

## HANDOUT TWO:

# Resources for The Roots of the Suffrage Movement - 19th Century, Beginnings of Suffrage's Narrative

Transcript for Interview Archive Material, Lisa Tetrault

### Split in Suffrage Movement Over 15th Amendment

As different people who think we can make our vision of justice a reality start fighting with one another over those different visions of justice, you start to get all kinds of ugly cleavages in the United States and ugly splits and ugly fights. And one of them that is unbelievably painful is one that happens in the feminist-abolitionist coalition, those people who had been organized in women's rights and anti-slavery, prior to the American civil war. They found a new organization after the American Civil War and they decide what we're going to press for is voting rights for freed people, all freed people, Black men and Black women and white women, and so they start pressing for those demands. They're like, this is what we think is the most important demand for remaking a nation. When Congress proposes the 15th amendment, and only gives voting to Black men or only extends voting to Black men, there's a huge fight within the feminist abolitionist coalition because it's half of what they're demanding. So do they approach it as a glass half full or is this too short of their ultimate goal and therefore ought to be rejected as too much of a compromise with principle? And so an enormous fight breaks open between some very famous figures. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper—a variety of titans within the feminist abolitionist movement—Lucretia Mott. And Stanton and Anthony really are the ones who opened the fight by saying we refuse to support the 15th amendment because this is enfranchising Black men before white women.

And a lot of people want to defend that as a principled stand. You know, what we demand is all things for all people, not just half of our demands. But really it's not that. What it is—is Stanton and Anthony standing up and saying, and revealing their own sense of a pretty entrenched racial hierarchy, in saying we don't want ignorant "Black Sambos," which is language they use. Ignorant Black men, "Sambos," voting before the educated white womanhood of the nation, which of course they're seeing in a kind of elevated fashion. So, it's not this kind of egalitarianism that you might hope for. And Stanton and Anthony get into a huge fight with Frederick Douglass, and Frederick Douglass says back, We need this, we have to have this, our brains are being dashed out on the pavement. There's massive violence in the Civil War South, you know, in the post-war South, vigilante violence, Klan violence, all kinds of... I mean freed people are being slaughtered, and he says, you know,

know, we're being hung from lampposts, we have to have this, it's an imperative in this moment. And Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton say no. And they bolt from that alliance and they form a new organization, and they leave their abolitionist colleagues in the dust. And they leave a bunch of their women's suffrage colleagues in the dust, too. So this splits not just the abolitionist and the women's suffragists, it splits the suffragists. A whole lot of women suffragists say no, Lucy Stone and others, we will remain with the 15th Amendment. We will support it and we will continue to fight for its gradual expansion.

### Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's Suffrage Narrative

That narrative we were talking about, the suffrage merriment, Stanton and Anthony end up writing it. They're the ones who really give the movement its history. And so they give their version of the story, and really they're at the center of the story. And when we remember the suffrage movement, we largely remember them. And that's how they intended it. But there were all these other suffragists including those that stayed aligned with the 15th Amendment, and Lucy Stone is chief among those. And she's largely forgotten today, but she was as influential and as important as Stanton and Anthony. She started her career as early as they did. She cut her teeth in abolition in the 1840s. She went to Oberlin. She was one of the first women to get an equal college degree. She would live all the way through to the end of the 19th century and be fighting her own fight, parallel to Stanton and Anthony's. They fought two different fights and they would hate each other really for the rest of their lives.

Part of the reason we don't remember Lucy Stone is she never understood what Stanton and Anthony understood, the power of historical narrative. She refused to participate in their history project. Stanton and Anthony start writing history. About halfway through the suffrage . . . they realize they need some reinforcements. And the reinforcements they pick is history writing as a way to start controlling the narrative and making an argument. And Lucy Stone refuses to participate and she says, "We don't have time to write history. We have a movement to fight." What Stanton and Anthony understood, but I don't think could have openly articulated, I think they understood it tacitly was history writing was movement fighting. Lucy Stone never understands that and she therefore doesn't leave a readymade narrative to future generations to understand this story, and she's left out of it.