

Abortion, Race, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century America

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Many sociologists have considered the intersection of race and gender in the production of social life, but while works on “intersectionality” have offered a useful paradigm for analyzing the experience of individual persons, a model for understanding how structures interact remains unclear. Appropriating Sewell’s (1992) argument that structures consist of cultural schemas applied to resources, this article develops a more nuanced approach to intersectionality. It presents the argument that because the basis of race and gender as social structures is the inscription of cultural schemas on bodies, and because racial reproduction is predicated on the continued creation of these culturally inscribed bodies, race and gender as social structures necessarily intersect at the level of biological reproduction. The study uses this theoretical insight to analyze how physicians and suffragists contested the meaning of, and policy regarding, abortion in nineteenth-century America. While most histories of abortion argue that nineteenth-century abortion politics concerned gender relations, this article argues that what was at stake was Anglo-Saxon control of the state and dominance of society. Abortion politics contested the proper use of a valuable social resource, the reproductive capacity of Anglo-Saxon women.

In 1858, the American Medical Association launched a successful campaign to criminalize abortion at all stages of pregnancy. Virtually every state had passed laws criminalizing abortion by 1890, and most gave physicians authority to decide when abortion was medically necessary (Mohr 1978; Luker 1984).¹ Many of

these laws remained unchanged until vacated by the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Most historians of abortion assert that nineteenth-century abortion politics concerned gender relations—specifically, that physicians argued for the passage of anti-abortion laws by asserting that society was damaged by women’s refusal of motherhood. Physicians addressed men’s fears of women’s changing social roles, in particular, of suffragists’ demand for women’s right to a place in the public sphere (Brodie 1994; Smith-Rosenberg 1985). Thus the current historiography concludes that nineteenth-century abortion politics concerned control of women’s bodies and the meaning of motherhood in defining women’s social place.

We argue that the nineteenth-century politics of abortion were simultaneously racial and gen-

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¹ Most laws required two or more regular physicians to approve an abortion as “medically necessary.” In the twentieth century these laws resulted in hos-

pital review boards that approved few abortions. It was the breakdown in physicians’ consensus on when abortion was necessary that led to efforts to reform abortion laws in the 1960s (see Luker 1984; Reagan 1997).

der politics. Claims that physicians played on fears of independent women miss what was at stake: Anglo-Saxon control of the state and dominance of society. The arguments that physicians made to convince the public and politicians that abortion endangered society suggest that abortion politics in the mid-nineteenth century were part of an Anglo-Saxon racial project (Omi and Winant 1994). While laws regulating abortion would ultimately affect all women, physicians argued that middle-class, Anglo-Saxon married women were those obtaining abortions, and that their use of abortion to curtail childbearing threatened the Anglo-Saxon race.

The critical political context for the anti-abortion movement was not only suffragists' claims for women's rights, but also the massive immigration that undermined Anglo-Saxon political power and social hegemony. Anglo-Saxon political control in northern cities and states depended on numerical dominance at the polls, which led to concerns about the reproductive prowess of Anglo-Saxon women. In other words, reproduction of an aspect of the racial structure—political dominance—was tied to the reproduction of an aspect of the gender order, women's role as mothers. Immigration created a social as well as a political problem for the Anglo-Saxon elite, who saw the mid-nineteenth-century newcomers as the bearers and propagators of alien values that would ultimately destroy American culture. This problem was historically specific: the Anglo-Saxon political dilemma sprang from the history of partisan politics in the context of the Civil War, which temporarily curtailed use of race as grounds for denying citizenship. The war also killed more than 500,000 men, which exacerbated concerns about the nation's demography. Finally, the Anglo-Saxon predicament was created in a specific cultural context: one in which the cultural meanings of "race" assigned Anglo-Saxons, Celts, and Teutons to different races.

Understanding abortion politics in the nineteenth century leads to the problem of how to theorize the intersection of race and gender. While considerable and significant work on the intersection of race and gender has been done within sociology, leading to the formation of the "Race, Gender, and Class" section of the American Sociological Association, this work has tended to focus on contemporary "racial/eth-

nic" women as those positioned at the intersection of race and gender, and who attempt to negotiate a "matrix of domination" (Collins 1990; McCall n.d.). This formulation says little about the nature of racial and gender structures that intersect, the possibilities for action within these structures, or the motivations of those in dominant rather than dominated positions. Here we argue that because the basis of both race and gender as social structures is the inscription of cultural schemas on bodies, and because racial reproduction is predicated on the continued creation of these culturally inscribed bodies, race and gender as social structures necessarily intersect at the level of biological reproduction. In a social context where every child born is racially inscribed, reproductive politics are tied to racial politics, even if the racial aspects of reproduction are not always perceived and articulated (c.f. Liu 1991; Roberts 1997).

The intersection of race and gender, however, transcends the issue of reproductive politics. To understand the larger theoretical issue of "intersectionality" we appropriate Sewell's (1992) work on social structures. Sewell argues that social structures simultaneously comprise cultural schemas and resources. This insight allows us to develop a more nuanced approach to intersectionality. We use this approach to analyze how nineteenth-century political actors contested the social use of a valuable resource, the reproductive capacity of Anglo-Saxon women. Physicians made overt appeals to the racial interests of Anglo-Saxons when they argued that abortion should be prohibited to ensure Anglo-Saxon political control and preserve Anglo-Saxon civilization. Suffragists also made claims about the rightful use of women's bodies. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and their followers, used the racial language of civilization to argue that women aborted because they lacked political rights. Suffragists and physicians made claims about women's reproductive capacity as a social resource, but their claims about motherhood were not about all women, but rather women of the dominant race. Thus historians are correct in their assertion that rhetoric about abortion addressed concerns about motherhood, but they have overlooked the racial specificity of this rhetoric. In this paper we show how racial

claims, both explicit and implied, complicate the meaning of gender in reproductive politics.

This paper provides a new interpretation of the history of abortion politics. Historians have analyzed concerns about “race suicide” that emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century, but have done minimal analysis of concerns about the racial composition of the population voiced in the abortion debate more than forty years earlier. Mohr’s pioneering work on the history of abortion devotes approximately three pages to discussion of nativism in physicians’ anti-abortion arguments (1978:93, 167, 180), although his analysis of the passage of these laws shows that members of the Ohio legislature cited the declining native-born fertility rate during their deliberations (pp. 207–8).² Smith-Rosenberg devoted three sentences to racial arguments in the anti-abortion movement (1985:238). Reagan’s treatment of nativism in the nineteenth-century anti-abortion movement is similarly brief (1997:13). Brodie’s (1994) text on abortion and contraception in the nineteenth century fails to mention the racial concerns expressed in the anti-abortion campaign altogether. Linda Gordon ([1976] 1990), author of the first definitive history of the birth control movement, is also the only historian to devote significant attention to racial arguments in debates about reproductive rights. However, Gordon’s discussion of eugenic logic analyzes arguments about contraception made between 1890 and the 1920s, during the height of the eugenics movement and decades after the physicians’ campaign against abortion made the practice illegal. A sociologist, who devoted two paragraphs to physicians’ arguments about race suicide, has written the most complete discussion to date of race in the nineteenth-century abortion conflict (Linders 1998). Our analysis of racial arguments in nineteenth-century abortion rhetoric fills an important gap in the extant historiography. But most importantly, this analysis introduces a model for theorizing the “intersectionality” of structures of race, gender, and social class.

² In the mid-nineteenth century, “native born” referred to persons of Anglo-Saxon descent born in the United States. “Nativism” was a political and social reaction to later waves of immigrants.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Examination of nineteenth-century abortion rhetoric challenges sociological understandings of race, which tend to conflate “folk taxonomies” of race with race as an analytical category (Wacquant 1997). Describing the Irish as a “race” is faithful to the historical record, but is foreign to contemporary sensibilities, and makes problematic our color-based notions of race.

The content of ideas about race and gender are products of ongoing social contestation, but social actors use these ideas to create social realities, including the unequal distribution of resources among persons in different racial and gender categories (Glenn 1999, 2002; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Omi and Winant 1994). We use the term “race” to mean “a complex and often internally contradictory set of ideas about human similarity and difference” (Nobles 2000:xi). Race, like gender, is a social construct that refers to real or imagined bodily traits (Glenn 2002; Fausto-Sterling 2000). Finally, race usually invokes descent: racial traits are presumed to be inherited and passed on (Appiah 1995; Glassman 2004).

Contemporary sociologists use the term “race” to refer to categories marked by bodily difference—most importantly by skin color—and “ethnicity” to mark differences based on country of origin (Jacobson 1998; Omi and Winant 1994:55; Tilly 1998:64). But this categorization does not recognize that people see what they are socially cued to seek. As Jacobson notes, “[A]n earlier generation of Americans saw Celtic, Hebrew, Anglo-Saxon, or Mediterranean physiognomies where today we see only subtly varying shades of a mostly undifferentiated whiteness” (1998:10). While the Irish were counted as “white” in both census categories and immigration law, Anglo-Saxons tended to see them as racially inferior “Celts.” An 1851 *Harper’s Magazine* article described the “Celtic physiogamy” as marked by, among other features, “the black tint of the skin” (quoted in Jacobson 1998:48). Roediger argues that antebellum Anglo-Saxons considered the Irish Catholic “race” to be “*low-browed and savage, groveling and bestial, lazy and wild, simian and sensual,*” and notes that comparisons to derogatory stereotypes of blacks were often explicit (Roediger 1991:133; italics in original).³ The image of

the “Celt” as being racially similar to “Africans” maintained its currency after the Civil War. In 1876, for example, *Harper’s Weekly* published a cartoon entitled “The Ignorant Vote,” in which former slaves in the South were portrayed as balancing the vote of the simian Irish in the North (Jacobson 1998:199–200).

“White” as a social and political category has existed throughout American history, but its meaning and social significance have varied, and those who were politically white were not necessarily socially so privileged. For example, in the nineteenth century the Irish were “white” according to the census but subject to racial discrimination. One could also be classified “white” by one part of the state and not another. Early-twentieth-century anti-miscegenation statutes proscribed intermarriage of white persons with those of nonwhite races—the latter variously defined to include Poles, Slavs, Chinese, Mexicans, and others, as well as persons of African descent, depending on where the statutes were passed. For example, in the 1922 *Rollins v. Alabama* decision, a black man who married a Sicilian woman was judged not guilty of the crime of miscegenation because she was not clearly “white” (Jacobson 1998; Pascoe 1996). The current content of the term “white” is a twentieth-century creation, which emerged after the passage of federal immigration restrictions in the 1920s cut the inflow of European immigrants, and as the migration of blacks to northern cities solidified color as the marker of privilege (Jacobson 1998:95). The sociological couplet “race and ethnicity” emerged in 1931, with “ethnicity” marking the cultural differences among whites whose history as “races” was being erased (McKee 1993:29, 131–32; Jacobson 1998:110). Concerns over the survival of the Anglo-Saxon race analyzed in this paper show that the presumption that “race” refers to persons “of color” is a relatively recent historical development.

While the end of immigration in the early twentieth century created the conditions for consolidating the category “white,” massive immigration in the nineteenth century had fragmented it. Between 1851 and 1880 almost five

million immigrants arrived in the United States, and the rate of immigration increased in the following two decades (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960:57; Tienda 2002). The 1860 census counted 31.4 million Americans, slightly more than four million of whom were foreign-born. Of these, 1.6 million were born in Ireland and almost 1.3 million in Germany (Jacobson 1998:43).⁴ The 1890 census, the first to count second-generation immigrants, found that 80 percent of New York City’s white population consisted of immigrants and their children; the corresponding figure for Boston was 68 percent (U.S. Department of the Interior 1895:clxii). Jacobson (1998:7) and Smith (1997) argue that the presence of so many immigrants led to the destabilization and fracturing of the category “white,” and to its replacement by a racial scheme in which the white races of Europe were considered separate and differently suited for citizenship. The Irish and Germans, and later the Jews, Italians, and Slavs, came to the United States under an eighteenth-century immigration act that gave “free white persons” the right to enter and become citizens. But in the nineteenth century native Anglo-Saxons increasingly saw these newcomers as members of inferior races who were unfit for self-government and a threat to the republic (Jacobson 1998; Smith 1997).

Irish Catholics raised particular concerns. Nineteenth-century racial logic conflated religion with race in a way foreign to contemporary racial categorizations. Newman (1999) notes that late-nineteenth-century racial discourse united race, religion, class, and geographic origin, so “‘Anglo-Saxon,’ ‘American,’ ‘white,’ ‘civilized,’ ‘Caucasian,’ ‘Christian,’ and ‘Protestant’ frequently served as interchangeable terms, with each of these categories encompassing the others” (p. 11). One commentator noted that the Irish were drawn to Catholicism because of their inherently passionate nature, but because a Catholic obeys his priest, “a republic of true Catholics becomes a theocracy administered by the clergy” (Froude 1879:524). Religion was so important in defining race that a new race, the “Scotch-Irish,” was invented in

³ Roediger’s claims about the status of the Irish are contested by Jensen (2002).

⁴ There were 4.5 million nonwhites counted in the 1860 census; of these, 4.4 million were black (Gibson and Lennon 1999, Table 8).

the United States. The “Scotch Irish” were Protestant Irish immigrants who arrived before the potato famine of the 1840s; this label distinguished them from the massive immigration of Irish Catholics who arrived with and after it (Ignatiev 1995:39).⁵

Finally, and critically for our argument about abortion, nineteenth-century ideas about racial difference were often expressed in a language of “civilization.” Bederman (1995) argues that in the latter part of the century, when Darwinist notions of social and racial evolution were popular but Mendelian genetics were not yet accepted, “civilization was seen as an explicitly racial concept . . . denot[ing] a precise stage of human racial evolution—the one following the more primitive stages of ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’” (p. 25). Discourses of “civilization” were predicated on the Victorian conflation of biology and culture in constructing ideas of race. Race theorists posited that human races evolved toward higher civilization as each generation learned more civilized behaviors and passed along this learning to their offspring (pp. 28–29). In this discourse Anglo-Saxons were the pinnacle of civilized humanity. The language of “civilization” in the nineteenth century had evolved from colonial discourses, which used the logic of “civilization” versus “barbarism” to justify slave trading and the conquest of Native Americans (Jacobson 1998:31). When, in the midst of the 1863 New York City draft riots, the *New York Times* referred to the Irish as “thousands of barbarians in our midst, every whit as ferocious in their instincts as the Minnesota savages,” it implied that the Irish had not racially evolved to the point of meriting political rights (Jacobson 1998:38, 52–54).⁶

⁵ While America in the 1860s was home to almost as many German immigrants as Irish, until World War I elites saw the “Teutonic” race as less of a threat than the Celtic. Germans were more likely than the Irish to settle on the frontier, where actual or feared conflicts with Native Americans deracialized immigrant settlers (Jacobson 1998:25, 47). Also, in northern cities Germans, unlike the famine Irish, were divided between Catholics and Protestants, skilled craftsmen and unskilled laborers, and Republicans and Democrats. The power and corruption of Democratic machines in New York City and Boston were blamed on the Irish immigrant vote (Erie 1988).

The language of civilization contained both gender and racial logics. In this rhetoric the more “civilized” races were marked by greater sexual differentiation (Newman 1999:10). Civilized women were “delicate, spiritual, and dedicated to the home,” where they were protected and provided for by civilized men (Bederman 1995:25). “Savage” people, on the other hand, displayed fewer gender distinctions, and savage men exploited the sexuality and physical labor of women (p. 25). The language of civilization, in short, incorporated Victorian middle-class ideals of separate spheres for men and women (Newman 1999).

Civilization rhetoric both obscured and complicated class as an axis of differentiation. It obscured class through an assumption that the largely immigrant working class was of a less civilized race than the Anglo-Saxon middle class. The wealth necessary for the cultivation of civilized cultural tastes, not to mention for the maintenance of a wife and children in the home and out of the labor force, was also elided (Bederman 1995; Newman 1999). But the industrializing and urbanizing social structure also led to concerns about the evolution of an elite class so removed from nature that they were sexless. In a properly civilized society, women took care of children at home while husbands ventured into political and economic spheres. Yet in the midst of this domestic discourse, the status and roles of women were changing rapidly. During the century the total fertility rate for whites fell dramatically, from seven children in 1800 to 3.6 in 1900 (Coale and Zelnik 1963:36). The appearance in the late nineteenth century of a class of rich women

⁶ In the 1890s the newly emerging discipline of sociology also used the language of civilization to study race. McKee’s (1993) analysis of the *American Journal of Sociology* notes that “throughout the first decade of the [twentieth] century, race still fell within evolutionary theory and the vocabulary of race reflected that; *Journal* articles spoke of civilization and savagery, of advanced and backward races” (p. 29). It was a sociologist, Edward A. Ross, who coined the term “race suicide” in 1901 to warn that America’s Puritan “stock” was being swamped by an influx of fecund immigrants. President Theodore Roosevelt took up the call, urging Anglo-Saxon couples to have large families and save American civilization (Gordon [1976] 1990; Bederman 1995).

who devoted themselves to a seemingly endless round of parties while servants cared for their children led some to express concerns that these fashionable women were unnatural (Beisel 1997). Similarly, the emergence of groups of women demanding access to education and the vote led social commentators, including physicians, to express concern that such women would be barren and their husbands emasculated (Cott 1987; Bederman 1995).⁷ The contradictory strains in the rhetoric of civilization render its analysis more difficult, but not invalid. Racial logics are not stable: their interpretation requires attention to the historical, regional, and political context in which they are used.

THEORIZING INTERSECTIONALITY

In the past decade there has been a flood of interest in the intersection of race and gender in the production of social life (Chow, Wilkinson, and Zinn 1996; Collins 1990; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999). Yet while sociologists in this field are explicitly studying the intersection of social structures, Glenn (1999) notes that they are hampered by an inadequate theory of the structures that they are examining. Collins (1998) argues that “intersectionality” has been a useful paradigm for thinking about the experiences of individual persons, but that a paradigm for understanding how *structures* intersect remains poorly articulated (pp. 206–8).

To date, the most comprehensive attempt at theorizing intersectionality is offered by Glenn’s “integrated framework” for understanding how the social systems of race and gender are mutually constituted. She argues that “racializing and engendering” occur at three different levels: that of representation, micro-interaction, and social structure. Glenn defines the last as “*rules* regulating the allocation of power and resources along race/gender lines,” and notes

that her approach is compatible with that of William Sewell, Jr. (Glenn 2002:12, 267; italics added). Here we develop Sewell’s (1992) theory of structure to argue that race and gender as structures intersect because they share *resources* as well as cultural schemas (or “rules”). Physicians and suffragists used the cultural schemas of race to make claims about the resource of women’s reproduction.

The problem that humans actually create, reproduce, and transform social structures has been articulated repeatedly by Giddens (1984), by Bourdieu (1984, 2001), and most clearly by Sewell (1992) and Hays (1994). Sewell notes that in common sociological parlance, structures structure human action. Sociologists using the word “structure” tend to mean “patterns of social life that are not reducible to individuals,” such as the economy, institutions (e.g., the family or bureaucracy), or networks (Hays 1994:58–59). Our largely unexamined metaphor of structure reduces culture to mental processes derived from structure (Sewell 1992:1–3).

While sociologists tend to regard structures as material, and culture as a causal outcome of material structures, Sewell’s (1992) theory of the duality of structure treats structures as simultaneously cultural and material. He argues that structures consist of cultural schemas applied to resources. Thus one’s understanding of a resource, such as a child, a job, or a vote, is a product of schemas about its meaning and appropriate use, just as cultural schemas are reproduced by the resources that justify them (1992:13). Sewell discusses the Kwakiutl potlatch, in which chiefs distributed stacks of Hudson Bay blankets to demonstrate their power and acquire marriage alliances and labor services, as an example of how “the activation of material things as resources, the determination of their value and social power, is dependent on the cultural schemas that inform their social use” (p. 11). Social change happens when people transpose cultural schemas onto different resource sets, which is possible in part because humans live in multiple and overlapping social structures. But social change also happens because the reproduction of resources over time is not certain. Thus if a field fails to yield an expected crop, the farmer may rethink his farming techniques (p. 18).

We suggest that a gender or racial system is composed of a series of resource/cultural

⁷ Bederman (1995) argues that Theodore Roosevelt remade his public image and argued against the “race suicide” of Anglo-Saxons by playing on early-twentieth-century concerns about the effects of over-civilization on men. The concerns about “fashionable women” that arose in anti-abortion rhetoric forty years earlier suggest that mid-nineteenth-century civilization rhetoric also contained concerns about over-civilization.

schema sets. Race, class, and gender as structures intersect where they share either schemas or resources.⁸ Considering structures as simultaneously cultural and material is particularly helpful for scholars of race and gender, who study social systems that involve inequitable distribution of resources along groups whose differences, like imagined biological differences among the races, are largely the product of the social imagination.⁹ This approach to intersectionality allows us to consider reproductive politics as an instance of struggle over the culturally inflected material resource of bodies. It also allows consideration of two theoretically separable aspects of racial reproduction: reproduction of the cultural categories of race, and reproduction of children, which generally entails control over the (racially inscribed) bodies and sexuality of adults. The latter process is considered in this analysis.

Faced with the nineteenth-century demographic transition, physicians offered the interpretation that Anglo-Saxon women's failure to reproduce was a misuse of an important social resource. The consequence of women's abuse of their fertility would be the demise of the Anglo-Saxon race. Although we do not typically think of fertility decline as analogous to a farmer's crop failure, demographic transitions require

⁸ Sewell (1992) notes that structures overlap where they share resources or cultural schemas. Sewell's theory of structure shares features with organization theory, particularly as articulated by Friedland and Alford (1991) and especially Clemens (1997). Clemens (pp. 49, 51) argues that collective action occurs when social actors master organizational forms and use them in new and novel ways, with "organizational forms" being "models for social interaction." In Clemens's approach, "institutionalization of social change involves articulating new rules that embed new organizational forms in fields of action" (p. 58). Social change in this model ultimately involves the transposition of cultural schemas, not the problem of resource reproduction.

⁹ Bourdieu (2001) articulates a compatible approach in his theory of masculine domination, arguing that power differences between men and women are a product of symbolic violence in which gender is understood as natural and then embodied and adopted by both men and women, who in turn reproduce male domination and female subordination by gravitating to those positions in the power hierarchy.

rethinking the social roles and value of women and children, as well as the proper use of women's fertility, just as farmers rethink farming techniques when crops fail. However, if children are valuable in part because they reproduce a race, then demographic transitions may also lead to a crisis in racial reproduction or the creation of new racial categories.

Were this a study of how physicians succeeded in their crusade to make abortion illegal, or why suffragists failed to get the vote until another half century had passed, Sewell's theory would need to be revised to include consideration of the institutions that make social change stick (for consideration of the success of suffragism, see McCammon et al. 2001 and Clemens 1997; for a neo-institutional approach to studying social movement success, see Clemens 1997). But that question is beyond both the scope of this paper and the available historical data on nineteenth-century abortion politics. This study emphasizes the importance of the resource of women's reproduction, the cultural construction of this resource, and its centrality in the social reproduction of race.

DATA AND METHOD

Data for this paper are documents written by nineteenth-century physicians and women's rights advocates. These sources include published articles by physicians who spearheaded the anti-abortion campaign, and *The Revolution*, a newspaper published between 1868 and 1872 by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Publications from physicians are of two sorts: polemical books and articles written for the general public, and articles about abortion written for fellow physicians. The former (n = 10) were obtained from the Library of Congress catalogue; the latter (n = 27) by searching *Index Medicus*. While we refer to "physicians" throughout this paper, obviously we refer to those whose anti-abortion sentiments, or professional interests, led them to write articles condemning the practice of abortion. Physicians could not have been unanimously opposed to abortion, for some condemned their peers who, they claimed, performed unnecessary abortions because they had succumbed to the lure of money. Still, physicians who thought elective abortion acceptable were

silent on the subject; not a single tract defended the practice (Brodie 1994).

At its founding, *The Revolution* was the only publication devoted to women's rights issues in the United States (Matthews 1997:129). Our analysis includes everything written in *The Revolution* on the topic of abortion. While Stanton and Anthony's views were considered radical by some suffragists, and their arguments about race led to a two-decade long rupture of the suffrage movement, they were two of the most important nineteenth-century feminist leaders. Stanton and Anthony's branch of the suffrage movement, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), was the only faction to articulate ideas about sexuality, marriage, and abortion. When the movement split in 1870, Stanton and Anthony's detractors in New England, who founded the American Woman Suffrage Association, refused to associate suffrage with any radical social ideas, including discussion of abortion (Griffith 1984:141). While a study of "race" and rhetoric about abortion leads to the question of what African-American women had to say about the issue, we can locate no public utterances during this time period on the topic.

The publications of physicians and suffragists encompass the vast majority of public discussion of abortion during the 1850s and 1860s, the years when most laws criminalizing abortion passed. We were unable to locate legislative debate about these laws or newspaper coverage of their passage. Newspaper coverage of deaths from illegal abortion increased in 1871, after the *New York Times* published an exposé of the abortion trade. Most of these articles were news stories rather than editorials, and so they did not offer lengthy explanations of why abortion was dangerous to society.

This analysis is based on a close reading and interpretation of the available documents. The study began as a comparison of constructions of gender in physicians' and suffragists' discourse about abortion, with the intent of following Luker's (1984) work and looking for competing meanings of womanhood and motherhood (Kay 1993). Physicians' and suffragists' racial claims were unexpected and led to the problem of understanding how claims about race could invoke the Irish and Anglo-Saxons, who are not "races" in contemporary sociological theory. Further, these claims about the racial

quality of the population predate the eugenics movement by four decades. The unexpected racial meanings that changed the course of our analysis illustrate what Sewell (personal communication, 1988) asserts about the method of cultural history. Sewell claims that the critical moments in reading a document occur when one finds passages that make no sense, because there the document's author uses a cultural schema different from that of the reader. The process also can be understood as uncovering a theoretical anomaly, a finding that did not fit into and thus challenged the theoretical categories we were employing.¹⁰ Being unexpectedly thrust into American racial history led us to a serious consideration of how sociologists think about race. Contemporary racial theory first prompted us to try imposing a black/white racial dichotomy on our historical sources and to look for mentions of African American abortion practices or politics. But this interpretive strategy failed: African Americans are almost never mentioned in these sources, even when their authors made claims about "race." As the historian Marc Bloch noted, "A nomenclature which is thrust on the past will always end up by distorting it, whether by design or simply by equating its categories with our own, raised, for the moment, to the level of the eternal" (1954:172). We as researchers were forced to rethink the meaning of race to make sense of our sources. Recent works by historians who are reexamining the racial categories that have been imposed on nineteenth-century American history have been especially helpful in interpreting the documents (Bederman 1995; Jacobson 1998; Newman 1999).

PHYSICIANS AND ABORTION: CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMEN AND MOTHERHOOD

Previous historiography has argued that the American Medical Association's effort to criminalize abortion was motivated by the desire to bolster the flagging prestige of "regular" physicians (meaning those who had what passed as medical school training in the mid-nineteenth century), and to drive the homeopaths, mid-

¹⁰ We are indebted to Pamela Barnhouse Walters for this observation.

wives, and irregular physicians, who competed with “regular” physicians, out of business (Luker 1984; Mohr 1978; see also Smith 1875). Physicians had been denied the ability to license medical practice directly (Starr 1982), so legislating who could perform abortion was one attempt to establish what ultimately became a firm monopoly over medical practice (Mohr 1978). But physicians did not make the case for abortion by pleading professional self-interest; rather, they argued that the practice of abortion spawned social disorder and threatened demographic disaster.

In making their case against abortion, nineteenth-century physicians argued that women’s reproductive capacity determined their social place (Gordon 1990). As Horatio Storer, leader of the anti-abortion campaign, explained, woman was “what she is in health, in character, in her charms, alike of body, mind and soul because of her womb alone” (quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman 1988:146). Women’s tendency toward diseases caused by “uterine derangements, such as hysteria, neuralgia, and that pathological condition known as spinal irritation” showed that women had an “intimate relation between the nervous and uterine systems” (Christian 1867:146). The end of menstruation marked the end of womanhood: “when the fountains of youth dry up, and the scanty circulation is turned from its accustomed channel, the woman ceases from the periodical discharges, which in health and with care are the secret of her beauty, her attractions, her charms” (Storer 1867a:59).

Nineteenth-century physicians opposed both contraception and abortion because they violated the natural purpose of sexuality and women’s natural role as mothers. As Storer (1867a) explained, “Were woman intended as a mere plaything, or for the gratification of her own or her husband’s desires, there would have been need for her of neither uterus nor ovaries, nor would the prevention of their being used for their clearly legitimate purpose have been attended by such tremendous penalties as is in reality the case” (pp. 80–81). Physicians argued that abortion was almost always fatal and was invariably detrimental to pregnant women. Storer argued, “We have seen that, in some instances, the thought of the crime, coming upon the mind at a time when the physical system is weak and prostrated, is sufficient to occa-

sion death. The same tremendous idea, so laden with the consciousness of guilt against God, humanity, and even mere natural instinct, is undoubtedly able, where not affecting life, to produce insanity” (p. 49). Physicians’ claims about the dangers of abortion were surely exaggerated: historians have argued that while abortion was certainly painful and frightening, it was safer than childbirth (Gordon [1976] 1990; Mohr 1978; see also Brodie 1994:224–32).¹¹ Yet physicians asserted that a woman who emerged from abortion physically unscathed would remain morally damaged, which would be “indelibly stamped on the face divine, forever effacing its light and beauty, and be forevermore a tell-tale witness against the so unchristian and unnatural mother” (Stoddard 1875:657).

Many nineteenth-century physicians also opposed the use of contraceptives, arguing that a sexual relationship in which conception was prevented was prostitution. Storer (1867a) asserted that “as has forcibly been asserted of marriage where conception or the birth of children is intentionally prevented, such is, in reality, but legalized prostitution, a sensual rather than a spiritual union” (p. 14). Physicians lamented that both abortion and contraception were increasing, for few entered marriage without knowing how to prevent its “legitimate results,” either by preventing conception through “injections, imperfect intercourse, or the abominable French application” (meaning douches, coitus interruptus, or condoms), or through abortion (Stewart 1867:7).

Physicians’ invocation of women’s reproductive capacity to explain her nature, social role, and the proper use of her sexuality is a classic example of how the social structure of gender is inscribed on the body. In this process, bodily differences become subject to a symbolic process in which men’s and women’s differences are vastly exaggerated while their similarities are ignored (see Connell 1987:78–87; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Laqueur 1990). The inscription of gender upon the body,

¹¹ A nineteenth-century physician asserted that fatal complications occurred in less than one in a thousand competently performed abortions, in spite of his colleagues’ claims that abortion invariably caused disability or death (Hale 1866, cited in Mohr 1978:77).

however, created not only a gendered identity but also a social system based on women's capacity to bear children. As one physician asserted, abortion was "a moral and social gangrene [that] pervades the community, and threatens its life, by destroying its very roots which nature intended should cluster around the domestic hearth" (Nebinger [1870] 1974:16). Women who aborted denied their moral responsibility to the family. According to Cook (1868), "What vast armies of premature martyrs to woman's vanity, woman's selfishness, and woman's inhumanity, have gone up to the great white throne with no earthly record of their sacrifice, save the painted, fleeting and fading beauty of vain and fashionable mothers!" (p. 32).

Having asserted that women were naturally mothers, physicians were left with the problem of explaining why large numbers of women were subverting the natural order (Smith-Rosenberg 1985:238). This problem was exacerbated by their observation that it was middle-class women who practiced abortion, and so the practice could not be explained by the depravity of the poor. Furthermore, Mohr (1978) argues, those condemning abortion feared alienating the middle-class clients whose business they were trying to wrest from midwives. Thus physicians attributed the prevalence of abortion to ignorance about fetal life. This ignorance was codified in state laws that did not proscribe abortion prior to quickening. Physicians asserted that a baby existed in the womb prior to quickening; abortion was morally wrong because it destroyed a child. Hence Storer condemned "the belief that the contents of the womb, so long as manifesting no perceptible sign of life, were but lifeless and inert matter: in other words, that, being, previously to quickening, a mere ovarian excretion, they might be thrown off and expelled from the system as coolly and as guiltlessly as those from the bladder and rectum" (Storer and Heard 1868:8).

Physicians' concerns about gender were clearly mediated by social class. This is explicit in Cook's condemnation of women who aborted as being "vain and fashionable" (1868:32). Smith-Rosenberg (1985) noted the class concerns in physicians' anti-abortion rhetoric, but interpreted them as evidence that physicians appealed to men's concern about the decline of

their patriarchal authority. Further examination of physicians' rhetoric suggests that their claims about gender were simultaneously mediated by class *and* race, and that the women whose reproductive behavior they sought to control were Anglo-Saxon women, the "native Americans" who predominated in the middle class. Abortion thus raised a threat to society beyond that of the collapse of the family, namely, the racial threat of the Irish.

A CRIME AGAINST THE STATE: RACE AND REPUBLICAN MOTHERHOOD

To create a persuasive claim that abortion was a problem worthy of widespread concern and state intervention, physicians argued that abortion threatened the political power and social influence of the native-born. Physicians employed racial arguments in their anti-abortion rhetoric by equating abortion with infanticide in "barbarous" nations and women who aborted with barbarians. But they employed a second racial strategy by arguing that if middle-class Protestant women did not cease aborting, political and social institutions would be taken over by Irish Catholics, which would cause the collapse of American civilization. Thus, they asserted, abortion was a crime against the state and a violation of women's duty to the republic.

The equation of abortion with infanticide, and infanticide with barbarism, rested on the recitation of instances of infanticide in various countries and the assertion that women who aborted were no better than such savages. For example, Gardner (1870) argued,

Infanticide is no new crime. Savages have existed in all times, and abortions and destruction of children at and subsequent to birth have been practiced among all barbarous nations of antiquity. . . . [T]he savages of past ages were no better than the women who commit such infamous murders to-day, to avoid the cares, the expense or the duty of nursing and tending a child. (pp. 112–13)

Gardner followed this claim with examples of infanticide in various countries "where civilization has not penetrated," with examples taken from the Greeks, Romans, ancient Norwegians, Chinese in the past century, "several savage people of North America," and from a variety of other cultures (1870:112–18). Examples of barbarous nations that practiced infanticide appeared as well in writings by Hodge

(1869:30–31) and Ayer, who employed Gardner's example of infants being buried alive with their mothers if the women died in child-birth (1880:47).

If abortion was a barbarous act, women who aborted were barbarians. One oft-cited example of infanticide was the purported practice of Hindu women of sacrificing infants in the Ganges. This act was repeatedly equated with abortion caused by American women's worship of fashion. Quoting an unnamed Brooklyn clergyman, Gardner asserted,

A popular clergyman of Brooklyn said in the course of a late sermon: "Why send missionaries to India when child-murder is here of daily, almost hourly occurrence; aye, when the hand that puts money in the contribution-box to-day, yesterday or a month ago, or to-morrow, will murder her own unborn offspring? The Hindoo mother when she abandons her babe upon the sacred Ganges is, contrary to her heart, obeying a supposed religious law, and you desire to convert her to your own worship of the Moloch of Fashion and Laziness and love of Greed. Out upon such hypocrisy!" (1870:129–30)¹²

Like many of his colleagues, Trader (1874) noted that while the "Hindoo" practiced infanticide to an alarming extent, "*at no age in the world* has there been a more reckless disregard for the lives of unborn humans" than among modern, supposedly civilized and Christian, nations (pp. 581, 583).¹³

¹² In *The Great Crime of the Nineteenth Century* Ayer argues, "Thousands of women, who shudder at the deeds of Pagan mothers in sacrificing the lives of their little ones in the turbid waters of the Ganges, are no less guilty than they" (1880:48). The sermon Gardner quotes might be Howe's "Sermon on Anti-Natal Infanticide" [1869] (1974), which equated infanticide in India with the murder of children in the United States because of love of fashion.

¹³ Dr. LeProhon, a medical professor, equated American women's resort to abortion to that of aristocratic Roman women, arguing, "Not unlike the Romans, the ladies are too fond of intellectual pursuits, and too solicitous of their own ease and comfort," suggesting that abortion was a symptom of the social decline that led to the collapse of the Roman empire (1867:14). Romans carried the view that the fetus was not human to "so outrageous an extreme as to hold that the *foetus* was a mere excrescence of

In addition to using images of the savage practices of exotic others to condemn abortion among the American middle class, physicians suggested that the moral failings of American women threatened the obliteration of the country by a tide of aliens. In 1866 the *Medical and Surgical Reporter* reprinted an article by a Vermont physician, who noted that "every physician must notice how much more prolific are the French, the Irish, and the Germans" (Butler 1866:262). A year later Storer analyzed population and still birth statistics for Massachusetts and New York, and concluded that the Anglo-Saxon population was decreasing in the United States. He argued that "it has been found of late years that the increase of the population, or the excess of the births over the deaths, has been *wholly* of those of *recent foreign origin*" (Storer 1867c:5). Abortion, Storer argued, explained the relative decrease of the Anglo-Saxon population (Mohr 1978).

The prevalence of abortion among Protestant women, and its (supposed) absence among Catholics, was frequently noted in physicians' anti-abortion rhetoric (Mohr 1978). Blaming "fashion" for the prevalence of abortion among Protestants, Ayer argued, "In the Romish church, murder and suicide in any form is regarded in all its horror and enormity, and as a natural result, the Catholic element in this country is rapidly increasing" (Ayer 1880:59). This statement should not be interpreted as admiration of Catholicism, but rather as fear of it. By the 1850s, anti-Catholic nativists routinely publicized papal statements that "denounced republican institutions . . . including the 'dangerous' and 'absurd' doctrine of 'liberty of conscience'" (Smith 1997:209).¹⁴ Catholics' unquestioned obedience to church dogma jeopardized the

the mother" (New York Medico-Legal Society 1872:77).

¹⁴ Leaders of the Catholic Church were also willing to use the threat of abortion to advance their political interests. In 1869 the *Medical and Surgical Reporter* published comments from Archbishop Spaulding, a leader of the Roman Catholic church in America, which noted that "the crying sin of infanticide is most prevalent in those localities where the system of education without religion has been longest established, and most successfully carried out" (May 29, 1869, p. 415). This is surely a reference to the "secular" public education that was intended to

social power of Anglo-Saxons and the foundation of the American republic.

While physicians viewed the fecundity of Irish and German women with alarm, particularly in comparison to that of native "American" women, this should not lead us to conclude that they would have wished to promote fertility limitation among these foreign races. Given the presumed unquestioned obedience Catholics granted church dogma (cited by Froude 1879 as proof of their racial inferiority), such attempts would be fruitless. But more importantly, given physicians' assumptions about the natural role of women, they viewed contraception and abortion with revulsion. This attitude toward contraceptives, whose use was associated with prostitution, was widely shared, as evidenced by the passage of a federal law forbidding use of the mail to distribute obscene material, including information about contraception and abortion, and the passage of laws in a number of states that prohibited distribution or use of contraceptives (Beisel 1997; Brodie 1994).¹⁵

Physicians threatened that the consequence of extant demographic trends would be the eventual loss of political control to the offspring of recent, predominantly Catholic, immigrants:

To such an extent has this foreign element increased that in some of the large towns and cities of the State [of Massachusetts] it actually comprises full one-half of all the school-children in those places. If a majority of all the youths and children under fifteen years of age in a place is made up from those of a foreign parentage, and is relatively increasing in number every year, how long will it be before such a power will be felt in the management, if not in the control, of the municipal government of those cities and towns? (Nebinger 1870:8)

Physicians argued that the continuing practice of abortion, and the resulting marginalization of native-born Protestant Americans, would destroy

Americanize Catholic immigrants, and that leaders of the Catholic Church found particularly offensive because anti-Catholic doctrine was often part of the curriculum (Higham 1988).

¹⁵ The most notable of these is the Connecticut law, which was overturned in the 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision, which created the constitutional precedent for privacy rights. This was the basis of the *Roe v. Wade* decision overturning the state anti-abortion laws discussed here.

American social and political institutions. As Hale (1867) argued, "[A]t this rate . . . it will not be many years before the Americans left on American soil, will be few and far between" (p. 4). Immigrants were, in this rhetoric, incapable of being true Americans; indeed, they posed a threat to the survival of America. Storer asked, "Shall [the West and the South] be filled by our own children or by those of aliens? This is a question that our own women must answer; upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation" (1867a:85).

The political power of the native-born could only be insured if American, meaning Anglo-Saxon, women reproduced male citizens and female citizen-mothers (Kerber 1980; Newman 1999; Smith 1997). Reproduction was a civic duty, and criminal abortion was an "offense of national and political character" (Hale 1867:4). Storer lamented, "In ancient commonwealths, the most fruitful mother was considered to have deserved well of her nation . . . now, on the contrary, such a wife is considered almost the greatest misfortune that can occur to a man" (1867b:111). "Anglo-American" women ridiculed the fertility of "foreign-born mothers," with the result that "the Anglo-Saxon race is rapidly dying out . . . and the Germans, and Irish, and Swedes . . . are fast taking the country . . . by the sheer force of their ever increasing armies of babies" (Cook 1868:35). Women shunned their responsibility to the race, with the consequence that the Anglo-Saxon race not only lost political power, but also faced extinction. This made abortion a crime against the nation:

I should love to thunder it across this continent, and have it pierce the ears and affright the consciences, as well as rekindle the honorable pride and patriotism of these wives and guilty husbands, and bring them to see it to be a duty they owe to an *intelligent Christianity*, and to an *intelligent and safe civilization*, and to the *State and Nation*—a duty they owe to the *great American idea of free schools and a free Protestant religion and free institutions* for all, that they stop murdering their children, and stop trying to defeat nature in *any* way, so that our American homes may again become populous with incipient citizens and voters, and incipient mothers of citizens and voters, and so that the American family shall not become an extinct institution in this country. (Cook 1868:36, emphasis in original)

Physicians argued that the state must intervene and control women's reproductive capac-

ities to ensure the future of the Anglo-Saxon race. Using the rhetoric of civilization, physicians argued that women who aborted acted like savages. The actions of women who refused the proper role of a civilized Anglo-Saxon wife and mother would lead to the control of America by the uncivilized Irish race. By criticizing women who failed to occupy their "natural" role as mothers, physicians reasserted the existing structure of gender relations. Physicians contested the current state of gender practices, yet their invocation of the racial threat of the Irish to condemn abortion simultaneously relied on and reasserted the existing racial hierarchy. While the motive of controlling their profession and profits may have led physicians to agitate for laws banning abortion, the cultural frameworks available for making their case to the public led them to contest and attempt to control the reproductive practices of Anglo-Saxon women.

Physicians made claims about abortion and racial reproduction in the publications directed both to the general public and to their colleagues. Not surprisingly, racial claims were much more common in the former publications than the latter.¹⁶ Of the ten abortion-related books and tracts located at the Library of Congress and directed toward the public, six included the argument that abortion was leading to the demise of the Anglo-Saxon race, and two cited the differential fertility of Protestant versus Catholic families as a cause of concern, but did not necessarily attribute fertility decline to abortion. The final two indicted abortion as savage behavior and also claimed that the practice was most prevalent among the best classes of society. Thus all tracts directed at the general public cited racial concerns or rhetoric in their condemnations of abortion.

Literature directed at fellow physicians was less likely to employ racial arguments. Of the twenty-seven articles either located in the *Index Medicus* or read before audiences at medical colleges, only four made the case that abortion explained the disproportionate increase of the foreign-born population. Another four made mention of Catholics, arguing or implying that Catholic families did not use abortion while

Protestant families did. Two of the articles directed at physicians discussed abortion as uncivilized behavior. This left seventeen articles that did not employ racial arguments to condemn abortion. Some of these seventeen were anti-abortion tracts that made claims that abortion was more common among the better classes of society. Many described abortions that the physicians encountered in their practice, reported on abortion-related deaths, or discussed legal issues surrounding abortion, such as the status of anti-abortion legislation. Thus, when addressing one another, an audience already assumed to be opposed to abortion, physicians sometimes used racial arguments. In contrast, when physicians addressed the public on the topic of abortion, arguments about the racial dangers of abortion were an important part of their repertoire.

Physicians thus made explicit and implicit arguments about race in their claims about abortion. They made the explicit claim that abortion was a crisis for the survival of the Anglo-Saxon race. Implicit racial arguments occurred when they accused women who aborted of savagery. The rhetoric of "civilization" functions through the presumed "savage," a person with less than full humanity (Appiah 1995; Glassman 2004; Bederman 1995). And finally, physicians reproduced racial schemas when they employed the categories of Anglo-Saxon and Irish to construct abortion as a social issue.

THE RACIAL AND SEXUAL POLITICS OF POSTBELLUM SUFFRAGE

Virtually all public rhetoric about abortion, as well as the agitation for the laws that eventually passed, came from physicians. But for a brief time some leaders of the suffrage movement also staked out a position on abortion. That their position so differed from what contemporary observers would expect from "women's rights" advocates forces us to further examine the historical and political context in which these claims were made. Linda Gordon (1990) explains that nineteenth-century feminists opposed the use of contraceptives, instead advocating "voluntary motherhood," in which women would engage in sexual intercourse only when she desired motherhood. Feminists advocated this practice, Gordon argues, to control marital rape. In addition, she claims, middle-class feminists wanted to guard rather than undermine the

¹⁶ Contact authors for the list of physicians' publications.

sanctity of motherhood, for the role of mother was the only high-status position available to women of their class (Gordon 1990:46). As we will show, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton also blamed abortion on the prevalence of marital rape. Anthony and Stanton, however, incorporated racial claims in their arguments about abortion that are not analyzed in Gordon's work on contraception.

Stanton and Anthony, like physicians, argued that abortion threatened the social hegemony of Anglo-Saxons. They, like physicians, also used rhetoric about civilization in their claims about abortion. But suffragists used this rhetoric to condemn the sexually savage behavior of supposedly civilized husbands. Stanton, Anthony, and their readers used the issue of abortion as a venue to demand women's rights. Unlike physicians, suffragists neither lobbied for nor advocated anti-abortion legislation. Suffragists agreed with physicians about the moral status of abortion. Lumping abortion with infanticide, they referred to both as "child murder." Where suffragists differed from physicians was in their diagnosis of abortion's causes. While physicians attributed abortion to women's moral failings, suffragists blamed women's degradation at the hands of men (Mohr 1978:111). In particular, suffragists blamed Anglo-Saxon women's abortions on the sexually brutish behavior of their husbands. The solution to women's degradation, and thus to abortion, was political rights for women (Gordon 1990; Mohr 1978). Thus, suffragists inverted the rhetoric of civilization, which had assigned women to the home, to stake women's claim on the vote.

Between 1868 and 1870, Stanton and Anthony, along with several of their readers, articulated a position on abortion that incorporated, and reinterpreted, the ideology of civilization in the pages of their journal, *The Revolution*. This discussion of abortion reflected two schisms in the postbellum suffrage movement. First, Stanton and Anthony's discussion of issues related to sexuality—such as marriage, divorce, prostitution, and abortion—was itself controversial. While recent historiography suggests that Victorians were hardly the sexual prudes that they are stereotyped to be, public discussions of sexual issues were not considered fit for decent women (Lystra 1989). Sullyng the campaign for women's rights with discussions of sexuality created considerable

controversy within the suffrage movement (Matthews 1997). Thus the only suffragists who articulated a public position on abortion were those affiliated with Stanton and Anthony; the rest were silent on the matter.

It was racial politics, however, that rent the movement, eventually causing a split that lasted for two decades. The schism emerged in 1865, when the issue of how American society would incorporate the newly freed slaves came to the forefront of American politics. While both Stanton and Anthony had been abolitionists and were ardent supporters of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed all citizens due process of law and reduced the representation of any state that disbarred an adult *male* citizen from voting, created a crisis. The Fourteenth Amendment, strongly backed by the Republican Party, introduced the word "male" into the constitution for the first time, making explicit the link between citizenship, voting, and male gender (Matthews 1997:121).

During the Civil War, Stanton had convinced Anthony to put the issue of women's rights aside temporarily and to join the fight to end slavery. This was consistent with both women's histories as activists in the abolitionist cause. But Stanton had also convinced herself that suffragists' support of the war would be followed by Republican efforts to reward their civic virtue with the rights of citizenship, particularly the vote. Their betrayal at the war's end by both abolitionist leaders and Republicans was bitter indeed.¹⁷ *The Revolution's* discussion of abor-

¹⁷ One of the most bitter of these conflicts occurred in Kansas, where in 1867 citizens voted on two referenda: the enfranchisement of women and that of black men. When Stanton arrived in Kansas, she learned that the Republican Party supported the vote for black men but not for women. Stanton and Anthony reacted by making one of the great tactical errors of the nineteenth-century women's movement: they enlisted the help of George Francis Train, a wealthy financier and women's suffrage supporter who was a devout Democrat and avid racist (Matthews 1997:128). Although the alliance with Train provided funding for *The Revolution*, predictably it increased the acrimony between abolitionists and suffragists. In Kansas, both referenda were resoundingly defeated.

tion, which began with its first issues in 1868 and had largely ended by 1870, mirrored this emerging controversy about black male suffrage (Matthews 1997; Terborg-Penn 1998).

ABORTION, SUFFRAGE, AND MALE SEXUALITY

Stanton opened the suffragists' discussion of abortion in 1868 with an article entitled "Infanticide and Prostitution." In it she excerpted an article on "social evil" (meaning prostitution) statistics and another on "child murder." The latter observed,

The murder of children, either before or after birth, has become so frightfully prevalent that physicians . . . have declared that were it not for immigration the white population of the United States would actually fall off! In a populous quarter of a certain large Western city it is asserted, on medical authority, that not a single Anglo-Saxon child has been born alive for the past three years . . . it is plain enough that the murder of infants is a common thing among American women. (*The Revolution*, February 5, 1868)

Stanton commented that scarcely a day passed when a newspaper did not mention "the fearful ravages on the race, made through the crimes of Infanticide and Prostitution." She blamed these social evils on women being made "slaves to man's lust," and noted that men should not be surprised when American women did everything possible to avoid maternity, for women were forced to adopt "false habits" of life that made maternity a period of "sickness . . . agony and death." Prostitution and abortion, she claimed, resulted from the "degradation of women," and would end only when women were educated and enfranchised (*The Revolution*, February 5, 1868).

Stanton's opening statement about abortion is similar in two respects to those made by physicians. Like physicians, she drew little distinction between abortion and infanticide, condemning both as "killing infants." And citing physicians, she represented abortion as a threat to the Anglo-Saxon race (Gordon 1990). Her statement also shows fractures in the category "white" and the contested status of immigrants in the years after the Civil War. Immigrants were "white" in that their presence kept the white population of the United States from declining. But their status differed from Anglo-

Saxons, and they were not "Americans," for it was American women who were aborting.

But while Stanton shared physicians' assumptions about the moral status of abortion and the racial status of immigrants, she departed dramatically from physicians' diagnosis of abortion's causes and cure. She claimed that American women avoided maternity because improper use was made of their bodies, in particular, women were at the sexual disposal of their husbands. Abortion, like prostitution, resulted from women's degraded status in society. Not only was the resource of women's bodies being used inappropriately, abortion would end only when women's status was improved by giving them the resources of education and the vote (Gordon 1990).

Another writer demanded suffrage, and invoked the nineteenth century's most notorious abortionist, Madame Restell, when she wrote, "Was there not a river-bed once discovered somewhere, macadamized with infants' skulls?"

Our rivers, our sewers, our drains . . . could all tell fearful tales of Restellism. Could this great evil exist with our educated franchise?"

This same writer cited the racial threat of the Irish, blaming Catholicism for the impending demise of the "American" family, saying, "Restellism is murder with the Roman Catholics. Half a dozen children in every Irish family. Only two in the modern American family. What is the matter? answer—Restellism. That is why, shortly, the children of the Emerald Isle will be walking through the graveyards of the Puritans" (*The Revolution*, May 7, 1868).¹⁸

Stanton and her supporters used the language and logic of race not only in reference to the Irish, but also in their invocation of slavery, which they equated to women's enslavement by men. In an anonymous letter published under the heading "Child Murder," a Maine writer argued that physicians erred in claiming that women aborted because they were ignorant about fetal life. Rather, women risked their lives aborting because "the cry is 'Liberty or Death,'

¹⁸ Restell was an abortionist in New York City who developed not only a practice among New York's elite, but also a mail-order abortifacient business. She became so associated with abortion that the practice was often referred to as "Restellism" (Mohr 1978).

and could you look in upon the wretched homes where heartbroken women work day and night, for the most shameful pittance, to provide food for the little ones whom the brutal lusts of a drunken husband have forced upon them, you would not wonder that they did not choose to add to their number. If our statesmen and philanthropists would abate this evil, let them give liberty to women, freedom entire, and the education it is sure to bring." Railing against marriage as an institution that "makes one human being the slave of another," this reader blamed abortion on the sexual degradation of women in marriage (*The Revolution*, April 9, 1868). Supposedly civilized men who should protect their wives were instead brutishly raping them. Women aborted because extant laws about marriage and social expectations of marital sexuality gave women no control over the use of their bodies.

Equating marriage with slavery because of the rape women endured there invoked one of the most shameful aspects of chattel slavery. Abolitionist literature frequently discussed the sexual abuse of enslaved women.¹⁹ Anthony tied abortion to women's bondage and rape within marriage when she argued that women should have the right to divorce abusive men. Many women were forced to abort, she claimed, because "no matter how ill-prepared she may feel herself for maternity, the demands of [her husband's] passion must never be refused." A man could consider himself a devoted husband because he provided for his family, but he was only devoted "to self-gratification at the expense of the respect of his wife." Men who called themselves Christians, and who would never

"insult" any woman, still raped their wives. "And if Christian women are *prostitutes* to Christian husbands, what can we expect but the natural consequence—infanticide?" (*The Revolution*, July 8, 1869, p. 4).

An Ohio supporter, Mattie Brinkerhoff, invoked slavery when she argued that women aborted because husbands controlled the bodies of wives. To maintain "even a semblance of that freedom which by nature belongs to every human soul," women resorted to abortion. For women to be "true mothers," she argued, society must all allow "true womanhood first." This would require "the ability to frame laws, making the husband and wife equal owners in the property accumulated by their united industry and economy, making the mother the guardian of her own children, the owner of her own body, in short, the controller of her own destiny" (*The Revolution*, September 2, 1869). Brinkerhoff did not openly demand the right to divorce, but her demands for laws redistributing resources in marriage, which would only be passed if women were enfranchised, would give women greater power within marriage and leave them less abject if marriages ended. Women could assume their rightful place in marriage only if they had the vote.

Brinkerhoff's appeal is a particularly interesting example of how material resources are intertwined with cultural schemas, and how those making claims for resources reinterpret those cultural schemas. Abolitionists had made repeated claims that slaves had the right to control their bodies, that enslavement was abhorrent because slaves lacked that basic right. As important for the future of women's rights was the abolitionist claim that a person's rights should not be curtailed because of the race of his or her body. Brinkerhoff imported this claim from those striving to end slavery to make the case for women's right to bodily autonomy. She extended other arguments from the struggle over slavery to make claims for women: that women should have the right to control the proceeds of their labor, and that women had rights over their own children.

Stanton and Anthony linked women's political impotence not only to abortion but also to infanticide. In 1868 they successfully mobilized to save Hester Vaughan, a domestic servant who had been seduced and impregnated by her employer, dismissed from her position, and con-

¹⁹ Stanton and her followers may also have been aware of the link between rape and slavery because of a notorious murder trial. In 1855, a slave named Celia was tried for murdering the man who owned and repeatedly raped her. Celia's attorneys made a politically explosive argument: that the same law that allowed unmarried white women to defend themselves from rape should apply to Celia. This argument threatened the slave system by conferring on slaves the same humanity as whites. But as married women had no legal defense against rape by their husbands, it threatened another fundamental social system, marriage, as well (McLaurin 1991). We are indebted to Larry Griffin for bringing this case to our attention.

victed of infanticide when found with her dead infant. The Working Women's Association, a group Stanton had helped found, organized protests against Vaughan's death sentence (DuBois 1978; Griffith 1984). Using the case to indict a social system that oppressed women and a political system that excluded them, *The Revolution* noted,

Judge Ludlow, of Philadelphia, [pronounced] a death sentence on a poor, ignorant, friendless and forlorn girl who had killed her newborn child because she knew not what else to do with it. . . . If that poor child of sorrow is hung, it will be deliberate, downright murder. Her death will be a far more horrible *infanticide* than was the killing of her child. She is the child of our society and civilization, begotten and born of it, seduced by it, by the judge who pronounced her sentence, by the bar and jury, by the legislature that enacted the law (in which, because a woman, she had no vote or voice), by the church and the pulpit that sanctify the law and the deeds, of all these will her blood, yea, and her virtue too, be required! All these were the joint seducer, and now see if by hanging her, they will also become her murderer. (*The Revolution*, August 6, 1868)

Suffragists used the ideology of civilization to claim women's right to a political voice, and to connect the abuses women suffered in private to their political impotence. With the Vaughan case, suffragists connected the seduction, impregnation, and pending execution of a young woman forced by poverty into domestic service to the forced pregnancies of wives who were powerless to resist marital rape. By accusing a supposedly civilized society and state of rape and murder, Stanton and Anthony used the language of civilization, which had proscribed women to the home, to claim a place for women in public.

CONCLUSION

While extant histories of abortion assert that anxieties about a changing gender order drove nineteenth-century abortion politics, this paper has shown that there were significant racial components in arguments made by physicians and suffragists about the causes, consequences, and cure for abortion. Activists' arguments about the meaning of women's reproduction and motherhood, and thus of a significant aspect of the gender order, are clearly understood only if seen as refracted through nineteenth-century

racial politics, in which Anglo-Saxon social and political dominance was threatened by the growing political and social power of alien races, particularly the Irish. While physicians and suffragists made strikingly similar arguments about race, their assertions about the causes of, and remedy for, abortion had quite different implications for gender relations. Physicians argued that abortion must be made illegal to stop women from aborting. Suffragists, however, argued that women aborted because husbands controlled and abused their bodies and sexuality. They claimed that until women gained the rights of citizens, particularly the vote, abortion would not cease.

Nineteenth-century abortion politics thus raise the sociological issue of the "intersectionality" of social structures, particularly those of gender and race. This paper offers a new way to theorize this intersectionality. We appropriate Sewell's (1992) argument that social structures are composed of cultural schemas applied to resources. We argue that understanding the "intersectionality" of structures of race, class, and gender requires analysis of how resources and cultural schemas are shared by these structures. In the case of nineteenth-century abortion politics, the resource of Anglo-Saxon women's reproduction was vital to the reproduction of Anglo-Saxon racial dominance. This resource became vital—indeed, assumed its status and meaning as a resource—because of the cultural schemas about race attached to it. Physicians and suffragists both made claims about Anglo-Saxon women's bodies as a resource that was part of both racial and gender structures.

But physicians and suffragists differed over the critical question of who would control this resource. Physicians argued that it was the obligation of Anglo-Saxon women to reproduce the race and thus the nation, and that state laws making abortion illegal would help secure this end. While suffragists' arguments about "voluntary motherhood," which asserted that women would choose when motherhood would happen yet assumed that women would ultimately be mothers, seem to be a far cry from contemporary feminist claims that to be a woman does not require motherhood (Luker 1984), they share the critical idea that women should decide whether or not to produce children. Suffragists treated women's capacity to reproduce as a resource to be controlled by individual women, not their

husbands. Further, while suffragists were opposed to abortion, their argument that women would shun abortion if they were granted equal rights suggests that individual women, and not the state, should control decisions about reproduction.

Despite physicians' successful efforts to get anti-abortion statutes passed, the available historical evidence suggests that women did, indeed, continue to make decisions about reproduction. In spite of statutes banning use of abortion and contraception, the United States completed its first demographic transition in the early twentieth century (McLanahan 2004). While we have been unable to locate a national analysis of the historical decline of immigrant vs. non-immigrant birthrates, the drop in the total fertility rate for "whites," which includes white immigrants, to 3.6 by 1900 suggests that immigrant families responded to the same pressures to reduce family size as did the native born (Coale and Zelnik 1963; also see Uhlenberg 1967, cited in Mohr 1978). Abortion remained an important means of fertility limitation. In the 1890s the AMA launched a second anti-abortion crusade, as the laws passed by the first were clearly ignored (Reagan 1997:80–82). Persons violating abortion laws were rarely convicted. Between 1901 and 1919, the Cook County Coroner investigated an average of over 60 abortion-related deaths a year, yet Chicago judges and juries convicted only one or two persons a year of providing illegal abortions (Reagan 1997:116–17). Access to abortion was severely restricted starting in the 1940s, although in the interim poor women were more likely to die from botched abortions, particularly when self-induced (Reagan 1997).

This paper raises questions about both the nature of racial politics and of racial reproduction. Because race is based on the cultural inscription of bodies, understanding racial reproduction requires analysis of the re-creation of cultural schemas as well as analysis of the reproduction of bodies that are inscribed. One of the most startling aspects of nineteenth-century racial politics is that fears of the demise of the Anglo-Saxon race were realized. The Anglo-Saxon "race" no longer exists in the social imagination; the racial privilege accorded to those descended from America's early English settlers has been subsumed into the category "white," a status shared with formerly despised

European races, including the Irish, Italians, and Jews (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Brodtkin 1998). The term "Anglo-Saxon" finds expression in the slightly derogatory moniker "WASP," (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant), a term describing a class segment, not a race.

This paper also offers an unusual vision of racial politics. "Racial politics" usually denotes actions taken either by or against a racial minority group to change their social position. Racial politics are also seen as inherent in issues like crime and welfare, which nominally refer to everyone but which often carry hidden meanings about racial minorities (Entman and Rojecki 2000; Gilens 1999). But in the nineteenth-century abortion debate, rhetoric about women referred to women of the dominant race. Many historians have categorized this rhetoric as "nativism," not seeing discussions of white races as language about "race." This implies that only the actions and interests of "persons of color" constitute racial politics, and that only such persons have "race." Nineteenth-century language about Anglo-Saxons and Celts leads us to rethink racial categories and assumptions about racial actors.

At the opening of the twenty-first century the United States is undergoing a racial transformation of a magnitude similar to that undertaken a century ago. Immigration is changing the political demography of the nation. Struggles over the "biracial" category of the census, born with the children of interracial married couples, suggest that the sexual boundaries around races, and the very definition of racial membership, are changing. Sociologists attempting to understand the racial politics of the present can only benefit from understanding the racial history that preceded it, the role of culture in defining "race," and from examining the vital role reproduction plays in racial politics.

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