

**“The Right to Self-Expression”:
Working Class Advocacy and Modern Self-Fashioning**

Candyce Lynn Hill

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For my grandparents, Don and Linda Hill

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Introduction

Decades after her emigration from Russia at the age of sixteen, Emma Goldman reflected on her first days in America in her autobiography *Living My Life*. Here she described how, while standing on the ship's deck and staring at the Statue of Liberty with her sister, she was overcome by the feeling that they, too, "would find a place in the generous heart of America."¹ As a young Eastern European Jewish woman who left the country of her birth in the mid-1880's, neither the immigrant girl who became known to the world as a radical anarchist and free lover, nor the sense of hope she brought with her to the New World were particularly unique to the many migrants—Italians, Slavs, Greeks, Russians, and others from southern and eastern Europe—who settled in the United States in this period of American history. During the years between 1880 and the beginning of World War I, these latter groups were joined by massive waves of immigrant Jews, who left violence, poverty, and systematic anti-Semitism to make new lives in the United States. As many as two million departed homelands in Russia, Poland, Romania, and surrounding regions.²

Five years after Goldman settled in Rochester, New York, eleven-year-old Rose Pastor, along with her mother and baby brother, joined her stepfather, Israel, in Cleveland, Ohio. Israel Pastor had departed London several months before to explore possibilities in what many Jews called the "goldene medina," the Golden Land, and found work and a new home for his family in Cleveland. Rose later recalled how elated she felt at these new beginnings, and how much optimism surrounded the family's arrival in the new country. She had left a childhood full of want behind, first in the Russian Pale and then in the slums of London. The first thing Rose

¹ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Company, 1934): 11.

² Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990): 2.

recalled dreaming about was “grass and trees to enjoy--and bread--enough bread to eat.”³ With hearts gladdened by high expectations, the life-changing journeys made by these two women, not only altered their own lives, but enabled them to participate in social movements that transformed history in the United States.

Emma and Rose’s generation of Jews departed Europe for a variety of reasons; perhaps the most fundamental were the changing economic and social realities that plagued Eastern European Jewish life. During the 1880’s and 1890’s, the Russian empire adopted a succession of laws that restricted Jews from living in both the rural areas of the Pale of Settlement, as well as in the major urban centers of the Russian “interior.”⁴ Jews faced severe overcrowding, stiff economic competition, and widespread unemployment in many urbanized areas of the Pale. Throughout the empire, many who had made their living as independent artisans were now forced to seek work in factories; yet such jobs were limited. They worked primarily in factories owned by other Jews, yet even many of these religious entrepreneurs preferred to hire gentiles. Fears of Jewish “radicalism and labor unrest,” or, ironically, its opposite, a belief that Jews were too attached to traditional ideas of religious observance and work, led many Jewish entrepreneurs to take advantage of the ready availability of peasant workers coming to the cities in droves after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, and creating a situation that favored the hiring of non-Jewish labor.⁵ The constant threat of violence both from government organized pogroms and arbitrary acts of anti-Semitism compounded Jews’ economic woes in this region.⁶ Many left Europe behind as the violence and the uncertainties of the economy escalated.

³ Rose Pastor Stokes, *“I Belong to the Working Class”*: *The Unfinished Autobiography of Rose Pastor Stokes*. Eds., Herbert Shapiro and David L. Sterling, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia, 1992): 34.

⁴ Glenn, 31.

⁵ Ibid, 32.

⁶ Ibid, 32-33.

These changes in the social and economic environment altered Jewish communities as well in these years. The final decades of the 19th and first years of the 20th century witnessed mass participation of Eastern European Jewish youths in two very significant organizations, the Bund and Zionism. Both movements had ties to the Jewish Enlightenment known as the Haskalah, which began in the 18th century and lasted well into the middle of the 19th. The Haskalah sought to redress the difficult circumstances in which many Jews lived, especially in the Pale, through education, culture, secularization, and modernization. Both Zionists and Bundists encouraged Jews to “defend their political, social, and ethno-religious rights.”⁷ The former believed that only mass immigration to Palestine would solve the “Jewish Question” in Europe, while the Bund sought Jewish emancipation through a socialist revolution in Russia.⁸ These movements encouraged several generations of young Jews to reconsider older notions of religious orthodoxy, class-consciousness, and labor, the very same cohorts who participated in the mass immigration to America.⁹

While specific economic and social conditions formed the backdrop for Jewish immigration to the United States, not only Jews came to America. Many other groups emigrated from Europe during this period as well. A sizeable portion of these assumed that they would eventually return to their countries of origin with more money in their pockets, but the Jewish pattern stood out as unique. Jews came to stay.¹⁰ Familial migration practices were also distinctive, especially when deciding which members of the family would make the journey and when. Most groups sent husbands and fathers ahead of the rest of the family. Though Jewish emigration initially began with men, single sons and daughters also came before other relatives.

⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 35-42.

¹⁰ Ibid, 64.

Once a significant group of relatives and countrymen was in place, they increasingly sent daughters ahead of the family.¹¹ Both the understanding that America would become their new home and this differing pattern of immigration powerfully influenced Jewish experiences and integration into American society.

The permanency of the move meant that Jews had a strong incentive to acclimate themselves to the norms of their new country as quickly as possible. American society direly needed immigrant labor, but there was also much suspicion of cultural differences. To mitigate these anxieties, strong efforts were made by reformers to Americanize newcomers during this period of mass migration. Reformers and social workers inundated arriving groups with information on the path to becoming an American and how their lives in the United States would be different. They disseminated such information in a number of inventive ways. Pamphlets taught English at the same time that they informed readers of simple American customs. Settlement houses offered classes in language, cooking, citizenship, and job skills along with a range of other social activities for adults, teenagers, and children. Philanthropists funded a variety of programs that helped young people adapt and find jobs. All immigrant groups were encouraged to adopt white middle class family values, what historians have called the “domestic family,” with its distinctive gendered division of labor: the father as the breadwinner, children in school, and wives and mothers out of the paid workforce, performing caring labor at home.

In Eastern Europe many Jewish families involved in commerce or home production had followed a pattern that gave women an important role in maintaining and contributing to the household economy, allowing many husbands and sons to spend time in the synagogue studying sacred texts.¹² In America, women were told that it was the husband’s responsibility to provide

¹¹ Ibid, 48.

¹² Ibid, 77.

for the family. The American breadwinner family, with its separation of domestic and wage labor, challenged older notions of Jewish familial organization. As Jews started to adapt to the male breadwinner pattern the economic contributions their wives made became more hidden; social workers urged Jewish wives to follow “modern, not traditional, understandings about women’s proper roles,” including cooking American food and adapting to American ways.¹³ At the same time, the family’s economic survival led Jews to place more responsibility on daughters’ wage earning potential.¹⁴ Unlike Italians, Jewish tradition implemented fewer social restrictions on unmarried women; thus daughters became ideal candidates for contributing to the family’s economy.¹⁵ This adaptation of the breadwinner ethic was one of the many ways that immigrant Jews acculturated.

Jewish families’ willingness to allow daughters to emigrate from Eastern Europe on their own, produced a set of circumstances that enabled young women to explore and enact new understandings of American womanhood. They came to the U.S. during a time of Progressive reform, labor and political unrest, union organization and strikes. It was not long before they encountered different political ideas, including socialism, anarchism and a range of other critiques of current economic and social conditions. Capitalist industrialization raised questions about the relationship between labor and capital, the role of the government in supporting its working class citizens, and how to institute reformist social policies on behalf of the collective good. Indeed, for some, these experiences continued a process of awareness that began in Europe, especially when members of their families were involved in organizations such as the Bund. For others, America itself offered an opportunity to explore the new world of working class politics and public engagement. I will argue that this encounter with modern political

¹³ Ibid, 77.

¹⁴ Ibid, 79.

¹⁵ Ibid, 82.

developments would enable my subjects to encounter and participate in an activism that offered a vision of civic community in the United States which combined their experience as oppressed Jews with an understanding of the extraordinary democratic potential of their adopted country.

The connection that unmarried Jewish women workers established with the American industrial workforce, in what was already becoming the richest and most powerful democratic country in the world, allowed Jewish immigrant women to move more freely in public and establish relationships with a wide range of individuals and groups. As they engaged with new ideas and the harsh reality of factory working conditions, some Jewish women joined “socialist reading circles, clubs, and trade unions” where they met and formed friendships. These peer groups encouraged not only solidarity with other young women, but also the opportunity to experience the “very modern innovation,” of friendships with young men.¹⁶ Especially for those who made the journey on their own, work in factories brought them together with other young women and men who were themselves being transformed into individuals with a more modern, autonomous sense of self, one that gained strength from the opportunities for public participation and action created by social and economic circumstances.

Thus, despite the brutality of their working conditions, both Emma Goldman and Rose Pastor encountered a range of opportunities that enabled self-fashioning. Of course, their stories are very much embedded in the overarching narrative of Jewish immigration during this period. However, Emma and Rose’s lives stand out because of the paths they chose to follow: each pursuing a public persona through political activity, published work, and alliances with social movements for which they served as spokeswomen for a time. Emma and Rose would eventually meet one another and collaborate on some of the women’s causes they both supported, issues on

¹⁶ Ibid, 82.

behalf of women and workers that attempted to refashion the United States in a way that better fit their youthful idealistic vision of the “the Golden Land” of their dreams.

Goldman arrived in America with her sister Helena in 1885. Initially they lived in Rochester, New York, with an older sister, Lena, and her husband, who had immigrated some years before. Emma quickly discovered a more dreary reality in her new country than she had imagined. Soon after her arrival she began working at a factory, sewing for ten and a half hours a day for a weekly paycheck of two dollars and fifty cents.¹⁷ She already had work experience in Russia, but Emma found the American factory system particularly oppressive. Four years later, at the age of twenty, she moved to New York City. There she developed friendships and joined a community of political radicals, many of them anarchists. In 1887, the Haymarket Riots in Chicago radicalized her, especially when the police blamed the anarchists. Furious when several of her political confreres were executed, Emma aligned herself more closely with anarchist beliefs, giving public speeches in support of the group’s agenda.¹⁸ Her political addresses denounced the miserable working and living conditions generated by factory life.

Rose Pastor was only eleven when she arrived in the U.S. with her family in 1890.¹⁹ Born in the Russian Pale, she moved with her mother to live with relatives in England when her father abandoned them. Ten years later, her mother remarried, and her stepfather Israel Pastor brought his family, including a new baby brother, to Cleveland. Rose began working in a cigar factory shortly after her arrival. The family grew, but did not prosper. Though Rose’s stepfather did his best to support the family as a junk dealer, his business failed and he eventually abandoned his wife and children. Rose remained the principle earner, but her education in London’s East End primary schools engendered a lifelong passion for reading and learning. In 1901 she wrote a

¹⁷ Goldman, 14.

¹⁸ Ibid, 6-9.

¹⁹ Stokes, xi.

letter to the English page editor of the Yiddish newspaper, the *Jewish Daily News*. Her correspondence was so well received that the editor gave her a small column. But Rose found it impossible to keep up with both her writing and factory work, and eventually her editor offered her a job in New York. In 1903, she left Cleveland to work at the paper, at a salary of fifteen dollars a week.²⁰ It was during an interview assignment that she met millionaire philanthropist J. Graham Phelps Stokes; they fell in love and married in 1905. The union of a poor Jewish immigrant girl and a well known Progressive New York philanthropist, who lived at University Settlement on the Lower East Side, just across the way from the *Jewish Daily News* office, made countless headlines. Rose had already come into contact with socialist ideas, and Graham Phelps Stokes shared her views. After the wedding, both she and Graham joined the Socialist Party and traveled around the country campaigning for Socialism. Rose focused her efforts on addressing the injustices industrial capitalism had forced the working class to endure.

This thesis will examine Emma Goldman and Rose Pastor Stokes' experiences as Jewish immigrant women in America. Chapter one will concentrate on their encounters with and responses to Americanization programs as single young Jewish women. Their interactions with settlement houses and female reformers, in particular, gave them plenty to criticize in terms of social workers' aspirations for their immigrant clients. As each acclimated herself to their new country, settlement house workers made it very clear to them what they believed their goals and aspirations should be in the process of becoming American. Both felt hopeful about the opportunities they thought were available to them. Instead, they faced intolerable working conditions and poverty stricken living situations. In addition, they and their fellow immigrants were instructed to conform to a set of values that urged them to aspire to a lifestyle only possible

²⁰ Arthur Zipser and Pearl Zipser, *Fire and Grace: The Life of Rose Pastor Stokes*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1989): 23.

for Americans in the white middle-class. Though both experienced the disconnect between what Americanizers sought to accomplish and the reality of immigrant working lives, each challenged the legitimacy of those efforts in her own way.

Chapter two will focus on a particularly controversial reform campaign that was especially important to working class women: birth control. Emma and Rose's experiences with working class families enabled them to understand viscerally how important family limitation was to the physical and mental health of working class women, as well as to the aspirations of working class families to achieve social mobility. They witnessed firsthand extreme poverty and overcrowding in immigrant communities: they overheard working class women's pleas for access to information about methods to limit their fertility. As women themselves, they deeply understood that such a reform would give immigrant mothers control over their bodies. Each used her expertise in advocacy to push for this crucial reform, supporting Margret Sanger in her efforts, and folding birth control into their campaigns for anarchism and socialism.

In trying to understand the lives Emma Goldman and Rose Pastor fashioned for themselves in the United States, I will suggest that in a sense each represents a particular encounter with modernity. Since Karl Marx analyzed the history and fundamental operations of capitalism in the mid-19th century, economists, sociologists, political scientists, philosophers and historians have attempted to deepen our grasp of the sweeping effects of the system on political and social development as well as on the more private reaches of human personality. Over time, capitalist industrialization transformed traditional farming economies, characterized by agricultural and artisanal production dotted with villages, small towns and a handful of cities, into a speeded up world of transportation and technological revolution, factories, mass production, and the transatlantic movement of goods. The rapid growth of cities displaced

laborers from rural geographies; they joined the new industrial working classes and stimulated transnational migrations as the need for cheap labor rose. By the time Rose Pastor and Emma Goldman settled in the United States, mature capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, changes in consumption, and the voracious need for industrial labor was at its height. Depending on their country of origin, various immigrant groups coped with the new aspects of modern life in different ways.²¹ Since the early 20th century, scholars have struggled to understand and define these changes, which have been too often lumped together and folded into the term “modernity.”

In this thesis, I suggest that both Rose and Emma were individuals whose lives were shaped and in many ways enabled by various modernizing aspects in 20th-century life. They each experienced profound disruptions, which detached them from the stabilities of traditional families. Their lives were framed by migration, responsibility for others, industrial labor and its radical politics, and an encounter with city life from an early age. In his analysis of the innovations of urban life, sociologist Louis Wirth, as early as 1938, characterized urbanism as a distinct feature of modernity which had specific effects on individuals and social relations in general. The ambiguities of city life and the exigencies of factory labor disrupted the face to face and familial relationships of the traditional small community. These changes proved difficult for many to navigate. But for young people and perhaps especially young working class women, I will argue that these disruptions also offered opportunities for self-fashioning which were wholly new. Less dependent on traditional social and economic communities, and forced by necessity into work situations that required self-discipline and endurance, some young men and women were also able to create new identities on the shop floor, and seek voluntary involvement in various groups, away from the prying eyes of parents who depended, at least in part, on their

²¹John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

wages.²² Emma and Rose embarked on such journeys of self-discovery and politicization: eventually their experiences led them to participate in the politics of protest and active engagement in reform efforts. For me, what characterized these women's modernity was their ability to think for themselves and act on behalf of their beliefs in the urbanized public sphere. Each migrated to an urban center where, when obliged to go "out to work," she immediately encountered the injustice and class oppression of industrial capitalism. Both Rose and Emma rebelled; through witnessing, anger, reading, study and critique, both gradually and painfully, created an autonomous self.

My title, "The Right to Self-Expression," then, is about a time in history when working class advocacy came hand in hand with the creation of the modern self.²³ For these two women, modernity meant a heightened class consciousness, equality with men, and participating in a deliberate campaign to tame and humanize industrial capitalism by extending the fruits of democracy to the working class. In doing so, Rose and Emma helped construct a more modern, perhaps even a more just, world.

²² Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life" *The American Journal of Sociology* 44:1 (July, 1938): 12, 23.

²³ Goldman, 53. In discussing anarchism in her autobiography, Emma Goldman declared that she wanted "freedom, the right to self-expression."

Chapter I

Making Immigrants Modern: Americanization and New Citizens

Immediately upon arrival, whether they were conscious of it or not, immigrants began the process of adaptation. Jewish immigrants, most of whom planned to make America their permanent home, displayed a particularly strong desire to acculturate. Despite the teeming, overcrowded neighborhoods and low-paid factory jobs, their expectations of social mobility generated a desire to adapt as quickly as possible. The desperate need for cheap labor allowed them to take advantage of an exploding economy, despite its oppressive conditions. Jobs were plentiful and even public education, at least for some of their children, was a real possibility.

From the perspective of progressive American reformers, however, the influx of uneducated working class peoples, bringing with them Old World habits and experiences of oppression and autocracy, posed a serious threat to U.S. democracy. Social workers and reformers understood the need to manage immigrants' cultural adjustment to American ways, and they founded settlement houses, language classes, and a range of inventive programs to teach what they assumed to be "backward" peoples how to become model citizens. They hoped to create workers who were willing to participate enthusiastically in the industrial labor force, spoke English, and practiced white middle-class American familial norms. In addition, classes in civics taught the workings of democracy to potential voters.

Both Rose Pastor and Emma Goldman came into close contact with these efforts. Interestingly, each of them brought a politics and their own utopian visions to these encounters. They were aware of the revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe and their experiences in the United States with other radical and working class immigrants taught them enough to be skeptical of the content of Americanization programs, as well as the methods and intentions of some Americanizers. Although they understood that, on an individual level, many social

workers were sincerely committed to easing working class lives, they also discerned the disrespect many of these middle class volunteers and professionals harbored toward various aspects of immigrants' lived experience. They worried that such programs taught unquestioned acceptance absent a political critique of the depredations and dislocations of industrial capitalism. Their promises for the future stood in stark contrast to the blighted lives, poor health, and unjust exploitation of workers, which both women witnessed all around them. Each in her own way pushed back against what she believed were reformers' empty ideals of modern citizenship, focusing instead on the necessity of building modern class consciousness amongst workers.

Immigrants' experience with Americanization took place over time and within different contexts. However, certain locations and particular activities characterized these reform efforts. Social settlements were among the most important of several locations where immigrants experienced this socialization. Settlements were often located in areas of extreme poverty. Progressive reformers who staffed these institutions came to live and work within them, creating a community of like-minded individuals sincerely committed to addressing the poverty and want, both material and spiritual, which pervaded these immigrant neighborhoods. Settlements offered classes and other social services and opportunities to the poor. They taught the skills that new arrivals would need to succeed in America. For example, classes in cooking, scientific childcare, as well as art and music were made available to adults, teenagers, and school age children. Sports teams were organized to keep teenage boys off the streets. In return, immigrants were expected to learn how to become Americans. During this period, the profession of social work expanded exponentially, and much of its content and knowledge base developed as Americanization efforts became more and more sophisticated. Social workers, along with visiting nurses, called on poor

immigrant families in their deteriorating tenement apartments, where they struggled daily with inexplicable squalor, disease, and crowded living conditions. The helping professions learned quickly that Americanization efforts would not work unless they also addressed the economic exploitation that resulted from the industrial system itself. Settlement houses and social workers authorized and invented the acculturation process one step at a time, however, and not all of them were active critics of the economic system broadly conceived. Indeed, many believed that easing their clients' social and cultural adjustment was enough.

Immigrants were encouraged to participate willingly in the "time-disciplined" modern industrial workforce. During this period, historian Susan Glenn notes, "social scientists and reformers insisted that industrial wage work" would give immigrants "an important vehicle for learning the 'ways and spirit' of their adopted country."²⁴ As factories proliferated, the need for cheap industrial labor rose exponentially. For those who had done agricultural or artisanal work in their home countries, an adjustment to the speed, discipline, lack of independence, and repetitive tasks of factory work was not always easy. Past labor styles, including a worker's control over his own time, or an artisan's sense of satisfaction when he crafted a product from start to finish, disappeared from the modernizing, speeded up work experience of industrialization. Industrial labor brought immigrants face to face with a crucial aspect of modern life—the loss of a worker's pride in his labor—while also depriving him (or her) of the sociality of the small shop, the rest periods and celebrations that occurred during harvest time when entire villages participated, or decent living conditions over which his wife and daughters had some control.

In addition to speedups, the dangers of machinery, and the loss of worker control over working conditions, immigrants were made to understand that learning English was considered

²⁴ Glenn, 137.

an essential requirement of citizenship in their new country. As historian Allen Davis explained in his fine work on progressive reform, “settlements often tried to combine the teaching of English with the teaching of citizenship.”²⁵ Reformers used specific words such as ‘state’ and ‘citizen’ in their language classes, teaching not only language skills, but new conceptions of civic responsibility and the nation state.

By putting immigrants into contact with the cultural norms of white middle class Americans, Americanizers sought to inculcate what they believed were essential political values, absolutely necessary if their efforts to transform them into modern citizens were to succeed. For example, they taught the breadwinner ethic of family life, both by example as well as in their support of higher wages for working class men. They believed that keeping mothers and children out of the workforce would encourage immigrant families to embrace the ideology of domesticity. Once that notion of family was accepted as the new norm, other cultural expectations would follow: proper dress, more healthful food, and American conventions regarding interacting and communicating with others. Of course at first, these norms were almost impossible for poor immigrants to achieve: they had few resources and required most members of the family, even children, to work. Still, enough immigrants eagerly responded to Americanizers efforts in the hope of appearing more American and more modern, a fact that encouraged reformers in the belief that old world habits could easily be left behind.

A closer look at the specific groups who supported Americanization efforts and a clearer understanding of their motivations will give us a better appreciation of the process. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the United States witnessed the rise of Progressivism, a reform movement that sought to create a partnership between the state and civil society on behalf

²⁵ Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1967): 50.

of protecting American citizens of all classes from the effects of industrial capitalism. They supported industrial regulation, food and drug laws, protective labor legislation, advocated using scientific investigation to encourage social reforms, and believed that the common good could be furthered by faith in human progress. Poverty, they argued, was created by unregulated industry that depressed workers' economic position; it was not the personal failures of individuals or even foreign cultures that created blight, rather the culprit was an exploitative economic system.

Progressive reformers believed they could address these problems through social engineering. They witnessed the extreme poverty endured in the immigrant ghettos and saw in those neighborhoods the opportunity to work with a population desperately in need of help. For these reformers, Americanization efforts would serve as an opportunity to combat social problems and encourage commitment to the common good through the application of new knowledge. Many progressive reformers were motivated in their work by a desire to change a situation they viewed as unjust. Others also feared that workers might eventually revolt against intolerable living and working conditions. Some immigrants even brought with them traditions of anarchism, socialism and unionism from Europe. While Progressive reformers worked in a number of social sectors, including social work, government, labor, education, the law, and health, their involvement with immigrants and with institutions such as social settlements gave them an opportunity to take an active part in Americanization efforts.

Progressive reformers came primarily from wealthier and middle class backgrounds.

Women, who were already coming into the public sphere in the late nineteenth century, played a key role in the movement, and often lived in the communities that they targeted for help. Jane Addams' Hull House, for example, became a model for the settlement house movement, a center of community activity and reform, as well as a teaching space for a range of graduate students

studying the social sciences at the University of Chicago. John Dewey and other prominent social science faculty often visited or shared a meal in the Hull House dining room. Through their role as social workers who made visits to poorer families' homes, wealthy supporters who participated in organizing charity events, or as residents in settlement houses, an interesting and diverse group of modern women activists came into contact with immigrants and helped teach appropriate habits and lifestyles. As Progressives, their work fashioned the tools of Americanization and dictated many of the expectations conveyed to immigrants about what being a citizen actually entailed.

While female reformers may have felt encouraged to participate in these efforts for the same reasons as their male counterparts, they had additional incentives. From the late 19th century until the end of the 1920's, middle class women began to assert their rights to be in public, especially through their work as reformers. They began to explore the city in new ways, partly as consumers and purchasing agents for their families, drawn to newly erected department stores and respectable entertainment spaces increasingly geared to the middle class, and as teenagers attending public and private high schools. Reform activity also authorized the exploration of city space, and allowed women to move beyond shopping to learning about and perhaps even visiting the slums. Judith Walkowitz's discussion of middle class women's public life in London in this period describes how "as philanthropists...[they] increasingly traveled into different regions of the city in search of adventure and self-discovery."²⁶ Working in these neighborhoods gave reforming women an *entre* into politics and the public sphere; they authorized themselves to become experts on behalf of the poor, and eventually gained a measure of influence. In addition, Walkowitz argues, "these women enjoyed the freedom of the streets,

²⁶ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): 52.

not because they were in fact invisible, but because they wielded considerable authority.”²⁷ Thus, female reformers may have been inspired by altruistic motives to a degree, but in their pursuit of social justice they also gained the more personal benefits of free movement and the prestige that comes from participation in an area of growing importance in politics and public life. It is no accident that such developments occurred at the same time that women demanded full citizenship through suffrage.

Another significant group of people, German-American Jews, engaged in Americanization efforts that were geared towards Jewish immigrants in particular. Having escaped the revolutions of the 1840’s in Europe, most of them arrived in the United States many decades before their Eastern European co-religionists. By the turn of the century, this group had become better off economically and acculturated into American society.²⁸ While German Jews in America may have been ambivalent about their poor, uncouth Eastern European counterparts, they did not abandon them. Instead, wealthier German Jews took on a sense of “duty to educate, modernize, and ‘uplift’ the newcomers from Eastern Europe.”²⁹ That these efforts were aimed primarily at other Jews in particular is perhaps an indication of the complex motivations behind their involvement. In helping these new arrivals to transition into life as Americans, German Jews, themselves still victims of social anti-Semitism, feared that, if the transition of their co-religionists to respectable American citizenship failed, their own status as assimilated Americans would be threatened.

Eastern European Jews participated actively in aspects of Americanization. Indeed, one of the most visible behaviors allowing us to see how eager young Jewish women were to transform themselves into Americans is how they chose to dress. In her book on this generation

²⁷ Ibid, 57.

²⁸ Glenn, 57.

²⁹ Ibid.

of Jewish immigrants Susan Glenn argues that “clothing remained a powerful cultural symbol.”³⁰ It signaled “to others that one was no longer a ‘greener’ or a new arrival.”³¹ Clothing, Glenn shows, became an important means to communicate one’s developing American identity.³² Rejecting the fashion styles of Eastern Europe, Jewish immigrant women participated eagerly in consumer culture, purchasing items that showcased their acculturation. Middle and upper class reformers may have preferred them to choose less flamboyant styles, but young women’s desire to look more “American” was a form of wearing their hearts literally on their sleeves.

Both fictional and autobiographical works of the period offer vivid accounts of how immigrant women linked their stylistics with Americanization. In Anzia Yeziarska’s novel *Salome of the Tenements*, a fictional narrative based very loosely on Yeziarska’s experience with John Dewey and Rose Pastor’s marriage to Graham Phelps Stokes, Sonya, the protagonist, manages to attract millionaire John Manning partly because of the clothes she wears.³³ Dressing in fashionable, tasteful, but simple attire, she presents herself as a confident, acculturated woman. Clothing makes her stand out, and Manning not only takes notice, but praises her artless elegance. He describes his own efforts to improve poor neighborhoods as teaching the “gospel of the Simple Life.”³⁴ He believes Sonya embodies what he views as the ideal immigrant woman, one whose poverty enables her to see the beauty in a lack of pretention. Manning laments the “gaudy, vulgar styles” so often chosen by other working girls.³⁵ Ironically, Sonya’s outfit and self-presentation is not the result of her lifestyle, but rather the product of enormous effort, artifice, and considerable expense. Yeziarska demonstrates disdain for Manning’s idea of the

³⁰ Ibid, 161.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mary V. Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yeziarska and John Dewey*, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1988). Dearborn’s account provides insight into Anzia Yeziarska and John Dewey’s relationship and Anzia’s understanding of Rose’s marriage.

³⁴ Anzia Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995): 75.

³⁵ Ibid, 75.

beauty of simple poverty; it is evident that the scene in the novel where this conversation is played out comes from the author's realization that the gap between rich and poor is perhaps unbridgeable. The reader is made to feel uncomfortable with Sonya's frenzied efforts to strike the right pose, while Manning's hopeless romanticization of poverty barely disguises Yeziarska's contempt.

In an autobiographical novel written by Elizabeth Stern, a Jewish woman writer and social worker who immigrated to the United States in 1892 at the age of three, the author makes a similar link between clothing and successful acculturation. The novel's protagonist, Leah Morton grows up in a Jewish ghetto, but her aspirations to education are fulfilled when she becomes a social worker. When her husband, also a social worker, becomes too sick to work, she takes a job in a department store to support their family, avoiding social work so as to evade any gossip from their colleagues about her new role as the primary breadwinner.³⁶ She describes how the young women she works with admire "fashionableness" above all. They quickly begin to imitate her clothing style.³⁷ In their estimation, it was Morton's dress that was indicative of her status: she understood the Americanized middle class stylistics which they were so eager to adopt. The young women in Stern's novel and in Yeziarska's fiction understood viscerally that passing oneself off as respectable meant learning how to imitate middle-class reformers: one of the most successful ways of conveying the message that one was a real American.

Eastern European Jewish immigrants Americanized in other ways as well. They often choose specific types of work to appear more "modern," and they responded gradually to social workers' patient teachings on the division of labor within the family. When immigrants began arriving in the late 19th and early 20th century, two different work environments were readily

³⁶ Leah Morton, *I am a Woman-and a Jew*, (New York, NY: J. H. Sears & Company, 1927): 149-150.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 167.

available to them: small scale, home-based shops and large industrial factories. While smaller shops were already a familiar workplace site in Eastern Europe and offered some advantages to new immigrants, known as “greeners,” many young women deliberately spurned the small shop in favor of work in factories. “Factories,” historian Susan Glenn notes, “stood for a modern world” which “they were anxious to enter.”³⁸ They wanted nothing to do with an environment that symbolized the Old Country. Glenn suggests that Jewish women in particular were even more adamant about this than other young female immigrants. Work in a large factory symbolized cultural mobility, Americanization, and the chance to leave the ghetto behind.³⁹ With this preference Americanizers and their charges came together in agreement.

Immigrant Jews’ also demonstrated a willingness to adopt a male breadwinner family economy, a second feature of the adjustment that exemplified their investment in the Americanization process. This separation of home and work was, of course, partly a fiction, because Jewish wives contributed significant amounts to the family economy by taking in boarders and occasionally doing finishing work at home. Since the middle of the 19th century, when work for wages began to define productive work under the emerging capitalist regime, productive *home* labor—which remained unwaged if it was performed to sustain family members—became hidden. The ideology of domesticity that accompanied the separation of home and work also defined the daily food preparation, child care, and home maintenance wives performed as “labors of love,” which had a symbolic and cultural value that stood in contrast to the commodified relationships in capitalism. In short, taking in boarders and performing housework, even laborious housework whose monetary value was hidden, was not viewed as the

³⁸Glenn, 139.

³⁹Ibid, 137.

same as going “out to work.”⁴⁰ The phrase “out to work” itself symbolized an important distinction for Jews in the modernizing world. Men, and if necessary, daughters and sons went “out to work,” allowing Jewish families to conform to American understandings of women’s domestic roles.⁴¹ By adopting these new habits and lifestyles, Eastern European Jewish immigrants took an active role in shaping their response to Americanization.

As a young woman living in Cleveland, Rose Pastor Stokes came into contact with Americanization efforts through social settlements and charity organizations. In her teens she began to participate in activities that were organized by a group called the Girls’ Friendly Club. She was drawn to this group, which offered cultural activities including “sewing classes, dancing classes, [and] choruses,” by a school teacher named Flora Mayer, who had visited the factory where Rose worked.⁴² Rose both loved and admired Miss Mayer because of her “genuine love” for the workers and because “she too work[ed] for a living.”⁴³ But Rose neither admired nor appreciated the wealthy Jewish women of the city who funded the club. She insisted that they and Miss Mayer were from “two different worlds.”⁴⁴ Obligated to tolerate these women’s efforts at refining the young factory girls, Rose quickly became frustrated. She had already developed a fairly simple Marxist analysis. She often noted that “workers, do the work, and create the wealth,” while “We,” [the workers] “give [the wealthy] culture,” by affording them leisure time.⁴⁵ Rose gained a great deal of “culture” from the Friendly Club, but she remained incensed by the obvious class differences and the insensitivities that accompanied them; she constantly criticized the gap between the lives of impoverished workers and the rich.

⁴⁰ Jeanne Boydston, “To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence” *Radical History Review*, 35 (1986):16-7.

⁴¹ Glenn, 77.

⁴² Stokes, 69-70.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 71.

In her autobiography, Rose recalled two events orchestrated by the Friendly Club that showcased her objections to the group's wealthy sponsors. After Miss Mayer had married and departed from Cleveland, a group of these women put together a pageant consisting of little skits and songs performed by the girls.⁴⁶ Rose had agreed to recite a poem, but her contribution rankled the guests. The recitation she chose was the "The Man with the Hoe," whose theme was the story of a French peasant who labored for the wealthy while being "kept in darkness, in ignorance, working like a beast of burden."⁴⁷ Before she departed that evening, the club's patrons confronted her. They tried to convince her that in America there was "no such peasantry" and farmers were "free and rich."⁴⁸ Their scripted beliefs about life in America included the expectation that immigrant working-women such as Rose, would become stable, uncritical, loyal Jews and citizens. Not rocking the boat by criticizing their current status went along with accepting the possibilities of upward mobility in the capitalist system. Factory work would lead to a better life for the next generations. To their dismay, Rose's response challenged their platitudes. "I told them what I know of workers' lives in America.... I had read of farming conditions," she remembered.⁴⁹ Rose needed the relief of expressing herself, she recalled, because the knowledge of suffering "had gathered in [her] to a point of physical pain."⁵⁰ Though the "uptown" women "seemed a bit appalled at [her] outburst," she would not back down.⁵¹ Rose, of course, had firsthand experience of labor in America as an exploited cigar factory worker whose family could barely afford food. Her lived experience enabled her to challenge the

⁴⁶ Ibid, 71-72.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

efforts of the Friendly Club's wealthier benefactors with some authority. No wonder she made them uncomfortable.

The Friendly Club also encouraged Jewish immigrant girls to join a Chorus. Rose loved singing, but the songs they were being taught troubled her. Girls such as she, who spent their lives living and working in bleak poverty stricken settings, were asked to sing about the beauty of nature and the loveliness of scenes that they rarely, if ever, encountered. Rose presumes in her memoir that their lady mentors thought such songs and poems would be "pleasant songs for working girls."⁵² To Rose, this powerful disconnect only made her angrier: the contrasting possibilities for middle-class Jews and the working girls they sponsored continued to frustrate, rather than satisfy her. Years later, recalling her teenage self, she remembered that she was never "content with singing about those things;" her desire to experience them was too powerful.⁵³ Her sponsors believed that nature songs would offer a measure of contentment to factory girls, but Rose found that they only "intensified [her] rebelliousness."⁵⁴ She concluded that such activities were geared toward keeping workers in their place.

When Rose moved to New York City, she had a second encounter with settlement work. Indeed, she took a job at the Educational Alliance in 1903, and led a group of girls in discussions of books, articles, and problems that they might face.⁵⁵ According to her biographers, this settlement was created as "an educational and cultural center" which stressed teaching the new immigrants English.⁵⁶ Its German-American Jewish founders, "embarrassed" by Jewish life "on the Lower East Side," eventually fashioned myriad and sophisticated Americanization programs

⁵² Ibid, 73.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 74.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 91.

⁵⁶ Zipser, 8.

that had many positive results.⁵⁷ Initially, Rose committed to working with these girls for only a summer, but when her time was up they begged her to stay. Given her experience in Cleveland, she resisted at first, believing that she was too busy. But the girls were so eager to have her, she eventually agreed.⁵⁸ After that summer, meetings were moved from the Educational Alliance to University Settlement.

The University Settlement enabled Rose to come into contact with people she may not have otherwise met. It was there that she first met her future husband, wealthy philanthropist and settlement worker J.G. Phelps Stokes. She also met Emma Goldman there.⁵⁹ In her memoir Rose reflected that the institution “was a seething center for the exchange of ideas.”⁶⁰ She came into contact with many “schools of thought” and was much moved by what she termed, “these glowing advocates” who, she confessed, stirred in her the desire she always had “to serve [her] class.”⁶¹ Certainly, her individual experiences at University Settlement expanded her contacts with like-minded intellectuals, but they did not resolve her questioning of settlement house work itself. Rose eventually concluded that these institutions did not benefit the people they served, but instead participated in “subtle corruption of the workers’ minds.”⁶² In short, they were a “stumbling block” to workers’ opportunities to organize themselves as a class.⁶³ At the time other social activists were also taking a more critical look at the outcomes of settlement work; eventually both she and her husband, Graham Phelps Stokes, withdrew their support from settlement houses by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Dearborn, 39; Zipser, 8.

⁵⁸ Stokes 91-92.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 95.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, 135.

⁶³ Ibid, 135-136.

⁶⁴ Zipser, 47.

In his book *Forging Democracy*, historian Geoff Eley explains how “class became the modern name for social divisions.”⁶⁵ Rose, a self-described advocate and member of the working class, understood how modern industrialization sharply separated wage earners into their own group. Rather than accept middle-class attempts to placate workers, she challenged this ideal of the model American citizen. For Rose, modern social divisions had the potential to create class-consciousness amongst workers, one that would encourage them to demand their rights as citizens in a democracy. Rose was all too correct when she claimed that Americanization efforts had not had the desired effect on her.⁶⁶ These middle class efforts to make her modern had in fact only fueled her competing ideals regarding the definition of modern citizenship.

Anzia Yeziarska’s novel, *Salome of the Tenements*, offered a fictional account of the author’s friend, Rose Pastor Stokes. The two met and became friends while both were working on the Lower East Side. Anzia herself was an immigrant from Polish Russia who had also experienced extreme poverty, both in Europe and in America.⁶⁷ As a young adult, she too had attended the Educational Alliance, where she learned skills in English, reading and writing, which enabled her to graduate from the Domestic Sciences Department of Columbia Teachers College in 1904.⁶⁸ After graduating, she taught cooking at the Educational Alliance for a short time. Later, when Yeziarska became a well-known writer, her fiction frequently took on themes that expressed frustration with social settlements’ approach to reform, especially the home visits social workers performed. While Yeziarska’s fiction does not pretend to recount Rose’s views completely, her own critique of settlement work offers us an additional window onto the responses of smart, ambitious young Jewish women to heavy-handed Americanization programs.

⁶⁵ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002): 47.

⁶⁶ Stokes, 73.

⁶⁷ Dearborn, 34-36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 49.

Sonya is the character in *Salome of the Tenements* whose trajectory is closest to the broad outlines of Rose's own life. Through Yeziarska's fictional portrait, the writer's critique of Americanization can be perceived loud and clear. The section of the novel in which Sonya invites John Manning to her apartment and he praises the glory of simple poverty, has already been discussed. Yeziarska uses John's character to expose to her readers the ignorance reformers had of immigrants' true circumstances. Eventually Sonya marries John and begins working with him at a settlement house. While her husband is proud of the settlement's programs, developed by "social experts" who scientifically surveyed "the needs of the neighborhood," she eventually becomes frustrated.⁶⁹ Here Yeziarska is critiquing the Progressive faith in the importance of science and empiricism to reform. The fictional Sonya, much like the real Rose and Yeziarska herself, is not convinced of their value. When she sees poor immigrants being taught to make inexpensive, rather than nutritious or edible food, she concludes that it would be better for them to eat nothing at all than be "thankful for cheapness."⁷⁰ Sonya's irritation echoes both Rose's and Yeziarska's suspicion that settlements were vehicles for teaching immigrants to accept their situation. In the end Sonya, like Rose, eventually divorces her wealthy husband, leaving his riches behind.

Emma Goldman also had encounters with settlement houses as a young immigrant woman, and she too questioned their value. In her autobiography, she recalled her visits to the Nurses Settlement with her friend, Emma Lee. Coming from a lower middle class Russian Jewish family, Goldman did not experience the extreme poverty endured by most immigrant Jews. Although she worked, Emma, unlike Rose, was never the primary earner for her family and she was able to separate from them and travel to New York City as a single woman. She

⁶⁹ Yeziarska, 134.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 135.

shared with more privileged women the desire for the varied experiences and the freedom the city offered, as well as celebrating its role as a venue for social protest on behalf of social amelioration. Nevertheless, her response to settlement house Americanization programs differed little from Rose's. Her friend Emma Lee's descriptions of attempts to teach poor immigrants how to use silverware properly rankled Goldman. Why bother with silverware if one didn't have enough to eat, she asked? In the context of extreme poverty, table manners were irrelevant.⁷¹ Here Goldman, like Rose, felt alienated from the many efforts to teach manners, which pushed privileged cultural norms often irrelevant to the lived experience of immigrants.

Goldman also worried about the effect such practices would have on immigrants, fearing that reformers "were creating snobbery among the very people they were trying to help."⁷² She remembered all too well an incident that occurred while attending the wedding of one of the immigrant women whom she had known from the Nurses Settlement. At the event, the immigrant bride, who had once "been active in a shirtwaist-makers' strike," behaved like a snob, and confided to Emma that the groom was someone "below [her] station."⁷³ This woman's involvement with the settlement and her participation in the inculcation of cultural norms had transformed her from an individual who had stood beside her fellow workers in a crisis, to an aspiring American girl with no sense of class solidarity. Just as Rose worried that the settlements would only teach immigrants how to live more contentedly with their poverty, Emma argued that acculturation to individualistic American values eroded Jewish workers' willingness to bond together on behalf of the common good.

Many Jewish immigrants were bound to encounter Americanization efforts geared to transforming them into model citizens. However, these middle class ideals of citizenship could

⁷¹ Goldman, 160.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

erode their desire for a modern understanding of class-consciousness. In their interactions with these programmatic settlement house efforts, Rose Pastor Stokes and Emma Goldman understood what was lost in the process better than many of the immigrants themselves. Each of these women had a sophisticated analysis of the depredations of industrial capitalism, and each, in her own way, was dedicated to mitigating economic and social injustices in an adopted country. Their challenge to Americanization efforts allowed them to fashion their own ideal American identity, one built on working-class consciousness. Indeed they had no strong objection to their fellow Jews' acculturation. Rather, they feared, rightly as it turned out, that such a transition would also weaken Jews' sense of class and community. Interestingly, Jews retained a strong sense of community, but by the mid-20th century, their success began to erode, quite profoundly, their class solidarity and radical politics.

Chapter II

Class Oppression and the Expansion of Birth Control Advocacy

When Rose Pastor Stokes and Emma Goldman arrived in the United States they took their place not only as members of an immigrant generation, but also as members of a cohort of Americans who were unevenly transitioning into a fully modernizing world. A wide range of dynamic transformations reorganized nation states, their populations, and individual lives during the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century, generating new ideas and practices in the social, economic, cultural and political sphere. The multifaceted nature of modern life meant that many of the shifts experienced by individuals and groups were interrelated: industrial capitalism and the new technologies that led to increasingly sophisticated factory production and huge growth in output, pulled men and unmarried children into a working class increasingly dependent solely on wages. Sharper class distinctions emerged, yet at the same time, the production of cheaper goods, a by-product of this phase of capitalism, gradually created a culture of consumption in all classes. New entertainment spaces geared to workers appeared and encouraged informal interaction between men and women.⁷⁴ In addition, by the end of the nineteenth century and into the next, a fierce campaign against child labor and the passage of compulsory education laws gradually limited the presence of children in the workforce. Women moved out of the home, and into a range of middle class jobs and professions. Many more received a high school education and a small percentage of them attended college. Middle-class occupations, such as social work, office work, teaching, domestic and nutritional science, nursing, journalism, and a range of others attracted single and even a smattering of married women. Secretarial work, began in the first half of the 19th century as a man's job, but by the

⁷⁴ Kathy Peiss, "Charity Girls' and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working-Class Sexuality, 1880-1920" *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, Ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989): 58.

1920's it had been completely feminized, partly because of the invention of the typewriter. As compulsory education and truancy laws kept children in school longer, and some states even passed minimum wage laws for working women, child labor declined, and not only members of the middle class, but workers as well, increasingly found that they could not afford larger families.

Eventually, access to birth control became an important topic among women reformers and advanced sectors of the medical profession. By the late nineteenth century in middle class families, children were gradually being seen as consumers rather than economic producers. This new understanding of childhood accompanied a growing trend towards companionate marriage, which encouraged economically privileged couples to limit family size. Women from many class and ethnic backgrounds sought out different birth control methods. However, the persistence of obscenity laws well into the 20th century meant that black market contraceptives were widely used, but rarely “regulated or inspected.”⁷⁵ Unlike certain parts of Europe, reformers in the United States would have a long and difficult struggle to create an environment where all women had access to safe and reliable contraception.

While middle class families often had some knowledge of birth control, working class and poor families were denied both the information and access to various underground contraceptive devices that might have helped them prevent conception. This class distinction meant that, while middle class families were able to focus more of their resources on “fewer and better children,” the poverty of working class and destitute families obviated not only knowledge, but access. The dissemination of birth control information held out the possibility of mediating this class disparity. Birth control was also supported by a relatively small group of

⁷⁵ Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America*, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2001): 67-68.

Bohemian intellectuals, artists, and writers who were gradually embracing sexual modernism, both in terms of separating sexual relations from childbearing, and viewing sexuality as a significant form of emotional expression between men and women. Many even supported freedom from what were considered “respectable” sexual conventions.⁷⁶ Though Emma Goldman embraced the tenets of sexual freedom, Rose Pastor Stokes never advocated Bohemian sexual mores; however, both women viewed the ability to control pregnancy as a woman’s right. Both witnessed firsthand the dilemma of too many mouths to feed among the working class and each actively participated in the movement by highlighting the class dimensions of unequal access and embracing modern ideals of sexual interaction to include the distribution of practical birth control information to all who needed it.

Though, unlike Emma Goldman, who was very open about her sexuality, we know nothing about Rose’s sexual life. She was clearly in love with Graham when they married, and the couple’s early correspondence is replete with all the conventional flourishes of romantic love. However Rose was very public about her support for birth control. In 1916, she published a play titled *The Woman Who Wouldn’t*, which linked her support for the cause to her critique of industrial capitalism and the inequality of class relations. In an interview she gave that September, Rose confessed that she knew little about dramatic technique when she began to work on the piece and assumed that good drama was simply “sustained suspense.”⁷⁷ The play utilizes suspense to tell the story of a poor unmarried woman named Mary who lives with her family in a mill town in Pennsylvania and becomes pregnant. The baby’s father is Joe, Mary’s fiancé, but the two have never had enough money to marry. When Mary learns that Joe is interested in another girl, she refuses to marry him, though she understands that an illegitimate

⁷⁶ Christine Stansell, *American Modern* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2000): 226.

⁷⁷ “Mrs. Stokes is Willing to go to Prison for Birth-Control Principle.” *The Baltimore News* 22 September 1916.

pregnancy will threaten the loss of her reputation and her job. Unable to find a solution and fearing that she could not provide for a child, she seeks an abortion. The doctor refuses to help her and convinces her that the procedure is dangerous. Eventually, Mary's pregnancy is discovered; her family banishes her from the house and she loses contact with them for years. When Mary returns, her eight year old child by her side, she has become a successful labor organizer and has come to the mill town to speak on behalf of striking workers. She is reunited with Joe, who offers to marry her. This time she refuses him on the grounds that she must remain the "the mistress of [her] own body and soul."⁷⁸ The play's suspense focuses primarily on Mary; with other characters learning that she is pregnant only gradually. In the final act, all her acquaintances and loved ones are forced to come to terms with her hard won independence and success as an activist on behalf of her class.

Throughout the play, Mary's words and those of several of the other characters clarify and dramatize Stokes' own ideas about birth control and why access to it is essential for women. The play also articulates her critique of capitalism. In the first act Jennie, Mary's married sister, tells her that "poor folks like me an' Henry ain't got no right t' bring children into th' world. If it's a sin, *I* say it's less a sin preventin' 'em than bringin' 'em into a life o' bitter poverty."⁷⁹ For Jennie, who might have wanted a child if she had been able to afford feeding and caring for one, the issue of she and her husband making ends meet was constant and crucial. They refuse to raise a child who will only know poverty. Mary too, views the problem as a question of what is best for future generations. After revealing to Jennie that she is pregnant Mary bursts out:

"Ain't I got a *right* t' my baby? Ain't it got a right t' come in to th' world an' be cared fer when it gets here? No, they hound ye t' death till ye're glad t' hide in

⁷⁸ Rose Pastor Stokes, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* (New York: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916): 180.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

hell t' get away from 'em. An' it's race suicide they say?.... It ain't me that wants t' murder my baby- it's them that c'n help me but won't, them that would treat me like I wasn't human no more- like I was a wild beast.... I want my baby- I want t' keep it!"⁸⁰

Mary's wish to keep her baby enhances the dramatic impossibility of her situation. She chooses abortion out of desperation; learning about it only through a rumor that the mill owner's daughter had received one from a physician.⁸¹ When the doctor refuses her she quickly realizes that only privileged women have such access; women like Mary do not have the same choices. In this scene, Rose, always ready to emphasize the disparities inherent to the class system, makes clear to the audience the troubling complexities of the double standard that women, especially working women, faced.

In the play's final act Mary articulates her objections to a system that allows child poverty. "I struggled--and suffered," she declares in a conversation with her family during their reunion, "but I knew it was not because I had my little one...in the way--I--did!--not because the law didn't approve of us, but because the world didn't have to give us work! Because I hadn't the right to earn a living. Because the right to work which is the right to life was not mine--legally mine."⁸² In the end, Rose's play suggests that Mary's problems were the problems of all women: capitalism exploited single women who earned lower wages than men, and married women because they were economically dependent on their husbands and could not refuse their sexual advances, even if it meant another child. In the play's conclusion Mary explains how she deplors "the right of the law to ignore millions of little ones and make slaves of them!"⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid, 34.

⁸¹ Ibid, 39.

⁸² Ibid, 165-166.

⁸³ Ibid, 168.

Mary's world, Rose makes clear, is one in which children and parents are forced to work or starve. For her it is a world that must be changed. Capitalism is under no obligation to provide for the well being of the poor. Rose makes it clear in *The Woman Who Wouldn't* that Mary's personal choices were forced upon her by an exploitative system that generated continued poverty.

Rose had firsthand experience with the toll too many children exacted from women. She lived with her mother and was surrounded by aunts and uncles during much of her growing up years in London. During that time she often shared a bed with young cousins, experiencing the slow death of at least one infant cousin during the night.⁸⁴ The death was the result of a particularly difficult pregnancy and occurred when she was living with her Uncle Solomon and his wife, who was never strong. When her mother remarried and the family moved to Cleveland, she took note of each of her mother's many births, some coming so quickly that barely a year passed between them. Rose's play initially depicts Mary as an exhausted, pale woman who worries, not only about her own pregnancy, but also about her sick baby brother.⁸⁵ Rose herself lived these experiences. Her autobiography recounts a period of eight months when her mother was preoccupied with a sickly new baby boy who had contracted pneumonia. Mother and baby visited doctor after doctor while family debts accumulated. By the time the baby recovered, her mother had given birth again. Rose describes her mother as "pale and spent...with a child on each arm; the new-born infant and the newly rescued infant."⁸⁶ For much of that time Rose was the primary breadwinner: with more children to feed, she took it upon herself to work faster turning stogies to increase her pay. The larger the family grew the greater the problem became. A

⁸⁴ Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class*, 11.

⁸⁵ Stokes, *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, 51-52.

⁸⁶ Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class*, 52.

family of eight living on five to six dollars a week left them in a state of “sickness, semi-starvation, [and] despair.”⁸⁷

In 1916 Rose gave an interview to the *Baltimore News* that explicitly linked the necessity of birth control to her critique of capitalism. She argued that capitalist law prevented the distribution of information because the system “needs human lives to keep the wheels of industry humming. It doesn’t care about quality. Its incessant cry is for quantity.”⁸⁸ Family limitation, in contrast, would enable working families to limit their offspring and improve their standard of living. But capitalism’s voracious need for cheap labor stood in the way. By this time she had become a well-known member of the Socialist Party and strongly favored legalizing contraception, defining it as “one of the workers’ most immediate needs.”⁸⁹

Though Emma Goldman’s political commitments were to anarchism, she, too, blamed capitalism for the lack of access to birth control. As a young person and a breadwinner, Rose’s family experience taught her that too many children brought suffering. In contrast, Emma came to understand the problem when she became a midwife to poor families. In the 1890’s, during one of her several stints in jail for public protesting, she trained as a practical nurse. In 1895, one of her supporters helped fund further training in midwifery and nursing in Vienna.⁹⁰ Having known about the working class in her early life “mostly from theory,” Goldman’s autobiography details how she first came into contact with the “living conditions of the workers.”⁹¹ She never recovered from the shock of what she experienced.

These first encounters with workers’ poverty gave Goldman two important insights. She learned how desperate the need for family planning was among the poor, and also that industrial

⁸⁷ Ibid, 81.

⁸⁸ “Mrs. Stokes is Willing to go to Prison for Birth-Control Principle.” *The Baltimore News* 22 September 1916.

⁸⁹ Zipser, 142.

⁹⁰ Goldman, 162, 174.

⁹¹ Ibid, 185.

workers earned wages so pitifully low, that they could not support their families. Again and again she encountered women who begged for abortions, living in families that could barely feed their children. She knew that the procedure could be fatal and refused these requests.⁹² Abortion was illegal, of course, and Goldman also feared arrest. In addition, her radicalism addressed what she called “the entire social problem.” Birth control and access to abortion were only “part of the human struggle.”⁹³ In her reflections years later, she emphasized, that this decision had nothing to do with “moral consideration for the sanctity of life.”⁹⁴ On the contrary, she felt strongly that “a life unwanted and forced into abject poverty” was not “sacred.”⁹⁵ In her speeches and writing she learned to passionately address both needs.

Emma eventually began to lecture about birth control, but at first she resisted giving out practical information on the subject. At the time, the “Comstock laws,” a set of anti-obscenity laws passed in 1873, threatened anyone who did so with jail time. Though not specifically focused on birth control when they were passed, these decades old laws were utilized well into the 20th century in a wide variety of ways to keep discussion of sex and sexuality out of the public sphere, especially public dissemination of birth control information and materials. Though they did not attempt to criminalize family planning or natural forms of contraception, such as what we now know as “the rhythm method,” they did target commercial sales of contraception as well as legitimate information, along with titillating content about sex.⁹⁶ Since public distribution was at stake, the Comstock laws stood in the way of accessing responsible information about birth control and were gradually opposed on the grounds that they violated the right to free speech.

⁹² Ibid, 186.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Tone, 13.

When, in two separate incidents Margaret Sanger, the most well-known birth control activist in the first half of the 20th century and the founder of Planned Parenthood, was arrested along with her husband William for disseminating pamphlets on birth control in 1915 and 1916, Goldman changed her mind about distributing information. The Sangers' willingness to challenge the law pushed Emma to take public action: she began discussing contraceptive methods in her speeches.⁹⁷ In addition to Rose and Emma, Sanger herself, briefly a member of the socialist party, had campaigned for birth control among the working class in order to break "the cycle of the 'present economic enslavement.'"⁹⁸

At a speech before the Sunrise Club in New York where Emma had anticipated being arrested after she deliberately distributed information, nothing happened. She reasoned correctly that the audience at the Club was middle class; her cynical understanding that the Comstock laws did not "apply" to them was correct; indeed, many middle-class women already had ways of accessing contraception. Indeed, as historian Christine Stansell has argued, this was a period of what she has termed "sexual modernism." Her book, *American Moderns*, highlights the changing sexual mores of the middle class, especially Bohemian intellectuals, artists and writers in the first decades of the 20th century. Understanding how the middle class came to support birth control can highlight for us the profound hypocrisy of a legal system that forced the poor to have babies, while allowing the middle class to control their family size. Indeed, Stansell argues that birth control became the "clearest political articulation of sexual modernism."⁹⁹ What she means by this is that contraception promoted "fewer and better babies" in the middle class, even as it separated intercourse from procreation, reduced the risk of pregnancy for women, and supported

⁹⁷ Goldman, 553.

⁹⁸ Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992):125.

⁹⁹ Christine Stansell, *American Modern* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2000):234.

equality between the sexes in sexual relations by recognizing and embracing women's sexual feelings.¹⁰⁰ This new intimacy of physical expression became a significant aspect of middle class ideals of "companionate marriage," in the first decades of the 20th century, an idea that Sanger herself promoted in her book *Happiness in Marriage*.¹⁰¹ These new notions of marriage could not have emerged without access to birth control. Indeed, Sanger's pioneering work in what her biographer Ellen Chesler has called "popular sex counseling," advocated sexual satisfaction among couples for its own sake.¹⁰²

After Goldman's lecture at the Sunrise Club, she gave a similar talk to a collection of young adults and students from Columbia University. Still, no arrest materialized. Encouraged, she chose a third venue on the East Side of the city, one located closer to poorer communities who needed the information the most.¹⁰³ Emma and Rose's public lectures on birth control methods suggest that sexual modernism was not confined to the middle class, it was only legitimated by middle class participation. It is also significant that public support for birth control during this period also engaged in definitions of the right to free speech. Both causes linked the middle class to the labor movement, making birth control a reform effort that occasionally promoted cross-class interactions.¹⁰⁴ Although they both had extensive interactions with middle class Americans, as immigrant women neither Emma nor Rose identified with privileged class backgrounds. Indeed, their commitment to the working class placed them in an interesting position as reformers. They were both familiar with the communities that they sought to help, and their efforts took on a personal dimension. Emma and Rose knew what was at stake

¹⁰⁰ William Robinson, *Fewer and Better Babies*, (New York, NY: Critic and Guide Co., 1915): 8. Robinson used the concept of "fewer and better babies" in his work, to promote families limiting their pregnancies based on their economic resources.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Sanger, *Happiness in Marriage*, (New York, NY: Blue Ribbon Books, 1936).

¹⁰² Chesler, 265-6.

¹⁰³ Goldman, 553-4, 569.

¹⁰⁴ Stansell, 234.

for poor families and they took seriously the need for practical information. They also knew that abstinence, while perhaps the most effective solution, was an unreasonable option for working class couples, who had few resources for other forms of enjoyment or intimacy. They would have also understood that the rhythm method or *coitus interruptus* was highly ineffective. For the poor, the need for birth control went well beyond the middle-class Bohemian desire for sexual freedom. Pregnancy could not be left to chance. Indeed, though Emma and Rose, who bridged the middle and working classes, might have understood and even claimed ideals of sexual modernism in their own intimate lives, they realized viscerally that it was beside the point for poor immigrant women.

Although Emma and Rose had intimate partners throughout their lives, neither of them had children. In her autobiography, Emma discusses both her many love affairs and her conscious decision to remain childless. She suffered from an illness she does not name, though she reveals that the condition left her in pain and infertile. After moving to New York City, a doctor recommended that she have an operation to relieve the pain and allow her to have children, but Emma refused. She wanted to be a mother, but she also wanted to remain free and able to focus completely on her growing political involvement and advocacy.¹⁰⁵ Her infertility put Emma in a unique position in terms of being able to control her own body, for she herself never had to worry about accessing contraception. Ironically, controlling her fertility did not translate into control over her love affairs: she had relatively tempestuous relationships with men, and remained hopelessly committed to at least two, Alexander Berkman and Ben Reitman, throughout her life.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Goldman, 57-61.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 91-93, 695. Emma was committed to both men throughout her life. She tried prostituting herself to raise money for Berkman, who was arrested for his assassination attempt on Henry Frick in 1892. She never was able to come to terms Reitman's compulsive womanizing, which hurt her deeply. She stayed in the relationship for years.

Rose left no indication of how she managed to control her fertility, but she did leave evidence of her deep love for her husband Graham. In a letter to him on April 25, 1905, before their marriage, Rose described a day of visits to schools and a relief society. She closed her message with passionate affection: “God bless and keep you, soul of my soul! And bring you back safe and well to me and to those others who love and need you.”¹⁰⁷ In the beginning of their relationship, Rose was deeply tied to her husband and their shared activities in the early years proved a kind of apprenticeship for her as a public persona. One might argue, in fact, that being free from the obligations and powerful emotional entailments of motherhood gave both Rose and Emma a sense of self-ownership that mothers, constantly engaged with meeting the needs of others, cannot always sustain. This freedom allowed them to focus their energies on their political engagement and reform efforts, all of which enhanced their confidence in themselves and their accomplishments.

Emma eventually began giving public talks on birth control methods to audiences on the Lower East Side: bringing information to these venues eventually led to her arrest and trial for violating the Comstock laws. Her friends and supporters held a banquet for her at the Brevoort Hotel the evening before she went to trial. Guests represented a wide range of professions and political associations. Rose attended as a member of the Socialist Party.¹⁰⁸ The following day, Emma justified her decision to discuss birth control methods, claiming at the trial that if it was “a crime to work for healthy motherhood and happy child-life, [she] was proud to be considered a criminal.”¹⁰⁹ This self-defense led to her conviction. Given the choice to pay a fine or spend

¹⁰⁷Rose Pastor to Graham Phelps Stokes, April 25, 1905, Rose Pastor Stokes MSS, microfilm. Papers at Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁰⁸ Goldman, 569.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 570.

fifteen days in a workhouse, on principle she chose jail.¹¹⁰ Although her conviction stirred protests, these would be eclipsed by the celebratory events scheduled at the time of her release, which made headlines in dozens of newspapers.

On May 5, 1916, crowds gathered at Carnegie Hall to welcome Emma back from jail. In her estimation these events transformed the cause of birth control from a “mere theoretical issue” to becoming “an important phase of the social struggle, which could be advanced more by deeds than by words.”¹¹¹ Goldman’s assessment proved correct: the time had come to turn birth control into a public issue. That same year would witness two important court rulings supporting greater access to contraception, one in Cleveland and the other in New York. In both cases, judges refused to jail women accused of stealing food for their families. Each judge spoke out in favor of birth control in their public decision, reasoning that such cases had less to do with stealing, than with the circumstances that led mothers to break the law.¹¹² They cited poverty and the inability to limit family size as the underlying causes of such crimes.

Inspired by the welcoming crowd at Carnegie Hall, Rose displayed her willingness to take action in solidarity with Goldman. Before the evening was over, Rose publically offered “typewritten sheets containing information on contraceptives” to anyone who was interested.¹¹³ Although the occasion had been organized in honor of Emma’s release, Rose’s unplanned role in the event made headlines across the country. After her announcement, eager listeners rushed forward to take hold of the leaflets. Scholars have speculated as to whether Rose actually succeeded in distributing them, but the newspapers, as well as Goldman’s account, indicate that

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 571.

¹¹² Anita C. Block, “The Tide Turns in the Birth Control Movement.” *Woman’s Sphere Editorial Comment* 22 October 1916.

¹¹³ Goldman, 570.

she was successful.¹¹⁴ On May 6, the *Boston Post* reported that the crowd not only stampeded towards Rose, but that she did not leave the hall until “all of her slips [were] given out.”¹¹⁵ *The Evening Sun* also noted that Rose did not leave the stage until all of her “booklets were gone.”¹¹⁶ Emma also recounts the event in her autobiography, reporting that when Rose stood up and spoke, no one stopped her in the event, and she “distributed leaflets on contraceptives from the platform of the famous hall.”¹¹⁷

Just as Emma had, Rose also anticipated arrest. Indeed, the *International News Service's* account quotes her as having exclaimed, “for the cause, be the penalty what it may, I here frankly offer to give out slips with the forbidden information about birth control. I have been breaking the law all along. I have given this information to whosoever has written to me for it.”¹¹⁸ Her open declaration of having violated the law certainly warranted Rose’s arrest, but in the end the police did nothing. A socialist attorney active in the birth control movement later speculated that Rose had probably escaped because authorities did not want to bring any more attention to the cause.¹¹⁹ It is also possible that the police avoided arresting Rose because of the status of Graham’s family among the New York elite. Whatever the reasons, this eventful evening at Carnegie Hall witnessed the dramatic spectacle of two radical Jewish women activists demanding the right to birth control and free speech on behalf of the downtrodden, an event that stands out as an important milestone in the movement for birth control and family planning.

Rose Pastor Stokes and Emma Goldman gave crucial assistance to Margret Sanger, whose early political activism gradually narrowed to the single issue of birth control. Americans

¹¹⁴ Chesler, Ellen 143.

¹¹⁵“Birth Control Meeting a Riot: Mrs. Stokes’ Audience Stampedes for Recipe.” *Boston Post* 6 May 1916.

¹¹⁶“Birth Control Meeting Noisy.” *The Evening Sun* 6 May 1916.

¹¹⁷Goldman, 571.

¹¹⁸“Mrs. Stokes is Mobbed for Birth Secret.” *International News Service* 6 May 1916.

¹¹⁹Zipser, 138.

are fortunate that Sanger's indefatigable energy and narrowing vision of reform sustained the movement, because in 1916 her cause was still two decades from legalization.¹²⁰ But by involving themselves in this reform, Rose and Emma not only helped disaggregate sexuality from marriage, childbearing, and family life, but linked the control of sexuality to a critique of capitalism and the defense of free speech. Indeed, their work allowed other women such as themselves, also deeply connected to poor immigrant communities, to take an active role in the movement by making much-needed contraceptive information, already accessible to many in the middle class, available to their working class counterparts. Their political ideologies were not the same: Emma focused on anarchism, while Rose was committed to socialism; yet each understood birth control as an issue that went to the heart of modern conceptions of women's autonomy and self-ownership, as well as a means to end the cycle of inescapable poverty perpetuated in the working class by capitalism's need for cheap labor. Through their birth control advocacy, Rose and Emma contributed to crucially significant political and cultural movements in the early 20th century that eased and modernized the options of working class families and the individual choices of women in their adopted country.

¹²⁰ James Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society: From Private Vice to Public Virtue*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984):128.

Conclusion

Throughout their lives, Emma Goldman and Rose Pastor Stokes made headlines. In the first two decades of the 20th- century, stories of their political activism and public engagement made excellent copy. Emma's radicalism was so public and considered so extreme that she was eventually deported to Russia under the Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1918 during the post-WWI Red Scare. On December 21, 1919, she sailed out of New York, leaving behind the "beloved city," which she affectionately called "the metropolis of the New World."¹²¹ Emma remained committed to anarchism throughout her life; when she died in 1940 she was buried, by her own request, near the Haymarket martyrs in Waldheim Cemetery near Chicago.¹²²

A year after the passage of the Espionage Act of 1917, Rose was indicted for her public criticism of the United States' involvement in World War I. With the help and support of Graham, she later successfully appealed her conviction, but the experience pushed her even further to the left. After the Bolshevik Revolution, she became one of the founders of the American Communist Party.¹²³ Rose and Graham Phelps Stokes divorced by mutual consent in 1925. In 1927 she married Jerome Isaac Romain, one of the new communist party's young intellectuals.¹²⁴ Three years later Rose was diagnosed with breast cancer. Though she traveled to Germany to receive radiation treatment, she died on June 20, 1933.¹²⁵ Her ashes arrived in the United States in time for a memorial in July of that year, and following the service they were

¹²¹ Goldman, 717.

¹²² Vivian Gornick, *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011): 138.

¹²³ Zipser, 176-177, 248-249.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 270-271.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 281, 298.

held at a law office for safe keeping. An unidentified man later removed her remains; their current location is unknown.¹²⁶

Although Emma and Rose were well known in their own time, their stories have faded from popular historical memory. Goldman's activities are more widely known than those of Rose Pastor Stokes. Still, both women played an influential role in turn-of-the-century American activism and their participation deserves to be remembered. As young women, they migrated to a country that was rapidly modernizing as it emerged as the most powerful industrial capitalist society in the world. The United States also claimed to be a democracy and was hailed as such by countries all over the world, especially because, from the middle of the 19th-century to 1924, it became home to the most diverse collection of immigrant peoples when capitalism's voracious need for cheap labor drew impoverished workers to its rapidly expanding economy. Irish, Germans, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and, after 1880, a wide collection of southern and eastern Europeans, including Italians, Poles, Slavs, and Jews, came to work in its rapidly expanding industrial economy which, by the 1920's, had made the U.S. the richest country in the world.

These economic changes witnessed extreme class divisions, a by-product of capitalism and even more visible in the United States because of the democratic aspirations and rhetoric that many immigrants took to heart when they left their countries of origin. Emma and Rose both experienced dire poverty, but the economic responsibilities that each took on at a relatively young age also gave them strength, and a seriousness of perspective that generated fierce determination and aspirations to respond to the conditions they witnessed. Ironically, industrial wage-earning offered working-women opportunities for individual self-fashioning that might not

¹²⁶ Ibid, 302. Arthur and Pearl Zipser were told by the law office that a "young Jewish poet" came for the ashes before WWII. They believe that the unidentified man was Jerome Isaac Romain.

have occurred had they stayed in their home villages in the “old country.” They also participated in voluntary associations, the exchange of ideas and information that took place on the shop floor, and in numerous cultural activities and working class groups.¹²⁷ For Rose and Emma, these opportunities for personal transformation led to political involvement and public advocacy on behalf of the working class. They were, of course, interested in Americanization, but insisted that immigrants themselves have a hand in fashioning their own future.

As we have seen, middle class reformers, some of them German Jews, had their own definitions of what it meant to become American. Teaching immigrants to aspire to the breadwinner family formed the core of Americanization programs. Rose and Emma challenged these goals, because they viewed them through the Marxist lens of capitalist exploitation. As a child and then as a worker, Rose had developed a working-class consciousness and sense of solidarity with her co-religionists, which was not as much about ethnic identity as it was about class. As a nurse, Emma had also witnessed firsthand the desperate poverty of workers’ lives. Both women were forced by circumstances to think, not only for themselves, but on behalf of others as well.

Their being in the modern world was tinged with more than a fleeting awareness of the ugly side of the modernization process. They witnessed not only the exploitation of male workers, but also the exploitation of workers’ wives and daughters. In addition, they understood that among exhausted, impoverished husbands, sexual intimacy with their wives was among the few pleasures that didn’t diminish their meager weekly wages, at least up front. Both Rose and Emma sought to bring practical information to working families desperately in need of family limitation. Their participation in the birth control movement responded to emerging ideas regarding what Christine Stansell has called “sexual modernism,” the embrace of intimacy and

¹²⁷ Wirth, 12, 23.

sexual-relations as something completely separate from childbearing, behaviors being explored in this period primarily by the middle-class and its bohemian margins. Through their activism Rose and Emma not only developed their own versions of modern citizenship and sexuality, they attempted to extend that autonomy to working class wives and daughters.

Rose Pastor Stokes and Emma Goldman led lives of admirable public engagement. They set an example for other women both within and outside the Jewish community. Perhaps their immigrant status led them to take the ideals of American democracy even more seriously because they had not grown up in the United States. We might also agree that their causes should not be resigned to the past; they resonate today in numerous ways. Progressive reformers were sincere in their wish to facilitate immigrant acculturation with their Americanization programs. But Rose and Emma's shared critique reminds us how essential it is to critically examine not only motivations, but the goals and end results behind the most well-meaning of reforms. We are also cautioned to be sensitive to the discrepancy that exists between reformers' ideologies and those of the people they intend to help.

Even now, the troubles reformers sought to address by their advocacy of birth control have not entirely disappeared. Birth control is legal, and twenty-first century contraceptive methods are extremely effective; yet problems of unequal access to information and birth control devices still exist. While most middle-class women have a range of options and can plan their pregnancies, the less privileged lack affordable health care and are thus deprived of the safest, most accessible, and effective options. Millions of Americans still live in poverty. Just as in Rose and Emma's time, the American capitalist system, with its belief in the free market and fee-for-service health care, is under no obligation to provide them either with work, or an effective means of birth control. Poor women are still the group that has the least control over their lives.

Indeed, Rose Pastor Stokes's and Emma Goldman's goals have not yet been realized. Together, these two stand out for their lifelong commitment to public activism; their stories deserved to be told to current generations of activists. They serve as powerful examples of how justice-seeking women can learn to 'talk back' to oppressive social systems.

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