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“A Mere Demagoguery”: Leavenworth and Atchison County Newspaper Coverage of the
Kansas Women’s Suffrage Campaign of 1867

On the cool evening of October 10, 1867, the townsmen and women of Oskaloosa, Kansas, gathered at the Methodist church to learn about the propositions before the state electorate to constitutionally amend voter eligibility. The church was filled to capacity and those who could not make it inside jostled for positions around windows. Some came expecting to hear Judge T.C. Sears, member of the Republican State Central Committee, speak in favor of enfranchising African Americans, and others came expecting to hear prominent suffragist Reverend Olympia Brown campaign in favor of women's rights. The planning mistake that scheduled both speakers in the church that day managed something that had been impossible to that point: getting opponents and advocates of enfranchising women in the same place, at the same time.

Judge Sears began the debate with a stirring speech that drew upon the loyalty of African American soldiers during the War of 1812 and the Civil War, as well as the country's need for "negro" support to reconstruct the South, as proof that the men of Oskaloosa should vote to enfranchise African Americans. As Judge Sears was an avid anti-suffragist, he likely alluded to many of the arguments against giving the vote to women, such as the need to keep women pure and preserve families. Reverend Olympia Brown was anxious to take the stage not only to advocate for women's rights, but also to repudiate the arguments the anti-suffragists had so carefully constructed in the eight months since the propositions were introduced.¹ While the speakers of the suffrage and Republican canvasses only spoke for one night in Oskaloosa, the antagonisms between the suffragists and the anti-suffragist played out within the pages of local newspapers every day during the campaign season of 1867. As the audience listened with rapt

attention to Judge Sears and Reverend Brown, they no doubt heard echoes of the countless newspaper articles they had previously read about suffrage.

In the infancy of its statehood, Kansas was often on the forefront of radical movements such as abolition and universal suffrage, and discourse surrounding these movements was often carried out between the pages of the local newspapers. Despite pockets of limited urbanization around the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, Kansas was largely a rural area and newspapers offered a reliable connection to the rest of the state. Kansas editors, political parties, and businessmen recognized the potential influence newspapers had on the opinions of their readers and they exploited the flow of information within the pages of the papers to their benefit by biasing and aggrandizing news coverage. Local historian Capt. Henry King accurately describes Kansas newspapers as “[having] early manifested a partiality for aggressive and vociferous campaigns.”² In the 1867 Kansas campaign for women’s suffrage, local newspapers used editorials, biased reporting, and selective publishing to influence public opinion about suffrage in favor of their own agenda which adhered to varying degrees with the platform of the State Republican Party.

The debate over suffrage made headlines across Kansas during the campaign season of 1867, but the newspapers of two counties, Atchison and Leavenworth, provide unique insight into the political and social dynamics surrounding the reform movement. While the newspapers in both counties were organs of the Republican Party, there was a surprising array of responses to the events of the suffrage campaign of 1867. Four events, in particular, were uniquely reported on by each newspaper: the introduction of women’s suffrage legislation, the arguments made about suffrage, the suffragist and Republican

canvasses, and the election results. It is necessary to understand the national and local atmosphere from which the women's suffrage proposition grew in order to understand the papers' responses to these events.

For nearly three quarters of a century, American women fought for the right to cast their vote in political elections. The campaign for women's suffrage spans from the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on 18 August 1920. While the individual reasons for advocating women's rights varied amongst the suffragists, the national climate for change was primed by the expanding role of women in the workforce, the recognition of the legal marginalization of women in American society, and the increased political awareness female advocates gained during the abolition movement.³

From its inception, the women's suffrage movement was closely associated with the national abolition movement. Many of the founding suffragists were anti-slavery advocates, and Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone were even on the payroll of the American Anti-Slavery Society.⁴ As the goals of the abolitionists and the political agenda of the Republican Party began to align, the two groups worked together towards the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery in December 1865. After the Civil War, fractures began to occur within the alliance of the female abolitionists, who became the suffragists, and the Republican Party as each group worked toward their own goals. The Republicans focused on enfranchising African Americans as part of their strategy for Reconstruction, while the suffragists focused on universal suffrage.⁵

As the call for suffrage rose nationally, the sentiment in Kansas grew as well. On the opening day of the 1867 legislative session, after an intense Republican campaign the previous fall to elect legislators sympathetic to enfranchising African Americans, Senator Benjamin Simpson of Miami County introduced legislation that would strike the word “white” from the Kansas Constitution.⁶ Days later, Senator Samuel Wood, of Chase County, amended Simpson’s legislation to include deleting the word “male” as well. After months of debate and controversy over combining the two acts, the Kansas legislature put forth two separate propositions before the state electorate to strike the words “white” and “male” from the Constitution.⁷ The motion to legalize women’s suffrage via popular approval of an amendment to the state constitution was the first of its kind in the nation.⁸ The importance of the 1867 legislation drew fierce voices on both sides of the suffrage debate.

Support for the women’s suffrage proposition in Kansas came primarily from local and national suffragists. In some ways, by 1867, Kansas was already ahead of other states in granting rights to women. When the state constitution was drawn up in Wyandotte in 1859, Clarina Nichols, a Kansas settler and devoted suffragist, called for women’s rights to be written into the document.⁹ While her desire for unconditional enfranchisement was denied, the constitution did grant women the right to vote in local school elections.¹⁰ During the Civil War, the suffrage movement subsided, but by 1867 prominent suffragists such as Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Reverend Olympia Brown were supporting Kansas suffragists such as Governor Samuel Crawford, Senator Wood, and Clarina Nichols in their attempt to enfranchise women. The suffragists garnered support for their cause by canvassing the state for nearly seven months prior to

the vote and by regularly submitting articles and announcements for publication to local and national newspapers.

The women's suffrage proposition was officially opposed by both the state Republican and Democratic Parties. The Democratic Party was not interested in extending the franchise to either African Americans or women. State Democrats remained silent on both propositions until the State Convention of 18 September 1867, when they officially issued unilateral opposition to both. Meanwhile, the struggle to establish Kansas as a free state had created an early alliance between settlers and the Republican Party. As the Free-State Party grew into the state Republican Party, it maintained a close relationship with the national party by regularly sending delegates to national conventions. By 1867 the national Republican Party had begun to realize the importance of enfranchising African Americans in order to maintain a free labor economy in the South.¹¹ Kansas Republicans transformed the political agenda of the national party into the more euphemistic call for racial equality espoused at the State Central Committee convention on 15 May 1867: "the unjust and false distinction of race and color, as a standard of political right, shall be wiped from the statutes of every State of the Union."¹² The party's agenda for racial equality seems as if it would lend itself easily to the suffragists' platform of gender equality; in fact, however, Republicans feared that advocating for the enfranchisement of women would significantly reduce the chances of enfranchising African Americans.¹³ In order to promote their agenda, local Republicans organized a canvass of the state by staunch opponents of women's suffrage and used their press connections to advocate against suffrage in newspapers across the state.

Both Atchison County and Leavenworth County developed thriving and influential newspaper industries. While periodicals sprang into existence almost as quickly as they faded out, three newspapers circulated in Atchison County in 1867: the weekly *Freedom's Champion*, the *Atchison Daily Champion*, and the *Weekly Free Press*. *Freedom's Champion* began in 1858 after Colonel John A. Martin took over the office of the defunct *Squatter Sovereign*. The paper quickly established a reputation as “one of the leading Free State organs” of the area.¹⁴ After a brief interlude fighting Confederates during the Civil War, Martin returned to Atchison and founded the *Atchison Daily Champion* as an extension to *Freedom's Champion*. Martin was a prominent member of the Republican State Central Committee, which he helped form in 1859.¹⁵ He was supported by the party as mayor of Atchison in 1865 and went on to serve as governor of Kansas from 1885-1889. No doubt Martin's political views influenced his decisions as editor and publisher of the two newspapers as both papers took a predominantly Republican stance on the issue of suffrage.

In addition to Martin's two newspapers, the *Weekly Free Press* also circulated in Atchison County. Rising to prominence in 1864, the *Weekly Free Press* was under the editorial leadership of Judge Franklin G. Adams. Editing was only a small portion of Adams prominent career. His political career began as a Free State delegate to the Constitutional Convention, which led to his association with the Republican State Central Committee. In the following years, Adams held various positions within the party, including secretary and committee member, until he was appointed United States Clerk in 1863.¹⁶ Despite Adams association with the Republican Party, and the overall Republican stance of his newspaper, the *Weekly Free Press* endorsed enfranchising African

Americans as well as women during the 1867 campaign. In April 1867, Adams sold the newspaper to Frank A. Root and L.R. Elliott, with the latter taking editorial responsibilities.¹⁷ While there are no records of the political affiliations of Root or Elliot, the change in ownership did not affect the stance of the paper.

Over in Leavenworth County, the newspaper industry was also thriving in 1867. Four newspapers circulated in the county throughout the campaign season: the *Leavenworth Daily Times*, the *Leavenworth Daily Commercial*, the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, and the *Evening Bulletin*. These papers, similar to the newspapers in Atchison County, were owned and edited by just a few men. The *Daily Times* is the oldest of the bunch and began publication in 1857. It was initially edited by Robert Crozier, but had been bought out by Colonel D.R. Anthony by 1867. According to *History of Leavenworth County*, the paper “has always been strongly Republican in policy and politics.”¹⁸ In addition to the *Daily Times*, Col. Anthony and his stock company owned all or part of the *Daily Conservative*, the *Evening Bulletin*, and the *Daily Commercial*, although they were run by various editors. Col. Anthony is an interesting case of opposing forces: he was arrested several times for radical opposition to slavery; he served as mayor of Leavenworth in 1863; he was president of the Republican State Convention in 1868 and presidential elector for the party; and he did all this while being the brother of ardent suffragist Susan B. Anthony. Much like Anthony himself, the papers of Leavenworth County responded to the suffrage question with a spectrum of adherence to the Republican platform.

Local newspapers in Atchison and Leavenworth Counties played an active role in adopting, amending, and promoting the arguments of the pro- and anti- women’s suffrage

campaigns in order to influence the constituents of their region. In order to promote a particular view on suffrage in their newspapers, editors employed three different techniques to manipulate the flow of information to their readers: first, they printed editorials that favored their own agenda; second, they selectively published articles that promoted their opinion; and, third, they biased their news coverage by inserting judgments or opinions of the event in the article. For the purposes of this paper, editorials are articles that express an opinion or persuasive argument but are not attributed to an author. Cases in which an article is reprinted from another newspaper are treated as selective publishing because the editor of the paper reprinting the article chose to reprint it because the message fit his agenda. Some articles encompass more than one technique and they will be analyzed as such. Additionally, because the *Daily Champion* and the *Weekly Champion* frequently shared articles, had a similar stance on the propositions, and were both operated by Col. Martin, the two papers are referred to collectively as the *Champion*. Finally, the archives of the *Evening Bulletin* are missing editions after 17 March 1867, so the newspaper's contribution to the discourse on women's suffrage will be unavoidably brief.

As the state legislature began its session in early 1867, the press expected some action on African American suffrage, but they never expected the introduction of legislation on women's suffrage. The reactions to the additional legislation were outstandingly negative, even in papers that later went on to support women's suffrage, and there was an emphasis on Senator Wood's role in introducing the proposition. An editorial in the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* sets the tone for the paper's stance on women's suffrage by saying, "Messrs. Wood and Rogers [Senators in favor of women's

suffrage] may indulge to some extent their harmless and utopian theories with reference to female suffrage and kindred follies, but, these sacrifices to buncombe [sic] be made, the result will be ... the simple proposition of erasing the word 'white' will be the one agreed upon.”¹⁹ While the *Conservative* declared women’s suffrage ‘harmless and utopian’, labeling the legislation as merely bunkum suggests the editor did not actually take women’s suffrage seriously. The mild indifference with which the *Conservative* treated the subject quickly turned into open hostility as the debate over combining the propositions progressed. “While the Sams [Senators Sam Wood and Sam Riggs] have had this sport, and have been cultivating, at the expense of the State, somewhat neglected early improvements in oratory, Sambo is left out in the cold singing quite a different psalm.”²⁰ The quip about the financial cost of the legislature’s extended debate over suffrage and the image of ‘Sambo out in the cold,’ a stereotypical reference to African Americans, demonstrate the *Conservative*’s impatience with the women’s suffrage amendment. Echoes of the Republican platform are apparent in the paper’s fear that African Americans would not be enfranchised if the legislation is linked to women’s rights.

Two other newspapers in Leavenworth County also took a similarly disapproving stance against linking the two suffrage propositions. On 1 February 1867, the *Daily Times* reported the events of the previous days’ legislative sessions, along with an editorial that summarized each legislator’s comments on the issue. The editorial reported an overwhelming number of negative responses to linking the suffrage propositions with sentiments such as, “it would give weak-kneed Republicans an excuse to oppose [enfranchising African Americans] in lots,” “one would kill the other,” and “it [is] bad

policy to push it now.”²¹ All of these responses bear striking similarity to the Republican position and the emphasis of them establishes the *Daily Times* sympathies with the party. The *Evening Bulletin*, on the other hand, was supportive of both propositions as long as they were submitted to the voters separately. In an editorial ominously titled, “Toe the Mark, Gentlemen,” the editor stated, “We have no objection to submitting the word ‘male’ in the Constitution to the test of public judgment; but we think, when the Legislature undertakes to pin it on to the word “white,” under the present circumstances, they do a wrong little less than that of openly refusing to obey the clearly expressed will of their constituents.”²² While the *Evening Bulletin* gives more support to women’s suffrage than any of the other papers in Leavenworth County, it stands unequivocally with the others against linking the two propositions.

The discourse in Atchison County was also unanimously against linking the women’s suffrage proposition with the African American proposition. An editorial in the *Weekly Free Press*, a paper that would go on to support enfranchising women later in the campaign, pleaded with legislators not to combine the two suffrage movements because, “as a whole, without an opportunity for separate vote, the [African American] Amendment would be endangered.”²³ The editors go on to proclaim in another article, “Right demands the word ‘white’ be stricken from our State Constitution.”²⁴ At this point in the campaign, the rhetoric of the *Weekly Free Press* aligned completely with the platform of the Republican Party. Meanwhile, the other newspaper in Atchison County, the *Champion*, took a far more aggressive stance with the legislators. After establishing their position against women’s suffrage because it endangered the African American proposition, the *Champion* editor issued stern warnings to legislators in an article titled,

“Under Obligation,” by saying, “There is a strong probability that these gentlemen [supporting women’s suffrage]...will have a chance to develop their wonderful faculties, hereafter, in the shades of that private life from which it was such an outrage to have ever dragged them!”²⁵ Speaking to the legislators directly, the editor goes on to say, “You are making a hard bed for yourselves, as you will find when you come home and lie down upon it.”²⁶ The article’s thinly veiled threats from Col. Martin, one of the founding members of the state Republican Party, no doubt reminded the legislators of their political obligations. The pressure from the press to not link the suffrage propositions must have had some effect on the legislators because the issue was indeed submitted to Kansas voters as two separate propositions, the first to enfranchise African Americans and the second to enfranchise women.

In the preliminary stages of the suffrage campaign, the newspapers of both Atchison County and Leavenworth County showed remarkable uniformity in their rejection of legislation linking the enfranchisement of African Americans and women. The newspapers all cited the same fear towards combining the propositions: voters would not vote for African American suffrage because they would not agree with extending the vote to women as well. While the editors and proprietors of the papers do not explicitly identify themselves with the Republican Party at this point, they subversively aligned themselves with the party by referring to “our” Representatives voting against women’s suffrage, most of whom were Republican, and the “duty” given to the Legislators, a duty that was given by the Republican Party.²⁷ Despite the papers seeming solidarity with the Republican platform, as the campaign season wore on, the papers became more varied in their support of the party line. Once the propositions were put forth separately, arguments

in favor and against women's suffrage began to appear in newspapers across both Atchison and Leavenworth Counties.

The arguments against suffrage were put forth mainly by the *Champion*, the *Daily Times*, and the *Daily Conservative*. The *Champion* in Atchison County was the strongest opponent of women's suffrage and the newspaper used editorials and letters to the editor to make their argument against the movement. In an editorial response to the *Hiawatha Sentinel*, the editor of the *Champion* claimed that he did not support enfranchising women because he did not think the majority of Kansas's women desired to vote. He went on to warn women "we should have a much poorer opinion of their innate modesty, refinement, and intelligent appreciation of their present position and power, if they did [desire to vote]." ²⁸ Here, the editor used two distinct arguments against women's suffrage: first, he referred to the Republican belief that the proposition was a ploy to defer support for enfranchising African Americans rather than a reform truly supported by the women of the state; and, second, he invoked the popular Republican argument that women have specific moral qualities which dictated their role in society, which certainly did not include politics.

In another editorial, the *Champion* editor strengthened his moral argument by invoking what he called Emerson's "law of distinctivity," which the editor used to claim that "it is not a social arrangement but an appointment of God" that created women for the "gentler and sweetened tasks in the holy atmosphere of the home." ²⁹ The editor reinforced the paper's stance on women's suffrage by reprinting a letter to the editor of the *Manhattan Radical* that was an amalgamation of both of the *Champion's* arguments. The letter, written by a woman, claimed that only "some strong minded women...would

like to vote” and that suffrage “would have but little practical effect” because woman’s political power came from “educat[ing] her sons to become good servants of the public.”³⁰ The editor’s strategy of invoking recognized authorities, in this case a woman and God, was an attempt to subversively strengthen the paper’s argument that women belonged in the home rather than the polls. After all, if women themselves claim they didn’t want to vote, why should the voters of Atchison County go against God’s will? The two other newspapers contributing to the discourse on enfranchising women, the *Daily Conservative* and the *Daily Times*, also used morality in their argument, along with developing other unique points.

Unlike the *Champion*, who almost never printed an article in favor of women’s suffrage, Leavenworth’s *Daily Conservative* and the *Daily Times* tended to include arguments on both sides of the debate, although they were predominantly slanted against enfranchising women. Both papers frequently printed letters to the editor; however, the letters were often accompanied by a brief editorial that revealed the editor’s position on the subject. For example, the *Daily Conservative* published a letter by a correspondent with the pseudonym “Maria Louisa” that explained reasons why women should be given the vote. The letter was printed on page three of paper, but the editor published a short editorial introducing “Maria Louisa’s” letter on the front page that attempted to undermine the creditability of the correspondent by claiming its author was actually a man. The editor went on to claim “there are more men claiming the ballot for women, than there are women claiming it for themselves.”³¹ This statement served to inadvertently remind the reader of the prevailing argument that it is actually opponents of African American suffrage that want to enfranchise women rather than women

themselves. While publishing the letter to the editor in favor of women's suffrage suggested the *Daily Conservative* was sympathetic to the movement, the leading editorial preface demonstrated otherwise.

The *Daily Times* also presented a similarly complex suffrage argument in their newspaper. On 26 February 1867, the newspaper printed a letter to the editor written by local woman condemning women's desire to vote. Simultaneously, the editor chose to publish an extract of a speech delivered a week earlier by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in favor of enfranchising women. Accompanying the articles was a short editorial explaining the impetus for including both sides of the debate as having received the letter to the editor at the same time the editor happened to be reading Stanton's lecture. He explains, if "we give wing to the genial feeling and lofty aspirations of one of our gifted daughters, we asked ourselves [why] not hear too, the voice of one as gifted on the other side?" The editor's words subconsciously aligned the reader with "our daughter" or the correspondent who wrote against suffrage. Likewise, the editor's use of the phrase "the other side" to describe Stanton was an attempt to discourage the readers of the *Daily Times* from identifying with the movement.³² Within the letter to the editor, the correspondent reiterated the arguments already put forth by the paper that the majority of women did not want the vote and that women's political power was felt through her influence on her children. In addition to these, however, the correspondent developed one new argument against enfranchising women: that if women were equal at the ballot box, they must be equal in all other spheres as well, such as "in the street mob, in the club room, in the halls of legislation, in the presidential chair, perhaps at the very helm of the

State.”³³ The threat of the proliferation of women in all masculine domains no doubt served to deter male readers from voting for the proposition.

In addition to the positions presented against women’s suffrage, two newspapers, the *Evening Bulletin* and the *Weekly Free Press*, provided more positive coverage of the proposition. Leavenworth’s *Evening Bulletin* presented the briefest and most succinct position in favor of enfranchising women. The newspaper mentioned women’s suffrage in only a few articles during the initial stages of the campaign, which, unfortunately, is all that are archived. When the newspaper did include an article on women’s suffrage, however, the editor was very explicit about the paper’s stance on the subject. In a 19 February 1867 editorial, the editor declared matter-of-factly, “No harm will come to the State if both propositions are adopted.” He went on to say, “Kansas has the right and ought to lead in both [African American and women’s] reforms.”³⁴ The *Evening Bulletin*’s argument that Kansas should lead in social reforms appealed to readers’ pride in their state’s progressiveness as a reason to support women’s suffrage.

While archives of the *Evening Bulletin* are unavailable after March 1867, there is evidence that the paper’s stance on women’s suffrage did not change as the campaign wore on. The *Daily Conservative* reprinted a response to the *Evening Bulletin* from another Midwest newspaper on 5 October 1867 chastising the *Bulletin* for supporting the proposition to enfranchise women. The article warned, “Remember that the triumph of Republicanism is necessary to the safety of the country... But if your efforts [on women’s] behalf embarrass the Republican cause, they should be stopped.” The article went on to threaten the editor of the *Bulletin* that “if through [your] efforts the Republican party should be defeated upon the issue of manhood suffrage in the State of

Kansas, you will have given aid to rebelism and Johnsonism, and you will not see the day again in this generation when you can go before the people and plead the cause of female suffrage with a chance of success!” The response to the *Evening Bulletin*’s support of suffrage demonstrates several things: first, it is evidence that the *Evening Bulletin* maintained its pro-suffrage position throughout the suffrage campaign; second, it is further evidence that the Republican Party prioritized African American suffrage as a way of preserving the United States; and, third, it illustrates the ostracism with which the Party treated Republicans who did not tow the party line. The *Evening Bulletin*, however, was not the only newspaper supporting women’s suffrage.

Despite initial hesitance to support linked propositions, Atchison’s *Weekly Free Press* began to publish articles in favor of the women’s movement almost immediately following the submission of separate propositions. The paper was a strong proponent of women’s suffrage and used an array of editorial techniques in their articles to present arguments in favor of enfranchisement. The articles published in the *Weekly Free Press* were often an amalgamation of original arguments and rebuttals to arguments put forth by opponents of women’s suffrage, especially those printed by the *Champion*. The argument most heartily challenged by the *Weekly Free Press* was the idea women would be demoralized by politics. To this, the editor of the newspaper printed several editorials and letters to the editor claiming that women would not be demoralized, but rather would purify the polls. In an editorial titled “The Question of Female Suffrage,” the editor of the *Weekly Free Press* claimed the only way to reform the corruption surrounding politics was to “trust to the always elevating, purifying, and refining presence of our wives, mothers, sister and daughters, to make the places of election the most sacred places on

earth.”³⁵ The editor’s argument recognized opponents’ concern for women’s morality, but insisted women were strong enough to not only withstand the negative pressure of politics but also to positively influence them. In a letter to the editor published 13 April 1867, a female correspondent took another angle in her answer to the purity argument: “It is certainly humiliating to the feelings of us, who have believed that politics is really the source of government...to be told by those who place themselves before the public, as its promulgator and expounders, that it is, at its best state, low and debasing.”³⁶ The author’s point essentially turns the argument that politics will corrupt women back on the opponents by implying that they should be ashamed of themselves for being complacent in degradation of the political process. Clearly the question of women’s morality was an important concern in the suffrage debate as the majority of persuasive articles on both sides of the issue addressed it. In addition to the topic of women’s morality, articles in the *Weekly Free Press* also addressed the popular argument that support for women’s suffrage was coming from opponents of African American suffrage rather than the women of Kansas.

Critics of women’s suffrage, especially the editors of the *Champion* and the *Daily Conservative*, claimed that moral and self-respecting women in Kansas did not really wish to vote. The editor of the *Weekly Free Press* refuted these claims by regularly featuring editorials and letters to the editor showcasing the opinions of Kansan women. In one such article, the editor of the *Weekly Free Press* chose to reprint an editorial from the *Missouri Democrat* pointing out, “When [women] show such a desire for the ballot that they organize themselves, call public attention to the subject, agitate and discuss the question, and bring the great majority of women to join in asking a share in the

government, then no man nor set of men will long resist their claims.”³⁷ Opponents of women’s suffrage also claimed that those women organizing and campaigning for enfranchisement were strong-minded and that no “good and pure woman would wish to vote,” to which one female correspondent replied, “this brazenly impudent and insulting assertion is uttered without a single proof to substantiate it.”³⁸ Letters to the editors, written by women themselves, often appeared within the pages of the *Weekly Free Press* and must have helped debunk opponents’ argument that women did not want to vote. In addition to these articles refuting the arguments of opponents, the *Weekly Free Press* also printed many articles offering unique and compelling arguments in favor of enfranchisement.

As the *Weekly Free Press* was one of the only supporters of the women’s suffrage proposition in either Atchison or Leavenworth County, they were the primary source for arguments in favor of enfranchising women. One technique often used in pro-suffrage articles was to include ideology and rhetoric from the Declaration of Independence in their arguments. For instance, one corresponded in favor of giving women the vote posited, “Should not those at least who are subject to taxation have a voice in regard to the imposition of taxes and the definition of public policy?” The letter continued, “It was long ago an established fact that ‘taxation without representation is tyranny’.”³⁹ Another article reprinted in the *Weekly Free Press* claimed, “Let women have a voice in choosing the rulers who rule her and levy taxes upon her property in common with man.”⁴⁰ Pointing to the principles upon which the country declared its independence functioned to infuse the fight for women’s suffrage with the sense of justice and equality that became part of the country’s identity following the American Revolution.

Another pro-suffrage argument used frequently within articles in the *Weekly Free Press* was that women voters would support reform legislation. A letter to the editor published 13 April 1867 pointed out that enfranchising women would give politicians' access to a new half of the population. The correspondent went on to imply that women would naturally support reform movements by claiming, "Woman's vote bodes no good to the liquor dealers nor to those slippery politicians who slyly give the liquor dealers aid and comfort."⁴¹ Essentially promising women would vote for reform movements, such as prohibition of alcohol, was a way of soliciting the support of politicians and Kansans struggling to gain support for reform legislation. Another article the editor of the *Weekly Free Press* reprinted from the *St. Louis Democrat* asserted, "Let women vote, and it is not impossible that the libertine and his victim might stand more nearly on terms of equality before the law." It appeared as if supporters of women's suffrage were willing to broker women's votes to an array of popular reform movements in order get their proposition passed. The arguments made within the *Weekly Free Press* were compelling and articulate, but they certainly did not conform to the platform of the Republican State Central Committee.

The *Weekly Free Press*, a Republican-affiliated newspaper, supported women's suffrage despite conflicting with the stance of the Republican State Central Committee. While the Party did not officially announce its platform until the summer of 1867, the decidedly anti-suffrage positions of other Republican-affiliated newspapers in Atchison and Leavenworth Counties were indications of the Party's position. When news of a Republican canvass advocating the African American proposition was announced, the editor of the *Weekly Free Press* defended his support of both propositions. In an editorial

published 31 August 1867, the editor claimed “the advocates of Woman Suffrage are not to be deterred from supporting that proposition by any threats or show of fight on the part of its opponents.” The articles went on to insist that organizers of the canvass “inaugurate a fight against those members of the party who choose to advocate both the Suffrage propositions.”⁴² Despite concurrence on the issue of African American enfranchisement, the *Weekly Free Press* strayed furthest from the Republican platform in its unilateral support of women’s suffrage. As the campaign season wore on in the summer of 1867, divisions between supporters and opponents of women’s suffrage grew deeper as newspapers in both counties turned their attention to the competing pro-suffrage and Republican campaigns.

The pro-suffrage campaign began with the organization of the Impartial Suffrage Association at the Impartial Suffrage State Convention on 2 April 1867. Several prominent Kansans were elected to positions within the organization, including Governor Samuel J. Crawford as President, Lieutenant Governor Nehemiah Green as Vice-President, and Senator Samuel Wood as Secretary. The convention was well attended and featured speeches from local and national suffragists, such as Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Clarina Nichols.⁴³ Newspapers that supported women’s suffrage promoted the convention and extolled its successes. Leavenworth’s *Evening Bulletin* printed an advertisement for the convention with an accompanying editorial that decreed, “The objects set forth in the call [for convention], meet our entire sympathy, and will receive our hearty co-operation.”⁴⁴ In Atchison County, the *Weekly Free Press* had a correspondent that reported to them from the convention. After praising the attendance of the convention and the organization of the Impartial Suffrage Association, the

correspondent reported that a canvass advocating both suffrage propositions was agreed upon with “a zeal and determination unparalleled in political campaigns.” The article went on to reveal that Lucy Stone would be in Atchison in three weeks time and advised “all who want to hear the subject fairly and ably discussed by all means not to fail in going to hear this able and popular speaker.”⁴⁵ The *Weekly Free Press* maintained its support of the suffrage canvass throughout the summer by publishing the Impartial Suffrage meeting schedule and reporting positively on events held around Atchison County.

Opponents of the women’s suffrage, on the other hand, were not as enthusiastic about the organization of the Impartial Suffrage Association or their proposed canvass. Leavenworth’s *Daily Conservative* and the *Champion* in Atchison were the two most outspoken adversaries and they voiced their disapproval for both the convention and its organizers. The *Champion* made its position on the convention clear by referring to it as “Sam Wood’s new circus” and proclaiming that “it didn’t amount to much.”⁴⁶ The editor of the *Champion* minimized the accomplishments of the Impartial Suffrage Convention in order to deflect interest and support in the campaign. Also, despite the fact that Senator Wood was not the only politician associated with the women’s suffrage movement, or even the most prominent, opponents of the proposition frequently aimed their criticism at him. By referring to the Impartial Suffrage Convention as a circus, the editor of the *Champion* undermined everything associated with women’s suffrage. When East Coast suffragists came to campaign in favor of the proposition, the *Daily Conservative* took offense to the involvement of people outside of Kansas. In an editorial published 5 April 1867, the editor objected, “If the distinguished gentlemen ‘from abroad’ imagine that

Kansas cannot think and act correctly and wisely... a few days' experience might teach them that they have been laboring under a slight hallucination." The editor continued, "If there is a surplus of talent idle in the East, we suggest that it be employed nearer home."⁴⁷ It is interesting that the suffragists were referred to uniformly as "gentlemen" rather than distinguishing between the male and female suffrage despite the fact that the group was mixed. In addition to expressing their doubts about the Impartial Suffrage Convention, dissenting newspapers also showed their opposition to the women's suffrage canvass by personally attacking the speakers and negatively presenting the meetings.

One of the tactics frequently used to subvert the women's suffrage movement was to belittle female advocates and negatively portray canvass meetings. One article in *Champion* declared a meeting in Atchison County a "great fizzle" and a "scathing rebuke". It went on to claim that "'female suffrage' in Atchison County is deader than the deadest mummy sleeping beneath the Pyramids."⁴⁸ This article is further evidence of the great lengths that some Republican editors went to in order to dispel support for the women's suffrage movement and adhere to the Party platform. Other editors printed articles insulting and degrading female suffragists speaking on the women's suffrage canvass. The speakers were often called names such as "strumpets" or "female screechers [sic]," and one article even remarked, "Lucy [Stone] is so strong minded that she has never lost her maiden name by marriage."⁴⁹ The derogative remarks about the women's suffrage canvass and its speakers were characteristic of the anti-suffrage campaign carried out in most of the Republican newspapers in Atchison and Leavenworth Counties. Perhaps in an attempt to destabilize the momentum of the women's campaign, some

Republicans began calling for their own canvass to advocate for the African American proposition.

As the women's suffrage canvass progressed through the summer of 1867, the Republican State Central Committee called their own convention to organize a canvass to build support for the proposition enfranchising African Americans. Articles announcing the Republican convention, as well as the results, were printed in papers across Atchison and Leavenworth Counties. Leavenworth's *Daily Times* and *Daily Conservative*, as well as Atchison's *Champion*, all heralded the organization of a Republican canvass to "press the question of the enfranchisement of the colored man."⁵⁰ The Republican State Central Committee explained their motivations for organizing a canvass in an address to Republicans of the state. After explaining the platform of the National Republican Party, the address revealed that "If the Republican party in Kansas is to maintain its position in the front rank of political progress, it must organize and drill its forces."⁵¹ The other paper in Atchison, the *Weekly Free Press*, also supported the Republican initiative, but observed that the address issued by the Party, "studiously avoids the fine points in the question presented to the people."⁵² As the only definitive advocate of the women's suffrage, it can be inferred that the editor was referring to the women's proposition when he mentioned the "fine points" missing from the Republican agenda.

The Republican canvass stretched from the end of June through September of 1867 and featured notable figures such as Judge T.C. Sears, Col. John Martin, Col. Preston B. Plumb, Reverend Isaac S. Kalloch, and soon-to-be Lieutenant Governor Charles V. Eskridge. A news article printed in the *Weekly Free Press* provided insight into the proceedings of the meetings. It reported that while some Republican speakers

provided mild endorsements of women's suffrage, Col. Martin, editor of Atchison's *Champion*, supported "negro suffrage, but that he did not want his mother or sister to vote, for he felt that it would hopelessly degrade them."⁵³ Col. Martin's remarks, as well as his participation in the canvass, is further evidence of his affiliation with the Republican Party and provides insight as to why his two newspapers aligned so closely with the Republican platform. Col. Martin was not alone in his public denunciation of the women's suffrage amendment. A correspondent for the *Daily Conservative* observed a similar meeting in Leavenworth County and reported that "[Msrs.] Kalloch and Eskridge opposed the 'pernicious doctrine' of female suffrage and made some telling hits."⁵⁴ As the November 3 elections drew nearer, both campaigns intensified.

Articles in favor and against women's suffrage appeared on almost every page of every newspaper in the days leading up to the campaign. In a last ditch effort to gain support, suffragist brought in eccentric entrepreneur George Francis Train to speak for the last leg of the canvass. Train was a desperate choice considering he was avidly against African American rights and his antics quickly garnered negative attention. After Train released a "Proclamation to the People of Kansas," the *Champion* criticized it as a "vapid and frothy declamation" that "excels anything we have ever seen."⁵⁵ The *Weekly Free Press*, on the other hand, largely ignored the new tactics Train brought to the canvass. Instead, they focused on continuing their argument in favor of women's suffrage. In the weeks leading up to the election, the *Weekly Free Press* printed a twelve part series written by David Martin titled "The Right of Suffrage". Martin pulled on everything from the Declaration of Independence to the Bible as evidence for his argument in favor of women's suffrage.⁵⁶ Despite their varying levels of adherence to the

Republican platform, however, all of the newspapers promoted the election and reminded readers to vote Republican. In the edition of the *Weekly Free Press* immediately before the election, the paper carried banners or small advertisements promoting the Republican Party. The banners carried slogans such as “Vote the Republican Ticket” or “Get Your Neighbors to Vote”. Interestingly, despite the paper’s prominent support of the women’s suffrage proposal, there were predominantly more banners encouraging voters to identify with the Republican platform than to deviate from it by voting for both propositions. The only banners in favor of the women’s proposition read “Vote for Woman Suffrage” or “Vote for the Amendments” and they were outnumbered by two to one.⁵⁷ The *Weekly Free Press* was not the only paper to have such an anomaly. Leavenworth’s *Daily Conservative* printed banners in their edition immediately prior to the election as well. Despite their general adherence with the Republican platform, they actually published one banner promoting voters to “Vote against striking the word ‘male’.”⁵⁸ Even though the paper printed seven times more banners adhering to the platform, it was remarkable that they even promoted the women’s proposition at all. After months of the editors battling against each other in the newspapers of Atchison and Leavenworth Counties, the results of the election revealed that Kansans were not ready for either proposition.

The Kansas suffrage campaign of 1867 ended in the failure of both the African American proposition and the women’s suffrage proposition. In Atchison County, where there was the most positive newspaper coverage of women’s suffrage, the proposition failed with a result of 345 in favor and 1,235 against. Comparatively, in Leavenworth County, where there was the least support for the women’s suffrage, the proposition was more successful with a vote of 1,588 in favor and 1,775 against. Additionally, the African

American propositions failed by a vote of 412 to 1,161 in Atchison County and a vote of 890 to 2,703 in Leavenworth County. The significance of the campaign, however, is not necessarily found in the results of the election, but how the newspapers of each county represented this early women's suffrage movement. Comparing the coverage between the two counties reveals that there were significant divergences within the Republican Party and that, while they were united in enfranchising African Americans, they were not in agreement about enfranchising women. There remains work to be done in order to completely understand the significance of the Kansas campaign within the context of the national Republican Party as well as the women's suffrage movement.

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Volume II, (Rochester, NY: Susan B. Anthony, 1881), 240-242.

² Capt. Henry King, "The Story of Kansas and Kansas Newspapers" in *History of Kansas Newspapers*, (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Historical Society and Department of Archives, 1916), 13.

³ For a detailed discussion of the rise of the women's suffrage movement, see Eleanor Flexner, *A Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 41-61 and Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 21-52.

⁴ DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 39.

⁵ While usage of the term "universal suffrage" varies, I will use it in this paper to mean suffrage for all persons regardless of race or sex. Additionally, the term "suffragist" generally refers to anyone advocating for enfranchisement, however, I will use it to refer solely to advocates of women's suffrage.

⁶ *Senate Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas, January 8 – February 26, 1867* (Leavenworth, KS: Clarke, Emery, & Co., 1867), 13.

⁷ *Senate Journal, 273-518; House Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas, January 8 – February 26, 1867*, (Leavenworth, KS: Clarke, Emery, & Co., 1867), 126-1075.

⁸ DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 79.

⁹ "Kansapedia: Women's Suffrage," Kansas State Historical Society, accessed March 8, 2011, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/women-s-suffrage/14524>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For in detailed discussion of the national Republican Party's views on black suffrage see Richardson, Heather Cox, "The Mixed Blessing of Universal Suffrage" in *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 41-82.

¹² "Address," *The Weekly Free Press*, May 25, 1867.

¹³ Stanton, et al., *Woman Suffrage*, 230.

¹⁴ Sheffield Ingalls, *History of Atchison County* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 218.

¹⁵ Kansas State Historical Society and Department of Archives, "John A. Martin," in *History of Kansas Newspapers*, ed. William E. Connelley (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1916), 33-35.

¹⁶ D. W. Wilder, *The Annals of Kansas* (Topeka, KS: T. Dwight Thacher, Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 214, 319, 393, 395.

¹⁷ Sheffield Ingalls, *History of Atchison County* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 218.

¹⁸ Jesse A. Hall and LeRoy T. Hand, *History of Leavenworth County Kansas* (Topeka, KS: Historical Publishing Company, 1921), 263.

¹⁹ "From the State Capital" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* (Leavenworth, KS), January 19, 1867.

²⁰ "From the State Capital" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 16, 1867.

²¹ "Letter from Topeka" in *Daily Times* (Leavenworth, KS), February 1, 1867.

²² *Evening Bulletin* (Leavenworth, KS) February 8, 1867.

²³ "The Suffrage Question" in *Weekly Free Press* (Atchison, KS), February 16, 1867.

²⁴ "Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, February 16, 1867.

²⁵ *Weekly Champion* (Atchison, KS), February 17, 1867.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Vote on the Suffrage Question" in *Weekly Champion*, February 19, 1867; "Toe the Mark, Gentlemen" in *Evening Bulletin*, February 8, 1867.

²⁸ "Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Champion*, March 3, 1867.

²⁹ "Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Champion*, April 23, 1867.

³⁰ "A Woman's Opinion of 'Female Suffrage'" in *Weekly Champion*, April 25, 1867.

³¹ "Maria Louisa on Suffrage" and "Female Suffrage" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, March 12, 1867;

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- ³² "Woman's Rights!" in *Daily Times*, February 26, 1867.
- ³³ "Women and Politics" in *Daily Times*, February 26, 1867
- ³⁴ "Suffrage" in *Evening Bulletin*, Feb. 19, 1867.
- ³⁵ *Weekly Free Press*, March 16, 1867.
- ³⁶ "Communicated. Something About Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, April 13, 1867.
- ³⁷ "Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, June 1, 1867.
- ³⁸ "Female suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, May 18, 1867.
- ³⁹ "Communicated. Something About Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, April 13, 1867.
- ⁴⁰ "Sensible Words on Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, May 11, 1867.
- ⁴¹ "The Champion and Female Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, April 13, 1867.
- ⁴² "A New Proposition of the Bolters" in *Weekly Free Press*, August 31, 1867.
- ⁴³ "Impartial Suffrage Convention" in *Weekly Free Press*, April 13, 1867.
- ⁴⁴ "Suffrage Convention" in *Evening Bulletin*, March 1, 1867.
- ⁴⁵ "Impartial Suffrage Convention" in *Weekly Free Press*, April 13, 1867.
- ⁴⁶ "Suffrage Convention" in *Weekly Free Press*, April 5, 1867.
- ⁴⁷ "The Suffrage Convention" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, April 5, 1867.
- ⁴⁸ "Great Fizzle!" in *Weekly Champion*, November 5, 1867.
- ⁴⁹ "Female Suffrage" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, March 16, 1867; "Untitled" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 15, 1867; "Don't Like It" in *Weekly Champion*, April 11, 1867.
- ⁵⁰ "A Canvass Needed" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, July 24, 1867.
- ⁵¹ "Address" in *Leavenworth Daily Times*, May 18, 1867.
- ⁵² "State Central Committee" in *Weekly Free Press*, May 25, 1867.
- ⁵³ "The Suffrage Meeting" in *Weekly Free Press*, June 22, 1867.
- ⁵⁴ "Manhood Suffrage" in *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 18, 1867.
- ⁵⁵ "Train" in *Atchison Daily Champion*, November 5, 1867.
- ⁵⁶ "The Right of Suffrage" in *Weekly Free Press*, September 28, 1867; October 5, 1867; October 12, 1867; October 19, 1867.

⁵⁷ *Weekly Free Press*, November 2, 1867.

⁵⁸ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, November 5, 1867.

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