

# Residual Media

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## Neglected News: Women and Print Media, 1890–1928

*Maria DiCenzo and Leila Ryan*

The demand which *Votes for Women* has to meet is twofold. In the first place, there is a growing desire for knowledge on the part of the outside public to learn what it is women are really striving for. . . . In the second place, it has to supply to all those women who are at work within the ranks a bulletin of the doings of the Union which shall keep them in touch with all the ramifications of the movement.

—*Votes for Women*, October 1907

*The Englishwoman* is not addressed only to those who are already fully convinced of the justice of the Women's Movement. . . . It is intended for the general public. . . . The question of the Enfranchisement of Women is not one . . . that interests only a struggling minority, and we trust that we may add to the already increasing number of women who desire a more equitable distribution of political power and responsibility.

—*The Englishwoman*, February 1909

Given the extent to which Victorian and Edwardian women activists were both “making the news” in the press of the day as well as “making” their own news—producing and distributing their own papers—there has

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been remarkably little attention paid to the wide range of women's political newspapers and periodicals produced in Britain between 1890 and 1928.<sup>1</sup> These print media are crucial to gaining an understanding of the scope and activities of a women's public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century because they were instrumental in shaping opinion and establishing and mobilizing large- and small-scale activist networks and reform campaigns. This chapter provides a snapshot of the types of official organs and journals that proliferated in these years—with a particular focus on suffrage/feminist publications—and it explores the functions that these papers served for specific campaigns and organizations, but also, crucially, for the general public. The suffrage/feminist press in this period constitutes a residual media form at a variety of levels. In historiographic terms, these periodicals, overlooked by most media scholars, challenge dominant narratives of press and media history, suggesting a longer and more continuous history to the nineteenth-century radical print tradition, as well as earlier roots and precedents to postwar developments in feminist and alternative media. In historical terms, they are residual in two further senses. First, they are the literal residue or traces of pivotal developments in the history of the emancipation of women—the artifacts and evidence of an elaborate and complex social movement. Second, they relied on what were by this point residual forms because feminists drew on established practices and formats of earlier reform movements, such as the Chartist, radical, and socialist presses, using print media to articulate and circulate ideas. But by inflecting existing (and increasingly dated) forms in new and unconventional ways, the early feminist press offers a case in point for Williams's argument that the "residual" and the "emergent" may be effectively linked through their alternative or oppositional relation to the dominant culture. This press was overtly politically partisan at a time when the mainstream press, according to most media historians, was being depoliticized under the pressure of commercialization. These publications adapted long-established forms but generated new meanings and effects in the process of waging a political struggle for a disenfranchised constituency that was gaining a louder and stronger public voice.

### *Media Studies, History, and Methodology*

We begin by relating current theoretical debates in media studies to a discussion of the suffrage press to demonstrate how recent frameworks can illuminate the complexities and dynamics of earlier media that have been either ignored or dismissed. The aim is to expand the historical dimensions of issues often assumed to be relevant only to contemporary media and social movements—highlighting the continuities, rather than the ruptures. Taking our cue from James Curran's criticism that much media history fails to draw the necessary links between media forms and larger social trends, the chapter argues that there is a great deal that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist press as a residual form can tell us now, particularly in terms of disrupting the generalizations that are too often made about the scope and diversity of early women's movements and particularly how the articulation of feminist ideas through a range of print



FIGURE 13.1 Miss Kelly, "a champion Votes for Women seller," was captain of the Charing Cross pitch. Courtesy of the Museum of London.

media came to influence attitudes toward women's roles in public life.<sup>2</sup> There has been an active process of reflection in recent years on the theoretical and methodological issues related to media history. On one level, critics have noted the disproportionate emphasis in media studies on contemporary forms and developments. The criticisms are often raised in specific contexts, but they point to the implications for media studies more generally and in different national contexts. For instance, Neils Brügger and Søren Kolstrup lament the waning of the important role that historical studies played in the 1970s, and their collection of essays grows out of the need to address why historical scholarship became "the neglected child of media studies."<sup>3</sup> In some cases, the concerns are more directly related to particular genres or media forms. Martin Conboy offers what he argues is a "much needed critical history" of the popular press because only a historical approach can provide the kind of long-term perspective necessary to contextualize the relationship between the popular and the press today.<sup>4</sup>

John Downing, in his examination of alternative media, also stresses the need for historical approaches that illuminate the development of cultural forms and processes over time. He argues,

A recurring and insidious temptation in media studies is to assess media from the singular vantage point of the contemporary moment. Both the impact and the origins of media become extremely foggy as a result. This is not least true of radical alternative media and oppositional cultures, which are already vulnerable to premature dismissal as ephemeral and therefore irrelevant.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in his attempt to expand the definitions of alternative media through an analysis of recent forms, Chris Atton stresses the importance of history and bases his argument "at least on historical 'congruence'" and regards his study as "grounded in the histories of alternative media from the past two centuries."<sup>6</sup>

On another level, those within the field of media history have posed fundamental questions about what constitute appropriate objects of study and approaches. Hans Fredrik Dahl interrogates the disciplinary boundaries, as well as the meaning and implications of the very term "media history"; the fact that its objects range from economics to culture and its methods from quantitative to qualitative leaves it without "a clear thematic identity and great depth in time."<sup>7</sup> Tom O'Malley takes the problem of the relationship among media studies, communication studies, and history further, and he offers a more systematic and chronological account of the emergence and development of media history as theorized and practiced in the UK.<sup>8</sup> These tendencies toward retrospective and meta-analyses of larger trends can also be found in Curran's recent work in which he identifies and distinguishes the main interpretations of media history that have emerged in explaining the historical role of media in Britain.<sup>9</sup>

These overviews raise fundamental issues—ranging from whether or not media history should deal with institutions, media content, or cultural effects, to the tensions between theoretical and empirical approaches—but they do not draw any clear conclusions except to point to the inevitably interdisciplinary nature of the field and to call for increasingly comprehensive and contextualized methodologies. They clearly all agree that history matters and that, as Curran (like Brügger and Kolstrup) puts it, media history is "the neglected grandparent of media studies: isolated, ignored, rarely visited by her offspring."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, this compelling case for the value of reinvigorating media history raises other, namely historiographical, problems. In this turn to history, we might justifiably ask, whose history or whose versions of history will influence the structure and concerns of the history of media in a given period? The work of historians of radical alternative and feminist media suggests that this self-conscious analysis of the field has not been entirely reliable in terms of recovering or addressing particular traditions of work that have gone missing in the scholarship. For instance, Curran acknowledges the extent to which feminist narratives have been "usually entirely ignored in conventional media history" and attempts to

give the area extended consideration in his overview. But, in reconstructing women's history, he ends up reinforcing accounts (i.e., with an emphasis on domestic ideology, minor uprisings, followed by more containment, until the women's liberation movements post 1960s) that have been rendered problematic, even discounted, by feminist historians.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the scope and profile of feminist activism, from roughly the mid-nineteenth century through the inter-war period and the 1950s, and particularly the media of these women's movements, are not accounted for. These omissions and oversimplified historical narratives are by no means confined to media studies, but they remind us that where media historians look and the questions they ask have important implications for what they find and how they interpret the findings. As Downing argues, "What might abstractly seem a bland and low-key instance could, in a given context, be wielding a hammer blow at some orthodoxy. . . . So context and consequences must be our primary guides to what are or are not definable as radical alternative media." We argue that the early feminist and suffrage press offers a case in point and provides a particularly compelling example of why and how residual media warrant further consideration.<sup>12</sup>

### *Feminist/Suffrage Media History: The Scholarship to Date*

There is a rich body of work devoted to Victorian periodicals of all kinds, and women's domestic or commercial magazines before and after World War II, so the dearth of studies about women's political periodicals from the late 1800s to the 1920s becomes all the more surprising. Official organs of suffrage organizations, for instance, are part of a long tradition that includes the Chartist, socialist, labor, and radical presses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like these other movements, the women's suffrage campaign was committed to electoral as well as more general social and political reforms, and many of its leagues organized and distributed publications nationally. Yet suffrage and other feminist print media are conspicuously absent in the narratives of British press history—the rise and fall of the radical/popular/political presses—chiefly because these accounts focus on class politics, rather than gender politics. They take for granted the decline of a politicized press due to the commercialization or "capitalization" of the press by the end of the nineteenth century, without accounting for the fact that increasing numbers of women were intensifying a long-standing public battle to gain citizenship rights.<sup>13</sup>

Additional reasons for this neglect range from the position of early twentieth-century periodicals, journalism, and activist literature in the academy—particularly how these forms slipped between the disciplinary cracks of history and literary studies—to the labor-intensive nature of the empirical research that often relies on materials difficult to obtain. Historians have tended to draw on them as sources but have not focused on them in terms of "genre" or as objects in their own right. In literary studies, genre as well as periodization complicated the recognition and inclusion of periodicals that appeared between 1900 and 1918. The field of Victorian studies has produced an impressive and

extensive body of scholarship on periodicals, but even those who use the "long nineteenth century" often end at the turn of the century. It is modernism—with its emphasis on an avant-garde and formalist aesthetic—that constitutes the major narrative of early twentieth-century literature and little magazines.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, as noted earlier, the explosion in media studies that has tended to focus on the period after 1945 has only recently begun to address the issue of historical scope in relation to political media.

The impact of new historicist and cultural materialist challenges to the field of literary studies has been important, in combination with the growth of feminist approaches to literature and history and the commitment of women's studies to recovery and revisionist projects. Related to these developments is the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research in the humanities and social sciences, particularly the literary, historical, and sociological discourses and perspectives that are themselves the product of debates within and between disciplines concerning the "cultural" (or linguistic) turn, on one hand, and the "historical" turn, on the other. In these ways, new critical perspectives and approaches have been instrumental in the recovery of residual practices and artifacts. These factors and developments inform the methodological issues related to, and the overall position of, feminist periodical research on the late Victorian and Edwardian years. The early feminist and suffrage press is finally gaining some of the critical attention it deserves. These print media represent the traces of networks of individuals and organizations who worked to effect social and political change for women of all classes. They provided the vehicles through which allies and opponents of women's emancipation tried to negotiate different and sometimes conflicting definitions about women's roles in the public sphere.

Margaret Beetham describes the advent of journals advocating women's rights as "a thin trickle which became a stream, if not a torrent, of words between 1900 and 1914 when, for the first time ever, there was a lively and diverse periodical press which spoke to and for women in terms of their rights."<sup>15</sup> There is no question that radical and progressive papers were outnumbered by the even greater growth in domestic magazines for women at the end of the nineteenth century, most of which were characterized by either a complete unawareness of "women's rights-ism" or a conscious rejection of these developments, defining femininity in opposition to the New Woman.<sup>16</sup> They are the kinds of publications that have had the highest profile in studies of early women's print media. But the radical and progressive papers were numerous and diversified enough to indicate a broader range of interests, reading habits, and practices for women in the period.

The mid and late years of the Victorian period saw the development of progressive journals that covered a wide variety of issues, ranging from work, education, and law to reports of specific reform campaigns such as antivivisection, anti-Contagious Diseases Act, and the suffrage movement. They are recognized as papers that were produced by women, for women, but most of them stressed again and again that they were addressing a wide readership that included men. Some of the notable titles include *The English Woman's Journal* (1858–64), which David Doughtan describes as "the early British feminist movement working out its

theoretical base in public"; *Woman's Opinion* (1874); *Women's Penny Paper* (1888–90), subtitled "the only paper in the world conducted, written [printed and published] by women"; *Shafts* (1892–1900), geared in part to the working classes; and *Woman's Signal* (1894–99), which was linked to the temperance movement.<sup>17</sup> Also emerging, particularly in the years during and after the First World War, were a series of trade/work-related papers that often referred to themselves as "organs" for these groups and constituencies. Even though the features could vary from the serious (the abuses of employers) to the more frivolous (what to wear), they assumed and promoted women's rights to independence and the need for collective effort to ensure their rights as employees and to improve their status and working conditions. The titles suggest different areas of employment for women in these years such as *The Woman Teacher* (1911–61); *The Business Girl* (1912); *Humanity* (1913–14), subtitled "Devoted to the Emancipation of Sweated Female Workers"; *The Woman Clerk* (1919–31); and *The Woman Engineer* (1919–present).<sup>18</sup> It is often assumed that the women's movement died out by the interwar years, but surviving feminist periodicals tell a different story.<sup>19</sup> Some of the major suffrage journals continued to publish into these years, often under other new titles: *The Vote* ran until 1933, and *The Common Cause* became *Woman's Leader* from 1920 to 1932. Also, the well-known and long-running feminist political weekly, *Time and Tide*, was founded in 1920.<sup>20</sup>

Although it is important to indicate the spectrum of progressive periodicals in the period, we turn our attention to a selection of overtly feminist journals that developed out of and in reaction to the Edwardian suffrage movement. Narrowing the focus allows us to offer a more detailed discussion of particular genres, generated by what remains one of the most visible and familiar campaigns. The emphasis is on two types of publications. The first type is what were referred to at the time as "official organs" and what scholars have variously termed pressure group periodicals, publications of special interest groups, campaign journals, and suffrage newspapers. In this sense, suffrage organs such as *Votes for Women* and *The Common Cause* are part of a long tradition of publications growing out of movements devoted to electoral as well as other social and political reforms. The second type, the nonaffiliated/independent feminist reviews, appeared in both mainstream (*The Englishwoman*) and more avant-garde forms (*The Freewoman*), modeling themselves on the radical and literary weekly and monthly reviews of the period. All of these labels distinguish these publications from commercial and domestic magazines and the public press of the day, even though they referred to themselves variously as papers, journals, periodicals, and newspapers.

### *The Role of the Suffrage/Feminist Press: Strategies and Functions*

Not only did the suffrage campaign generate an extensive and lively press of its own, monitoring and challenging the mainstream dailies at every turn, but as a movement, it was highly diverse, with internal divisions that affected its

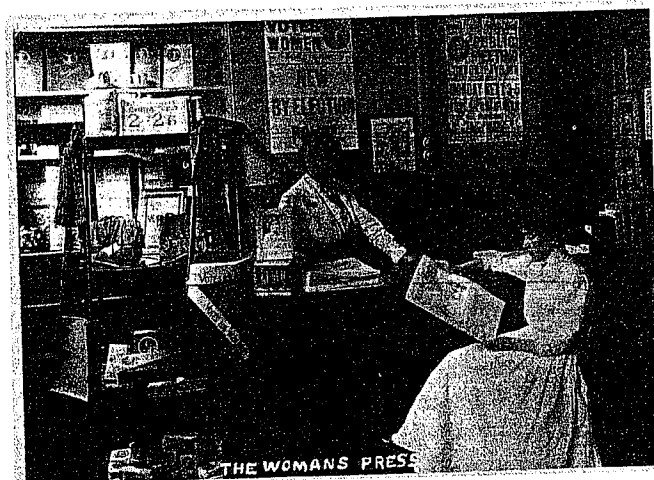


FIGURE 13.2 Inside The Woman's Press, 156 Charing Cross Road, 1910. Courtesy of the Museum of London.

relationship with authorities and the general public. The papers often acknowledged these issues directly:

The Press and their Public: There is no question but that the attitude of the majority of the daily Press is a gross breach of faith with their readers. The public expects news from them, not misrepresentation. Men buy a daily paper to learn what is going on. To conceal or misrepresent what is going on is to obtain money under false pretences. We give in our news columns an account of what has been done by the *Women's Social and Political Union* during the past weeks, that our readers may see for themselves the extent to which facts have been suppressed. (*Women & Progress*, November 2, 1906)

There is a tendency to dismiss suffrage newspapers as mere newsletters or as serving a solely propagandist function, but this overly reductive thinking obscures the variety of approaches to form and content, and—when read in relation to one another—the provocative and often conflicting messages they conveyed. These papers were part of a conscious campaign of counterinformation designed to influence public opinion and to build and mobilize support for the cause, as well as a broader agenda of social and political change.<sup>21</sup> In virtually all of the senses in which Downing and Atton define them, these papers constitute early examples of radical alternative media, serving the same functions then as those we attribute to the media of social movements now. Atton stresses “the alternative press’s responses [to the social construction of mass media news] as demonstrated not simply by critiques of those media but by their own construction of news, based on alternative values and frameworks . . . alternative media provide information

about and interpretations of the world which we might not otherwise see and information about the world that we simply will not find anywhere else.”<sup>22</sup> Downing attributes two main purposes to radical alternative media: “(a) to express opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure and against its behaviour; (b) to build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure.”<sup>23</sup> It is through the latter of the two that we see how social movements come to constitute “alternative public spheres.” Although Downing’s use of the concept is a reformulation of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s notion of a proletarian “counter public realm,” it echoes the use of terms such as “feminist public sphere” and “counterpublics” posited by feminist critics of Habermas.<sup>24</sup> What the terms all point to are oppositional groups/cultures/discourses that Nancy Fraser describes as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”<sup>25</sup> Print media played a crucial role in the formation of a feminist public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, part of a larger context that saw the increasing differentiation and pluralization of the public sphere. But it is important to note that this process of segmentation did not necessarily imply segregation. In this respect, the relationship between the suffrage press and the public sphere once again illuminates the dynamic relationship between residual and emergent forms. Although it was emergent in the sense that it contributed to the differentiation of the public sphere, it was residual in the sense that it did not aim to isolate or ghettoize itself. Rather, as we elaborate later, it addressed a general public that included men and as well as women. So although it drew new attention to women’s issues, it did not regard itself in specialized terms and consciously engaged with a wider political arena.

The “lateral” function of building solidarity that Downing identifies was complicated for suffrage activists because although they expressed open opposition, vertically, vis-à-vis the government, they had to capture the attention of and convince a male-dominated public (and Parliament) to grant them citizenship rights. So in building and mobilizing support, the papers addressed themselves internally to existing memberships and sympathizers but also externally to the general public. They tried to fill the gaps in existing press accounts and to counter negative coverage. Balancing these different functions was a continual challenge. As Helena Swanwick notes in one of her editorials for *The Common Cause*,

We would like the paper to meet the needs and wishes of many sorts of people. There is the old, convinced Suffragist, who is sick and tired of “arguments” and who wants to have news to be kept abreast of the movement. There is the new convert, who is hungering for fresh reasons wherewith she may defeat the enemy in dialectics. There is the educated man or woman who wants special articles, and there is the illiterate, for whom we would like to cater. There is the secretary of the small society who wants the names of the local people and their speeches recorded, and there is the large body of the frivolous or the tired, who want “something readable.”<sup>26</sup>

This problem of negotiating internal and external needs also presents a tension in terms of how we situate and discuss these media now, between understanding alternative media as "ghettos" or as part of more complex alternative forums/spheres that exist and must be taken seriously within and in relation to the wider public.<sup>27</sup>

On one level, the women's/suffrage movement had developed into its own sphere, complete with office headquarters for various organizations, women's presses, literature shops, holiday resorts, and private clubs that provided rental accommodation and libraries. Some organizations had sophisticated promotional strategies, embracing commercialization and exploiting fully the possibilities of niche marketing. For instance, the Women's Social and Political Union ensured that members could have their rooms decorated or buy bicycles, jewelry, china, and playing cards in the colors of the Union. Although these practices complicate, they do not contradict the political aims of such groups and their publications, suggesting instead a dynamic engagement with commercial culture that was not incompatible with political activism. At the levels of production and consumption, periodicals were markers of involvement in the cause, and the suffrage newspaper as "object" came to be linked to the image of the "modern" or "political" woman. They were crucial to establishing institutions and networks, offering a forum for participation (through articles or correspondence) and bringing news of the activities of the leadership and branches to members nationally, thus connecting them across geographic and even social lines. It is this unifying role that is often stressed in studies focusing on the potential of print media to influence "collective identity formation" and to create what Kate Flint calls "reading communities."<sup>28</sup> Feminist scholars have noted how the papers represented new discursive spaces for readers and provided what Martha Solomon suggests were "replacements for old social stereotypes about the nature and roles of women . . . encouraging readers to envision new roles and activities."<sup>29</sup> In her discussion of the role of print in the politics of gender formation, Beetham underscores the genre of the periodical as the "crucial site for the debate around the meaning of gender, sexuality and their relationship," but she also points out that "women were actively engaged, not only in defining themselves, but in shaping the press, as it went through its own late Victorian crisis."<sup>30</sup> Beetham's insistence on relating these practices and their effects to a broader context is important. There is a tendency to ghettoize feminist media—like other alternative media—limiting the scope and impact of these discursive arenas and obscuring their contribution to larger political discourses.<sup>31</sup>

### *A New Take on an Old World: April 1912*

Gaye Tuchman has argued,

News is a window on the world. . . . The news aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know, and should know. . . . But, like any frame that delineates a world, the news frame may be considered problematic.

The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or backyard. The unfolding scene also depends upon where one stands.<sup>32</sup>

Her analogy remains a simple, but productive way to consider how we position and interpret news media. In the case of suffrage organs alone, there was a proliferation of papers after 1907, each with a different mandate, each claiming to offer an approach or perspective not currently addressed by the press or other women's/suffrage papers. The growing number of suffrage papers ranged in terms of the political spectrum from *Woman's Dreadnought* (1914–18), organ of the East London Federation of Suffragettes (Sylvia Pankhurst's socialist paper geared to poor and working women) to the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review* (1909–16), which restricted membership along party lines, was opposed to universal suffrage in any form, and clearly drew on the ladies' magazines of the period. The spectrum included the high-profile organizations (Women's Social and Political Union, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies [NUWSS], and the Women's Freedom League) whose papers are discussed later, as well as denominationally based groups, men's groups, regional associations, the international alliance, and of course the antisuffragists who launched their own review in 1908.<sup>33</sup> The only two serious precursors were Lydia Becker's *Women's Suffrage Journal* (1870–90) and *Women's Franchise* (1907–11), both designed to bring news from different suffrage societies to the movement as a whole. Two significant journals to appear during the Edwardian campaign were *The Englishwoman*, an independent monthly review, clearly connected with and sympathetic to the NUWSS, and *The Freewoman*, perhaps the most notorious, albeit short-lived magazine of the period, edited by the former militant suffragette Dora Marsden.<sup>34</sup> The paper announced itself as a feminist review, claiming,

The publication of THE FREEWOMAN marks an epoch. It marks a point at which Feminism in England ceases to be impulsive and unaware of its own features, and becomes definitely self-conscious and introspective. For the first time feminists themselves make the attempt to reflect the feminist movement in the mirror of thought." (November 23, 1911)

What surprised and angered some was that its editorial stance was openly critical of the emphasis on the suffrage campaign as the means to advancing women's rights. The proliferation of suffrage papers reflected not only the expansion of the movement but also the growing diversity of opinion about goals and tactics—and, in turn, the need to make them visible. Although each might be seen to fulfill similar functions, they necessarily distinguished themselves and created the need for others to define their own positions. Like the associations they represented, these periodicals varied considerably in terms of form, content, and style.

Ragnild Nessheim, in her study of the mainstream press and the suffrage campaign, notes, "Almost without exception, authors of books about press and



politics quote very sparingly from the letterpress of newspapers. . . . The reader learns what individual papers said and stood for, not from the horse's mouth (i.e., the letterpress of the papers themselves) but from the press historian's indirect rendering of editorial content."<sup>35</sup> One might go even further in the case of this material to suggest that the closer we look at the content and format of suffrage papers, the harder it becomes to generalize about them. Although each established its own particular template—using standard features ranging from editorials, feature articles, and interviews, to book/theater reviews, short stories/poetry/drama, correspondence sections, branch reports, advertisements, and classifieds—they also differed in terms of what they deemed newsworthy and allotted space accordingly. For papers ostensibly covering the same movement, in addition to events nationally and internationally, at times there was almost no overlap in content. Complicating the process of reading these papers now is that the conclusions one might draw from any given sample of issues are easily undermined by those in subsequent months/years. For example, *Votes for Women*, official organ of the WSPU, with its popular journalistic style, had a tendency to be quite narcissistic (promoting a cult of celebrity around high-profile figures like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, and the Pethick Lawrences) while at other points providing more substantial and informative features. The shifts in style are especially evident in long-running periodicals that were subject to major changes in personnel and editorial policy.

In this final section we offer some general points of comparison between leading periodicals on opposite sides of the militant/constitutionalist divide, as well as those claiming to be independent. Taking April 1912, a period of turmoil for the suffrage movement, we provide a brief case study to demonstrate the different and conflicting ways in which these periodicals interpreted major events for their readerships.<sup>36</sup> Although these papers claimed to speak on behalf of the women's movement, they did so in different ways. The defeat of the Conciliation Bill on March 28, 1912, (by a vote of 222 to 208 on second reading) was a flash point for politicians and suffrage activists alike. This was a development fraught with intrigue, accusations of betrayal, and attributions of blame. It involved the role of the press, namely the appearance in *The Times* of the famous missive from self-styled scientific observer, Sir Almroth Wright, describing the militant suffragists as "warped," "immoral," "sex-embittered," and "incomplete" women. Not only did most of the feminist papers denounce and ridicule this diatribe, they also interpreted the decision by *The Times* to publish it on the day the bill was debated in Parliament as a deliberate attempt to sabotage its passage. For example, *The Englishwoman* noted that *The Times*, although it later modified its support of Wright, did not "scruple to make use of these exaggerated statements against women when they could be turned into a weapon to defeat women's suffrage."<sup>37</sup>

Virtually all of the periodicals foregrounded the extent to which parties, particularly the Liberals and Conservatives, were willing to exploit the suffrage cause to their political advantage and equally willing to abandon it in the interests of expediency. This was evident in the significant number of MPs who had pledged support but voted against the second reading. *The Freewoman*

reminded its readers of the "overwhelming majority by which the Bill was carried twelve months ago, and also the various majorities by which the principle of Woman's Suffrage has been affirmed over and over again by Parliament."<sup>38</sup> Even though the WSPU had long discounted politicians' reliability and honesty, for those who were not yet convinced, the defeat of the Conciliation Bill proved they could not rely on promises of party support. *The Vote* stated,

The House of Commons . . . has its own peculiar brand of humour; it is not so long since honourable gentlemen greeted with hilarious laughter the mention of the stomach-pump and the forcible feeding of political women prisoners. The laughter, the cheers, and the hysterical outburst which greeted on March 28 the successful smashing of pledged words is another instance of this sense of humour as well as a fitting comment on their sense of public honour.<sup>39</sup>

Reinforcing a similar message, both *Votes for Women* and *The Common Cause* published division lists of the names of all those who voted in favor, against, and who were absent and unpaired—a tactic they frequently employed after major parliamentary decisions. Several papers also reproduced extracts from the speeches made in the House of Commons during the debate.

Especially damning were the views expressed across the board about the role of Irish Nationalists, the overwhelming majority of whom voted against the bill, in spite of their previous support. It seemed that all were agreed on the motives of the Irish Nationalists. *The Freewoman*, for example, stated clearly that the Nationalists were "using their power simply to keep the Government in for the purpose of obtaining Home Rule."<sup>40</sup> Even the more sympathetic *Common Cause* lamented that "The fact is Nationalists are in mortal terror lest anything should interfere with the passage of their Bill this year. They should take longer views, and remember that they may need the help of women for two more years. They surely do not propose to fight the women for that length of time?"<sup>41</sup> Also interesting is the way in which the Labour Party emerged in this crisis as the only consistent supporter (the only party for which all members present voted in favor of passage). In calculating the small margin of votes by which the bill was defeated, *The Vote* regretted that "thirteen Labour Party representatives of the miners were obliged to be absent unpaired on account of the coal crisis."<sup>42</sup> This would prove a pivotal point in the party's relationship with the NUWSS; the constitutionalists, traditionally Liberal supporters, felt particularly betrayed by the government's handling of the situation and soon after began to form an alliance with Labour.

But underlying all these factors in the defeat of the bill and central to the coverage was the issue of WSPU militancy. The WSPU had intensified its window-smashing campaign in the weeks leading up to the debate, and the other suffrage organizations were not only openly critical of their actions but blamed the militants for encouraging defeat of the bill. The statements were unequivocal. *The Common Cause* claimed on its front page (which regularly included "Non-Militant" in bold letters): "we regard its defeat as a distinct piece of success for



the W.S.P.U. They are in the position of having predicted the death of the Bill and then having ensured the success of their prediction by administering poison."<sup>43</sup> Regarding the organization of women workers as a more urgent priority, *The Freewoman* expressed impatience with "the childish obsession of grown women as to the value and potentialities of the vote" but saved its most biting sarcasm for the WSPU, accusing it of operating only on the basis of self-interest:

That society, however, had its organization to save. . . . If the W.S.P.U. get their way, we shan't have votes for women this ten years. It is not to their interest to get it. With their policy, with its extraneous thrills; their society—a jolly club . . . they can get along for another decade very comfortably. It is the people with work to do who feel the pinch.<sup>44</sup>

It becomes easier to see why *The Freewoman's* radical take was seen to verge at times on the side of antisuffragism. Even the other militant society, the Women's Freedom League, seemed compelled to reiterate its support of the bill and was willing to suggest that WSPU violence had played a role in its defeat:

We cannot and do not share the view that it is a good thing the Bill is killed; on the contrary, we consider nothing more unfortunate could have happened at this juncture . . . The W.S.P.U. has been quite candid . . . they have said repeatedly in their paper and on platforms that they were not interested in the Bill . . . and indeed, it seems likely that the militancy which took place only three weeks before this critical Second Reading was deliberately designed to wreck the Bill.<sup>45</sup>

The story was far from front and center in the WSPU's *Votes for Women* for the same week, which featured on its cover a political cartoon depicting women fire-fighters breaking windows to save lives. Instead, the story took second billing to news of Mrs. Pankhurst's release from prison, the conspiracy charges against the Pethick Lawrences, and a meeting in Albert Hall. In addressing the defeat of the bill, the paper stated simply that "The result of the division on the Conciliation Bill simply illustrates afresh the futility of the attempt to legislate on a matter of this importance without a lead from the Government and pressure by the Government" and denied that militancy was a reason for its defeat, arguing that "the far more serious militancy of the miners, with all its attendant suffering and financial disaster, did not prevent but actually brought about the passing of the Minimum Wage Bill."<sup>46</sup>

The reactions to the Conciliation Bill provide a brief glimpse into the ways in which the periodicals tried to hold the authorities to account, just as the Almoth Wright story indicates how they responded to such displays of misogyny, reinforcing how public these battles indeed were. Equally, however, they reveal both the solidarities (all were united in their satirical treatment of antisuffragists) and the divisions within the movement and the conflicts over specific demands (i.e., the wording of bills defining who would get the vote) and the tactics/means by which they should try to secure their demands. These stories were

only two among many in the first week of April 1912. It is also necessary to situate them among the other regular features that suggested business as usual—branch reports, announcements for upcoming meetings, recent pamphlets and books, and ads for everything from "ready-to-wear frocks" to vegetarian room and board. Here we see how these networks functioned and how organizations tried to encourage continued efforts in the face of major setbacks. These print media made movement-related news their primary concern, but they were also vehicles for "news" generally, offering their perspectives on the events of the day. The sinking of the *Titanic* was a major story at the end of April 1912 and provided an occasion for some to explore the policy of "women and children first" and for others to lament the death of the newspaper figure and champion of women's causes W. T. Stead.

In conclusion, these periodicals provided a feminist window on the world for readers then and offer a window onto earlier women's movements for readers now. For all their differences, what they shared—activists and opponents alike—was a fundamental belief in the power of reasoned argument to influence public opinion at time when print media were the most effective means of circulating ideas. Through them, early feminists were able to generate the public discussion of issues that were formerly excluded, performing a central function Fraser attributes to counterpublics, namely that they "expand discursive space," forcing "assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation . . . to be publicly argued out."<sup>47</sup> At the same time, they worked out their diverse and sometimes conflicting definitions of what women's roles in public life should or could be. The diversity of this early women's press reveals the range of political positions held by individuals and organizations; women's struggles were internally divided, and these media reflected those internal divisions. Published weekly and monthly for many years, the papers provided commentary on a wide variety of topics ranging from women in local government, to the rights of married women, prostitution, labor issues, and the struggles of women in other parts of the world.

These are the residual traces of women's active engagement in the political process, but at the same time they also demonstrate the ways in which women's voices were implicated in broader political struggles. In other words, they represent the attempts to articulate a particular set of concerns in the context of the public political arena. These papers reported on political developments nationally and internationally. On another level, even this brief case study of April 1912 offers evidence of how these publications were vehicles for the intersection of other social and political movements, ranging from the labor movement to Irish nationalism. Although the process of recovering these documents for media history has stressed their status as organs within a specific movement, we must recognize the risk of such an exclusive focus. As Patricia Gibbs and James Hamilton have noted, there are advantages to using an umbrella term like "alternative media" to describe what have otherwise been identified as specific efforts such as the "labor press" or the "feminist press," arguing "it is extremely useful to see them together because such a move emphasizes their collective resistance to increasingly monolithic commercialized media systems and products."<sup>48</sup> Defining

alternative media solely in terms of targeting specific publics, interests, and constituencies—in their emergent capacity—has served to contain and marginalize their significance. Whether or not a broader conceptual strategy of the kind posited by Gibbs and Hamilton would militate against the reductive, homogenizing, and even dismissive accounts of these media is not clear. Attention to the “temporal lags” certainly reminds and forces us to consider the inextricable links between residual and emergent forms at particular points in time, revealing the ways in which the former give rise to, or act as catalysts, for the latter, in their challenges to the dominant—whether consciously or not. One might argue that postwar feminism saw itself in revolutionary terms because the neglected history of earlier movements obscured the sense of what it was “continuous” with. In the process of forging new identities and discourses, it was, however, also instrumental in the recovery of this history as feminists went in search of their precursors, just as Victorian and Edwardian activists had done before them. In similar ways, historians of alternative media are contributing to a growing body of theoretical and empirical studies of media that have remained obscure until now and, in the process, they are “expanding the discursive space” of media history research and offering new insights into the continuities of media forms.

## Notes

1. The generic terms “press” and “public press” were used widely in the period by a variety of publications to refer to the mainstream press (mainly the daily newspapers).
2. James Curran, “Media and the Making of British Society, c. 1700–2000,” *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002): 135.
3. Neils Brügger and Søren Kolstrup, eds., *Media History: Theories, Methods, Analysis* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 7.
4. Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 2.
5. John Downing, with Tamara Villarreal Ford, Genève Gil, and Laura Stein, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001), 6.
6. Chris Atton, *Alternative Media* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 2.
7. Hans Fredrik Dahl, “The Pursuit of Media History,” *Media, Culture & Society* 16, no. 4 (1994): 551, 553.
8. Tom O'Malley, “Media History and Media Studies: Aspects of the Development of the Study of Media History in the UK 1945–2000,” *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002): 155–73.
9. Curran, “Media and the Making of British Society,” 135–54. See also the longer version of the same paper in James Curran, *Media and Power* (London: Routledge, 2002).
10. Curran, *Media and Power*, 3.
11. Ibid., 8. For a more detailed critique of Curran's account of feminist interpretations in media history research, see Maria DiCenzo, “Feminist Media and History: A Response to James Curran,” *Media History* 10, no. 1 (2004): 43–49.
12. We use the terms “suffrage,” “feminist,” and “women's movement” in deliberate ways to distinguish between specific campaigns and more general attitudes and activities related to the advocacy of women's rights in the period. In the limited space available, note that we use “feminism and/or feminist” to refer broadly to the conscious attempts to change and improve the social, economic, and political conditions and status of women vis-à-vis men. We use “the women's movement” to encompass “feminism” but also to point to the wider scope of women's participation in the public sphere, including women who lobbied for social change but did not regard themselves as breaching the boundaries of conventional gender roles, as well as those who lobbied to preserve the status quo for women (e.g., antifeminists and antisuffragists). The suffrage movement constitutes a particular campaign, geared toward gaining enfranchisement for women. Although we try to

maintain consistent usage, all three terms (in addition to “the Woman Question”) were employed in overlapping and conflicting ways in the period in question.

13. For a more detailed account of this problem, see Maria DiCenzo, “Militant Distribution: Votes for Women and the public sphere,” *Media History* 6, no. 2 (2000): 116.

14. There is perhaps no better example of how influential narratives shape and distort our understanding of decades and centuries than the disproportionate emphasis on modernism over all other forms of writing in early twentieth-century literary studies. See Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) for a discussion of these issues in relation to women's fiction of the period.

15. Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), 174.

16. Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?* 174.

17. David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals 1855–1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987). This reference guide remains an indispensable source for identifying and locating women's periodicals.

18. The titles are too numerous to list here, but these and many others can be found in the Harvester Microform collection entitled *Social and Political Status of Women: Radical and Reforming Periodicals for and by Women*.

19. See also Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918–1928* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1997), and Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914–1928* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989).

20. For a more detailed discussion, see Dale Spender, *Time and Tide Wait for No Man* (London: Pandora Press, 1984).

21. It is important to stress that the campaign for the enfranchisement of women had broader goals and implications than simply securing a parliamentary vote. It was for many suffragists at the time a means to an end, rather than an end itself; citizenship rights were a first step in securing an official voice in matters relating to their lives generally. As the first editorial in *Common Cause* made clear, “Women's homes, their houses and children, their food and drink and work and sickness, the attendance upon them in labour, every minute matter of their daily life, from the registering of their birth, to their final old-age pension and death certificate, is bound round, hedged in, prescribed by law, and the laws are not always what the women approve—they are by no means what they would be if the women's voices were heard” (*Common Cause*, April 15, 1909).

22. Atton, *Alternative Media*, 10, 12.

23. Downing, *Radical Media*, xi.

24. See also John Downing, “The Alternative Public Realm: The Organization of the 1980s Antinuclear Press in West Germany and Britain,” *Media, Culture & Society* 10, 163–81 no. 2 (1988): The terms he uses to describe “the alternative scene,” which encompassed the antinuclear press in Germany in the 1980s, could be applied directly to the suffrage movement: “It was a zone of multiple disagreements, not a little self-delusion and potential careerism, but also of alertness to a variety of issues not permitted on to the plateau . . . of the official public realm . . . also a zone of interaction for a considerable variety of purposes. Its foibles often satirized . . . In the 1980s, however, it was a way of life, partial for most, total for some” (171). For discussions by feminist critics, see Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 109–42.

25. Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 123.

26. *Common Cause*, April 14, 1910.

27. Atton, *Alternative Media*, 37.

28. See Mary P. Ryan, “Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, and Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

29. Martha Solomon, *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840–1910* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

30. Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?* 118.

31. For a more detailed discussion of the internal and external orientations of these papers in relation to the feminist public sphere as formulated by Nancy Fraser and Rita Felski, see DiCenzo, “Militant Distribution,” 117–18.

32. Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 1.

33. Many of these groups published their own papers, such as *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, *Catholic Suffragist*, *Free Church Suffrage Times*, *The Altruist*, and *Jus Suffragii*. Some of these continued after the franchise bill of 1918 under new names. Other titles reflect the divisions and splinter groups within the movement. For instance, the founders of the Women's Freedom League defected from the Women's Social and Political Union to form a separate militant, but democratically run, league, with their own paper, *The Vote*. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst founded *The Suffragette* after their split from the Pethick Lawrences, who continued to edit *Votes for Women*, and eventually Sylvia Pankhurst, too, was ousted and founded *Woman's Dreadnought*.

34. Its notoriety stemmed from its explicit discussion of sexual mores and for advocating free love. Ironically, given its short run, this periodical is perhaps one of the best known of the period. It reappeared as *The New Freewoman* and then became the well-known modernist journal *The Egoist*, edited by Ezra Pound.

35. Ragnild Nessheim, *Press, Politics and Votes for Women, 1910-1918* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 17.

36. The process is even more interesting when we take into account that people subscribed to and read more than one paper at a time, which is clear from personal papers, diaries, scrapbooks, and membership lists. Space is too limited to deal with the evidence of the close monitoring of daily and specialist papers, but the papers routinely reproduce lengthy passages from a wide range of daily newspapers and other publications. Even the editors of the *Anti-Suffrage Review* clearly read all the suffrage organs and cite them regularly.

37. *The Englishwoman*, May 1912.

38. *The Freewoman*, April 4, 1912.

39. *The Vote*, April 6, 1912.

40. *The Freewoman*, April 4, 1912.

41. *The Common Cause*, April 4, 1912.

42. *The Vote*, April 6, 1912.

43. *The Common Cause*, April 4, 1912.

44. *The Freewoman*, April 11, 1912.

45. *The Vote*, April 6, 1912.

46. *Votes for Women*, April 5, 1912.

47. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124.

48. Patricia L. Gibbs and James Hamilton, "Alternative Media in Media History," *Media History* 7, no. 2 (2001): 117.

## 14 The New Techno-Communitarianism and the Residual Logic of Mediation

James Hay

*Enduring Freedom in Iraq: Acting upon and Governing (through) "Communities of Practice"*

As we gain experience developing business-based communities, it will become easier to apply such methods *outside the firm and even beyond networks of firms*. . . . Firms that understand how to translate the power of communities into successful knowledge organizations will be the architects of tomorrow—not only because they will be more successful in the market-place, but also because they will serve as a learning laboratory for exploring how to *design the world as a learning system* (emphasis added).

—Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and

William M. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*

Since the early 1990s there has been increased recognition of and support for the informal networks of colleagues that operate within the bounds of our corporate and government structures. It is within these voluntary groups that novices are mentored, . . . experts are identified, knowledge is shared, and answers are rapidly provided to an ever-widening array of inquiries. . . . Along with the recognition of the value of such groups, has come the provision of tools and support structures [e.g., databases and information systems] to facilitate the launching and sustaining of [these informal] communities. *Outside of the formal bureaucracies, but aligned with their strategies, communities are increasingly recognized as*