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Jessie Ackerman, 'The Original World Citizen': Temperance Leader, Suffrage  
Pioneer, Feminist, Humanitarian

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

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by

Jenny Rushing

August 2003

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Elwood Watson, Chair

Dale Schmitt

Stephen Fritz

Keywords: WCTU, Temperance, Suffrage, Feminist

## ABSTRACT

Jessie Ackerman, 'The Original World Citizen': Temperance Leader, Suffrage Pioneer,  
Feminist, Humanitarian

By

Jenny Rushing

Jessie Ackerman was the second world missionary for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Her fascinating life sheds light on the most important issues facing women during this time period. Most WCTU women have been dismissed by twentieth century scholars as being religiously fanatical and conservative. They have been overshadowed by suffragists and other women that we consider more radical by today's standards. Only in recent years have some feminist historians begun to reexamine the contributions WCTU women made to the suffrage movement and to feminism.

The research for this thesis relies heavily on primary sources including Ackerman's personal papers found in Sherrod Library's Archives of Appalachia, her three published books, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View*, *What Women Have Done With the Vote*, and *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*. Also consulted were issues of the WCTU's official journal, *The Union Signal*, from 1887 through 1892.

## DEDICATION

To John Cole,  
whose loving support and encouragement  
allowed me to fulfill a dream.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Elwood Watson, Dr. Dale Schmitt, and Dr. Stephen Fritz for their valuable time and advice. I would also like to thank my fellow graduate students, who have made this experience so enjoyable and memorable. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who have always allowed me to be myself.

## Contents

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. ‘MOST TRAVELED WOMAN IN THE WORLD:’ ACKERMAN’S INTERNATIONAL REFORM MISSIONS.....	5
3. A TEMPERATE SUFFRAGIST? ACKERMAN’S ROLE IN THE INTERNATIONAL WOMAN’S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT.....	37
4. A TEMPERATE FEMINIST? ACKERMAN’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO FEMINISM AND WOMAN’S RIGHTS.....	60
5. CONCLUSION.....	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	86
VITA .....	93

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Jessie Ackerman, a world missionary for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union around the turn of the century, traveled around the world six times, visited every continent except Antarctica, had three books published, worked for temperance, and advocated women's rights as well as human rights throughout her lifetime. A lecture announcement in 1907 introduced her with the following praises: "Miss Ackerman has broken more records as a traveler than any other woman. She has been round the world six times and has penetrated to some spots where no white woman has ever been before."<sup>1</sup> She founded the national WCTU of Australia and hundreds of smaller unions around the world while also addressing issues such as prison reform, woman's suffrage, the eight-hour workday, uniform marriage and divorce laws, and shelters for abused women and children. Yet, like so many other WCTU women, her contributions to the woman's rights movement have been overlooked. The women of the WCTU and their activities have been mistakenly overshadowed by suffragists. By today's standards, religious organizations are not seen as progressive. The work of the WCTU has been misinterpreted as being conservative, and the women themselves have been remembered as religious fanatics who failed to impose their beliefs on the public. In actuality, the WCTU quickly became the largest women's organization in the United States and later in the world.<sup>2</sup> It was the first mass woman's movement. It appealed to women across

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<sup>1</sup> Leicester lecture announcement, Jan. 12-18, 1907, Archives of Appalachia, Sherrod Library, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN (subsequently referred to as SLAA).

<sup>2</sup> "Woman's Christian Temperance Union," <http://www.wctu.org/earlyhistory.html> 2/21/02.

socioeconomic, racial, religious, and national identities and may have done more to politicize women's culture than any other group. Through the lifelong dedication of women such as Ackerman, the WCTU improved the quality of life for women and children worldwide while also convincing the average woman of the need for suffrage. Although they have been dismissed by many historians, Ackerman and the women of the WCTU made an indelible mark on American culture that was anything but conservative. A study of Jessie Ackerman's life, fascinating and significant in its own right, can reveal the true impact the Woman's Christian Temperance Union had on the United States and the world.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was organized around temperance but also included a broad array of social reforms. Their belief that women had a duty to uphold moral and religious standards allowed them to take their place in public life. Their religious philosophy was in accord with Protestant fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible. They saw evils in the form of social problems, including alcohol, that prevented people from living in accordance with God. Because women were called by God to lead, they could step out of the home and into the public sphere.<sup>3</sup> Often called gospel temperance, the WCTU worked on a grass-roots level, visiting individuals, printing tracts, and holding camp meetings and street corner assemblages in order to reach a broad audience that often crossed socioeconomic and racial boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Almost all WCTU leaders were middle-class, Protestant, and involved in other reform organizations. Most of the leaders were married, but a large number, twenty-four percent, were single.

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<sup>3</sup> Norton Mezvinsky, , "The White-Ribbon Reform, 1874-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1959), 84-85.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 91.

Ackerman remained single her entire lifetime, devoting herself fully to the cause. Forty percent, including Ackerman, had college degrees or professional training after high school, and three percent held graduate degrees.<sup>5</sup> They hoped to reach their goals through moral suasion and political legislation. Norton Mezvinsky wrote, “Not only total abstinence but total prohibition, not only moral suasion but legislation – those have been fundamental and inseparable in the principles and methods of the WCTU.”<sup>6</sup> One major problem limited their effectiveness. They did not have the vote, a crucial tool necessary to apply real political pressure. For this reason, the WCTU became involved in politics and supported woman’s suffrage. Through the WCTU many women learned valuable political skills that they applied to other issues, including the woman’s movement.

Jessie Ackerman was a pioneering woman in many ways. She was often called the most traveled woman in the world by her contemporaries. She circled the globe as the WCTU’s second round-the-world missionary from 1888 until 1896, spreading her message for temperance reform and woman’s suffrage among many other issues. She challenged social norms of her time by becoming an ordained Baptist minister in 1897 with her own congregation in Chicago. She continued her travels through the 1930s, working as a Peace Envoy for the Universal Peace Union, the World’s Organizing President for the Girl’s Realm Guild of Service and Good Fellowship, lecturer, journalist, and outspoken leader of the woman’s rights movement.

Ackerman’s life is evidence that WCTU women were more than just prohibitionists. Working within the largest woman’s organization in the world, she was able to reach thousands of women in dozens of different countries on a broad range of

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<sup>5</sup> Mezvinsky, 73-74.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 118.

social issues. She devoted her life not only to temperance but also to the development of political power and social status for women. One of her greatest achievements was convincing the average woman to join the fight for woman's suffrage. In this way she was even more influential than many suffragists. More women identified with Ackerman and the WCTU, which they saw as an acceptable, moderate, religious organization appropriate to their sphere of influence.

## CHAPTER 2

### ‘MOST TRAVELED WOMAN IN THE WORLD:’ ACKERMAN’S INTERNATIONAL REFORM MISSIONS

Jessie Ackerman was born July 4, 1860 in Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Little is known about her early life, but the evidence suggests she was one of a growing number of educated, middle-class young women looking for a more meaningful role in society than that of wife and mother. She had the advantage of a liberal education in Chicago’s public schools and at the University of California, Berkeley, where she studied law, theology, and elocution. She also devoted time to drawing and painting and instruction in household matters. It is unclear whether she received her temperance training before or after attending Berkeley, but for two years she traveled the continent, visiting Cuba and Mexico. She also spent a lot of time in the Southern states where she was interested in the condition of African-Americans.<sup>2</sup> One source states that “she began her work among the Freedmen of the Southern States.”<sup>3</sup> She taught in the most rural areas of the Appalachian mountains and later returned there to retire in the mid Twenties.<sup>4</sup> She remained concerned with people of color throughout the world and often compared the work she was doing with that of female abolitionists.

Ackerman received instruction at an Independent Order of Good Templars lodge at an early age and gave her first lecture at age twelve.<sup>5</sup> When she came to California in

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<sup>1</sup> Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied By Portraits of Leading American Women In All Walks of Life* (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 4.

<sup>2</sup> “Miss Jessie A. Ackerman,” *Union Signal*, Feb. 28, 1889, p10.

<sup>3</sup> “Life and Work of Jessie Ackerman,” n.d., SLAA.

<sup>4</sup> “Miss Jessie Ackerman, Champion Woman Traveler and Explorer, Tells of Circling Globe Eight Times,” *New York Herald*, 1918.

<sup>5</sup> “Miss Jessie A. Ackerman,” *Union Signal*, Feb. 28, 1889, p10.

1884 or 1885 she was employed by the Good Templars as a very successful lecturer and organizer. Ackerman got one her first temperance jobs with the help of Chaplain C.C. Bateman, a retired U.S. Army chaplain, missionary, and lecturer, who, after meeting her in California, wrote to the Independent Order of Good Templars requesting she be considered for a lecture position. She was accepted and received a modest salary. Bateman remembered Ackerman as “a young woman of large physique and strong, almost masculine face, but possessing manners most quiet and lady-like.” He claims to have directed her “genius,” and he included her as one of the three most remarkable women of the world at that time, the others being Mrs. Bullington Booth and Frances Willard.<sup>6</sup> Women had been accepted as equal members in the Independent Order of Good Templars since the end of the Civil War, so Ackerman was able to develop her leadership skills early.<sup>7</sup> She remained a member of the Good Templars but also joined the WCTU in California seeing an opportunity for broader, more evangelical work. Like many women, she may have been attracted to the WCTU because, from its inception, it banned men from becoming voting members. WCTU women did not have to compete with men for leadership roles. This was a ground-breaking step for a woman’s organization and was crucial to the Union’s later role in the woman’s movement.<sup>8</sup> Her early work prepared her to become a world missionary for the WCTU, but she remained associated with the Good Templars as well.

Ackerman’s experience as a lecturer for the Good Templars prepared her for her next challenge. Frances Willard requested that Ackerman go to Alaska in order to report

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<sup>6</sup> Chaplain C.C. Bateman, “How I found Miss Ackerman,” SLAA.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Bordin, 37.

on the conditions of native women at the National WCTU convention in 1888. Ackerman had gained a reputation as an excellent orator with the Good Templars. Willard was impressed and wrote, “We found that she was an excellent speaker, using attractive illustrations, wit, and pathos. She had also a decided gift with her pen as all our women know who have read her graphic letters in the *Union Signal*.”<sup>9</sup> The WCTU wanted to expand their work to Alaska, and in May, 1888 a mission teacher at Sitka wrote that a temperance worker was needed to save the natives from white men.<sup>10</sup> Ackerman left California the following month, traveling up the coast to Seattle, and then by steamer to Juneau. When she reached Sitka she quickly learned why the missionary had requested help. In her first report to the *Union Signal* she wrote, “The few missionaries are already over-burdened beyond their strength, and the sight of a new worker in their midst is hailed with joy.”<sup>11</sup> Ackerman later wrote of her experiences in Alaska and the deplorable conditions of native women there in her 1896 work, *The World Through a Woman’s Eyes*. She also sent regular reports of her mission that were published in the *Union Signal*.

Ackerman wasted no time when she arrived in Sitka where she was shocked to find many saloons despite prohibitory laws. With her WCTU credentials she had no problem attracting an audience. She used the courtroom to hold afternoon and nightly prayer-meetings. Then, two unions were organized, one for whites and one for natives.<sup>12</sup> Like most other progressives, the women of the WCTU often displayed racist attitudes

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<sup>9</sup> Frances E. Willard, “Miss Jessie A. Ackerman. Round the World Missionary of the World’s W.C.T.U.,” SLAA.

<sup>10</sup> “Alaska,” *Union Signal*, May 31, 1888, p.10, National Headquarters, WCTU (Joint Ohio Historical Society-Michigan Historical Collections-WCTU microfilm edition, roll 5.)

<sup>11</sup> “The White Ribbon in Alaska,” *Union Signal*, July 26, 1888, roll 5.

<sup>12</sup> “Work in Alaska,” *Union Signal*, Aug. 16, 1888, roll 5.

such as segregating local unions. The WCTU is an especially complex and interesting organization because the women often crossed color and class lines for humanitarian causes but at the same time remained conscious of race distinctions and were concerned with preserving the white race, which they believed was superior to all others. Ackerman is difficult to categorize when it comes to issues of race. On one hand all of her missions centered on uplifting what she considered the weaker races of the world through education, temperance, and other reform measures. She recognized the value in learning about and preserving different cultures, or perhaps certain aspects of those cultures she deemed worthy. Sometimes she even criticized the negative impact of Western culture, especially Christianity, on native peoples throughout the world. In Alaska she wrote, “Wherever the white man has planted his foot, his tracks may be traced in the greater degradation of the native women,” recognizing the negative impact the presence of white miners had on Alaskan natives.<sup>13</sup> She was concerned with the women of Northern Alaska and wished to see their release “from a slavery which means not only controlling the labor of their hands, but a right to sell or rent their bodies.”<sup>14</sup> She found that some native women committed infanticide in order to spare their daughters, while other girls were given away to future husbands while still infants.<sup>15</sup> Ackerman visited a gold mining town outside of Juneau, which she accessed by foot over a mountain trail, and found that the miners, single men from all around the world, often bought Indian wives or rented them for a year or two and then left them to fend for themselves and their children.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>14</sup> Jessie Ackerman, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes* (Chicago, 1896), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 28, 33.

At the same time, she expressed just as much concern over the condition of whites in Alaska. In a report to the *Union Signal* she wrote, “Much attention is given to the native work, but, I regret to say, very little is being done for our own race. In the whole territory there is not a single church for the whites, and only one missionary for our people.”<sup>17</sup> She realized that to reform society, all races and classes needed help. While Ackerman displayed racist attitudes at times, she was also critical of the white middle-class, often blaming them for social problems on a global scale.

About a month after Ackerman’s arrival another letter was sent from Sitka, Alaska to Frances Willard thanking her for sending a temperance worker with such “wonderful magnetic power.” Ackerman had taken the hearts of the people, both native and foreign, and had created an interest in her cause in only a few short weeks. Such immediate success became a trend in her worldwide missions, a result of her aggressive personality. Another trait of her missions was endurance. Long after she left the areas she visited the work she began was sustained by devoted followers. This was certainly the case in Alaska. The second letter from Sitka thanked Ackerman for “opening the door.”<sup>18</sup> In the following years letters would continue to be published in the *Union Signal* reporting on the success and growth of the unions in Alaska.

After her successful mission to Alaska, Frances Willard made Ackerman the second world missionary for the WCTU in 1888. She sent a letter to Ackerman informing her of her great responsibility in this position. “I am thinking it quite likely we shall arrange for you to go around the world,” she wrote. “Please study carefully Mrs. Buell’s handbook and my ‘Woman and Temperance,’ together with all the helps we sent out

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<sup>17</sup> “Another Alaska Message,” *Union Signal*, Sep. 6, 1888, roll 5.

<sup>18</sup> “Extract from Letter to Miss Willard from Sitka, Alaska,” *Union Signal*, Aug. 16, 1888, roll 5.

from our headquarters, for in following Mrs. Leavitt, who is a veteran in the WCTU ranks, I do not wish anyone to feel that you are less well informed than she.”<sup>19</sup> Ackerman was introduced at the National convention and reported on her Alaska mission. “I found there just what I found in Cuba, Central America, Mexico, and in all parts of the earth, in fact, over which I have traveled,” Ackerman said. “I found sin everywhere; I found death everywhere, and found this dreadful evil of drunkenness everywhere, and Alaska was no exception.”<sup>20</sup>

Willard pushed for a World’s WCTU after visiting San Francisco’s Chinatown in 1883. She was appalled at the deplorable living conditions and especially the widespread use of alcohol and opium.<sup>21</sup> She envisioned a worldwide sisterhood dedicated to social reform, and one that would unite all peoples of the world.<sup>22</sup> Willard was comfortable organizing such a challenging venture. Her first love had been the Foreign Missionary Society. Women had been participating in foreign missions since the early 1800s, but they had remained in positions subordinate to men. Single women also faced opposition from men who were reluctant to send them overseas on their own.<sup>23</sup> Willard also found the Foreign Missionary Society limited because of its denominational character.<sup>24</sup> The WCTU did not have any restrictions to deal with, so the World Union was able to affect change on a grassroots level in ways never seen before. The WCTU and foreign mission societies worked together, however, and their membership often overlapped. They were

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<sup>19</sup> Frances Willard, to Jessie Ackerman, 17 July, 1888, SLAA.

<sup>20</sup> “Saturday’s Sessions,” *Union Signal*, Nov. 8, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Mezvinsky, 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Comp., 1968; revised 1980), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Frances E. Willard, *Woman and Temperance or, The Work and Workers of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union* (Hartford, Conn.: Park Publishing Co., 1888; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 39.

united in their belief that women's help was needed in underdeveloped lands more than in Christian America.<sup>25</sup> Ackerman definitely shared this opinion. She admonished English-speaking women for complaining about a lack of opportunity when they should have been using the opportunity they did have to save the underprivileged women of the world. She wrote, "English-speaking women are the recipients of more courtesy and greater civility than those of any other race or tongue."<sup>26</sup> She was concerned with the rights of all women, but she believed the needs of the underprivileged far outweighed those of middle-class America.

The World WCTU was organized at the national convention in 1885.<sup>27</sup> WCTU historian, Elizabeth Gordon Putnam, claimed Willard was the first leader of a temperance organization to send missionaries overseas. She described the goal of the World Union as "A family of nations promoting peace, purity, prohibition, the enfranchisement of women and the establishment of courts of arbitration to banish war from the world..."<sup>28</sup> The WCTU slogan "For God and Home and Native Land" was changed to "Every Land."<sup>29</sup> The work of the WCTU women made an impact on North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa. They worked against the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, child labor, and army brothels. They supported women's right to vote, the eight-hour work-day, equal pay for equal work, uniform marriage and divorce laws, and stiffer penalties for sexual crimes against girls and women. This could be considered the most ambitious and far-reaching women's organization of its time.

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<sup>25</sup> Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985), 55.

<sup>26</sup> Ackerman, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Putnam, *Women Torch-Bearers: The Story of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (Evanston, Ill: National Woman's Christian Temperance Union Publishing House, 1924), 59.

<sup>29</sup> "Woman's Christian Temperance Union," [www.wctu.org/earlyhistory.html](http://www.wctu.org/earlyhistory.html) 2/21/02.

The first convention of the World's WCTU was held in 1891. The organization was now formally organized, and it resembled the national Union. Frances Willard, the national president, was also elected as the first world president. Mary Clement Leavitt, the first missionary, was an honorary president, and all of the national WCTU leaders became vice presidents. A corresponding secretary and treasurer were elected, and each nation also had its own. The organization was growing and becoming more effective each year. By 1897, two million women were members of the World's WCTU. Delegates to the 1897 convention came from Australia, Belgium, Burma, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, France, Great Britain, India, Japan, and North Africa, just to name a few.<sup>30</sup> Although the exact figures are unavailable, the numbers seemed to increase during the first two decades of the Twentieth Century. By 1920, The World's WCTU was active in nearly forty nations of Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America.<sup>31</sup>

Willard needed a purpose and a unifying thread for the formal organization of the World Union, so she devised the Polyglot Petition for Home Protection. Missionaries carried the petition overseas in order to gather signatures from constituents asking for legal restrictions against the sale of alcohol and opium. Eventually it was combined into one international petition to present to heads of government around the world.<sup>32</sup> The petition read:

We, your petitioners, although physically weak, are strong of heart to love our Homes, our Native Land, and the World's family of Nations. We know that when the brain of man is clear, his heart is kind, his home is happy, his country prosperous, and the world grows friendly. But we know that Alcoholic Stimulants and Opium, which craze and cloud the brain, make misery for men and all the world, and most of all for us and our children. We know these stimulants and

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<sup>30</sup> Mezvinsky, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Earhart, *Frances Willard: From Prayers to Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 341.

opiates are sold under legal guarantees, which make the Governments partners in the traffic, by accepting as revenue a portion of its profits, and that they are forced by treaties upon populations either ignorant or unwilling. We have no power to prevent this great iniquity under which the whole world groans and staggers, but you have the power to cleanse the fags of every Clime from the stain of their complicity with this unmingled curse. We therefore, come to you with the united voices of representative women from every civilized nation under the sun, beseeching you to strip away the safeguards and sanctions of the law from the Drink Traffic and Opium Trade, and to protect our Home by the Total Prohibition of this two-fold curse of civilization throughout all the territory over which your Government extends.<sup>33</sup>

Ackerman carried the petition with her during her travels. Frances Willard wrote, “To them [Leavitt and Ackerman] more than to all of us beside belongs the credit of having given to that Petition a truly cosmopolitan circulation...”<sup>34</sup> When it was finally combined in 1895, it had seven million names signed in fifty languages.<sup>35</sup> The historical significance of the Polyglot Petition should not be overlooked. It was the first world-wide petition against the traffic in liquor and narcotics, and it raised public consciousness on the global scale against narcotics for the first time.<sup>36</sup>

Willard’s personal motto was “do everything,” and Ackerman quickly lived up to the WCTU president’s expectations as she set out on her first worldwide mission.<sup>37</sup> Remarkably, she paid all of her own expenses for the first year, and then she received money from her supporters, most notably from Australia.<sup>38</sup> For example, members of the WCTU of Western Australia promoted the “Round-the-World Missionary Fund” by

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<sup>33</sup> Mezvinsky, 77.

<sup>34</sup> Frances E. Willard, “Miss Jessie A. Ackerman. Round the World Missionary of the World’s W.C.T.U.,” SLAA.

<sup>35</sup> Earhart, 343.

<sup>36</sup> Helen E. Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet* (Evanston, Ill.: The Signal Press, 1949), 82.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Earhart, 341.

giving as subscriptions to the cause “two shillings and sixpence.”<sup>39</sup> Ackerman’s goal was to spread the WCTU message of social reform and temperance by forming unions that would unite women throughout the world. She would follow up on work began by the first world missionary, Mary Clement Leavitt, who left in 1884 on what became a nine year world tour during which she created unions in Hawaii, Australia, Japan, and China.<sup>40</sup> Ackerman followed a similar route. She departed from San Francisco on January 29, 1889, for the Sandwich Islands, now known as Hawaii.<sup>41</sup> As on all of her subsequent journeys, she was most concerned and interested in the status of women and the indigenous culture. Although some historians have described the WCTU as a paternalistic organization, and certainly in some aspects it was, Ackerman saw the value in preserving these cultures. She was spreading a message of Christian values and wanted to improve some aspects of life, but she never tried to replace the native culture she found with her own. As we have already seen, she even recognized the limitations of her own culture and the devastating affects it often had on native peoples. In Hawaii, she found the natives were a mixture of all races, and that they lived as comfortably as middle-class Americans.<sup>42</sup> She even had a private audience with King Kalakaua, who would become the last king of the islands. He was the first of the many dignitaries she met throughout her travels. Of the encounter, she wrote, “My democratic, Fourth-of-July principles bore down heavily upon me as I thought of the bowing, scraping and ‘backing out’ from his natural-born mightiness.”<sup>43</sup> Ackerman was disturbed by the large number of lepers she found on the islands. No cure

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<sup>39</sup> Joyce R. Henderson, *The Strength of White Ribbon* (West Perth, Western Australia: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Western Australia, 1992), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Mezvinsky, 76-77.

<sup>41</sup> Ackerman, *The World Through a Woman’s Eyes*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

existed at the time for the disease, so lepers were banished from the general population. She visited a leper colony named Molokai and found many of the victims to be young children. She planned to visit more with them on her return visit.<sup>44</sup> She found the same situation in many of the places she visited, and health reform became one of her top priorities.

Ackerman left Hawaii for New Zealand and Australia, which was the first of four trips she made to the continent where she did most of her work. Mrs. Leavitt established several unions in the largest cities of Australia and New Zealand, but they remained small and weak, mostly because women did not speak in public. Ackerman found this to be the greatest obstacle in New Zealand and wrote that the “men, as a general thing, do not favor public women; they have a great idea of women’s sphere.” She continued, “We Americans know well what such sentiment means, for it is only in these late years that we have found our field unhedged and our sphere unfenced and ourselves in a position to use our God-given powers to the best interests of home, church, and society, and where we began the struggle years and years ago, these women are now beginning.”<sup>45</sup> Ironically, New Zealand women became the first in the world to win the fight for suffrage in 1893, in large part due to the influence of the WCTU.<sup>46</sup> But In 1889, Ackerman still found much resistance to the idea of a “public woman.” In many areas she was obviously not welcome, but she seemed to relish spreading her mission to those places more than any others. She wrote to the *Union Signal* about an “amusing incident” that occurred in Dunedin, New Zealand, where she had to hold her meeting in the city’s largest church

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>45</sup> “Our second round-the-world missionary from New Zealand,” *Union Signal*, June 6, 1889, p4.

<sup>46</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Women’s Suffrage*, s.v. “New Zealand.”

because city hall was unavailable. The church's pastor presided over the meeting, but he made it clear that he did not approve of women speaking in public or the cause of temperance in general. Ackerman wrote, "On introducing me, he took occasion to say he had always believed as the Apostle Paul did about women speaking in public, and as if to offer an apology for being found at a temperance meeting, he further said, as representing a church which was not one on this question, he thought it desirable to say he did not sympathize with the remarks that were sometimes made against moderate drinkers, and against those who respectably conducted the liquor traffic."<sup>47</sup> Ackerman was amused at the pastor's remarks about women but appalled that a minister would defend the liquor traffic. Despite the obstacles she encountered in New Zealand she still formed many new unions and added many new members to old ones. In June, 1889 she reported that the membership of the National WCTU of New Zealand had more than doubled, new unions were organized, and a lecture bureau was organized to raise funds for a National organizer.<sup>48</sup>

Ackerman left New Zealand and sailed for five days through a violent storm to Tasmania. She was unable to speak on the day of her arrival because of seasickness but quickly recovered and returned to work the following day. A union had been established in Hobart years earlier but had virtually disappeared by the time of Ackerman's visit. Nonetheless, she held a series of very successful meetings and found the women very eager to join her cause. After her brief visit she reluctantly headed back to the steamer that took her to Australia. She reached Melbourne safely on June 6 and then took a train to Adelaide where she began her work. She held meetings in Adelaide for a week and

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<sup>47</sup> Our Second Round-the-World Missionary," *Union Signal*, Sep. 12, 1889, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

attracted several thousand people, successfully expanding the union that Leavitt organized.<sup>49</sup>

From Adelaide, she traveled Northwest to Australia's most isolated areas. She found it very difficult to form unions here where most people had never heard of the WCTU. She visited several mining communities and found similar characteristics as she had in Alaska, large numbers of young men without homes or family influences, drinking, gambling, and fighting. She did have some success, however, in the mining communities she visited. Many "grand women were *unearthed*," she wrote, and over one hundred joined the union. She also wrote of an exciting adventure she had, taking a "trip to the center of the earth." She joined only a handful of women who had descended over 1500 feet into the mines. After donning completely male attire she said, "talk about women wanting to be men! No, thank you."<sup>50</sup> She ended her first tour of Australia with this incredible experience. As she headed for Asia to continue her mission she was encouraged by her success in Australia. While Leavitt concentrated mainly on organizing within the largest cities, Ackerman not only expanded those unions but also traveled to the farthest reaches of Australia, becoming perhaps the first woman to cover the continent. She was rewarded for her hard work, through extremely rigorous conditions, with the formation of many successful unions. The success of her first Australian tour contributed to the formation of a National WCTU in that country, for which she would serve as the first president

Reluctantly, Ackerman left Australia for China. After spending so much time there and becoming so familiar with the people, she felt like Australia was her second

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<sup>49</sup> "Our Second Round-the-World Missionary," *Union Signal*, Dec. 5, 1889.

<sup>50</sup> "Our Second Round-the-World Missionary," *Union Signal*, Jan. 9, 1890.

home. She eventually learned to love the people of China as well and considered their plight one of the most important areas for missionary work, but at first she was hesitant to visit this completely unknown country. In November, 1889, she wrote to the *Union Signal* about her dilemma. “I had never looked forward to a visit to China with any special feeling of pleasure,” she said. “While I have always deplored the fact that they were a people without a Sabbath and without the gospel, I never was sufficiently interested to think it was *my* duty to carry the gospel to them.”<sup>51</sup> Like many nineteenth century reformers, Ackerman considered the Chinese heathens. She may have thought it was hopeless to try and save them, but she quickly changed her mind once she saw the deplorable conditions many Chinese lived in, especially women. Of course, she hoped to win converts in China, but she was not unrealistic. She knew it would be a difficult task and often concentrated more on the basic needs of the Chinese people.

Ackerman spent ten days in Hong Kong, and while she began observing the condition of the natives, she spent most of her time with foreign soldiers and sailors in the city. Bringing temperance reform and other moral reforms to soldiers and sailors of all nationalities stationed in foreign ports was a priority of all the WCTU’s round-the-world missionaries. Removed from watchful eyes of family members and society, these young men were tempted with many forms of vice and sin. Ackerman held meetings for these servicemen, often boarding ships or visiting base camps to find an audience. She reported that many signed the temperance pledge in Hong Kong and some joined the Good Templars.

From Hong Kong, Ackerman boarded a house boat with seven Chinese sailors, a female missionary, and a native “Bible-woman” and headed inland. The natives crowded

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<sup>51</sup> “Our Second Round-the-World Missionary,” *Union Signal*, March 13, 1890.

around the group, for many of them had never seen a white person before. They were amazed at Ackerman's height. She stood six feet tall.<sup>52</sup> Ackerman was amazed at the conditions most Chinese lived in, especially the women. If she was reluctant to bring her mission to China before, the women she met convinced her there was no group in greater need of Christian reform. In her report to the *Union Signal* she reminded WCTU members of how fortunate they were to live in a Christian country. She wrote:

If anyone doubts what the gospel has done for our own sex, let him come to China. If anyone doubts that Jesus Christ was the emancipator of woman, let him witness the condition of our sisters in Asia, despised from birth, and bartered as any article of merchandise, and having no legal rights. Being wholly unable to own anything, she seems to be regarded only as a necessary evil, tolerated because she is a necessary factor in serving men. If there is anything in this world that should lead woman to *appreciate, understand and know* what religion has done for us, it would be to study the condition of the Chinese women in their own homes.<sup>53</sup>

One issue that she addressed was the practice of foot binding. She visited a hospital in which almost all of the women had bound feet and convinced one woman to remove her bandages and reveal the disfigurement that they caused. She was horrified by the pain and suffering this practice caused women. "The foot is drawn into a most unnatural shape by drawing all the toes save the great toe under the foot flat against the sole, and as the bandage is brought over the instep and around the heel, the foot, warped in length, is pressed into a narrow shape, ending almost in a point," she wrote. "Large wooden heels are worn so the foot never strikes the ground but they walk entirely on the heel."<sup>54</sup> The practice left many women crippled, unable to walk for the rest of their lives. Ackerman hoped to emancipate these women by converting them to Christianity and

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<sup>52</sup> Ackerman, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> "Our Second Round-the-World Missionary in China," *Union Signal*, March 20, 1890.

through education, and she lectured on the practice of foot binding all over the world.

Ackerman soon learned that the greatest threat to China was not alcohol, but opium. She had already been exposed to the dangers of opium while visiting Chinese neighborhoods in San Francisco, but now she experienced a nation-wide opium epidemic first-hand. Ackerman visited opium dens where she saw young mothers smoking with their children waiting by their sides. She blamed Western civilization for introducing opium and other vices. She wrote, “It is a fact that western civilization without the subduing effects of Christianity is the worst-known civilization.”<sup>55</sup> She recognized that the West often exploited weaker peoples for economic gain. In China the result was widespread poverty and addiction. Another result was greater resistance to Christian missionaries. She wrote, “the traffic in this fatal drug was forced upon this people at the point of the bayonet, and that, too, by a Christian nation.”<sup>56</sup> Why would the Chinese accept a religion from countries that exploited and abused them? This question was often posed to her by statesmen and religious leaders throughout Asia. One Chinese statesman said, “Do not talk to an intelligent Chinaman about Christianity. You have sent your Christianity to our country and what had it done?” “Why,” he said, “it has turned this great empire into a living, seething hell of opium smoke until one million of the people of China are dying every month of the year because of opium smoke.”<sup>57</sup> These encounters made a huge impression on Ackerman, and she became committed to not only fighting the opium trade, but also to reforming Christian governments, legislators, and missionaries.

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<sup>54</sup> “Our Second Round-the-World Missionary,” *Union Signal*, Mar. 13, 1890.

<sup>55</sup> Ackerman, *The World Through a Woman’s Eyes*, 166.

<sup>56</sup> “Miss Ackerman in China,” *Union Signal*, May 15, 1890.

Ackerman made a brief visit to Thailand, the former kingdom of Siam, where she had an audience with the king. She spoke to him about the lack of education for Thai women. He listened graciously to her arguments but then responded by saying that Thai women were the happiest in the world. He argued that an education would make them discontented because they would want things they could not have. Ackerman guessed the real reason he did not want to educate women was because he had forty wives and many other women in his palace court.<sup>57</sup> In the spring of 1890 she sailed for Japan where, once again, she began her work by meeting with the many foreign sailors in port. She visited saloons, warships, jails, and hospitals, hoping to reach as many sailors as possible. She also formed several unions in Japan among foreign missionaries and among the natives. She was much more impressed with the Japanese than the Chinese and considered them superior to other Asians, probably because she met more Christians in Japan. She even spoke to a Congregational Conference of about forty native Christian preachers. One of her goals was to win converts, but she remained respectful to the native culture and religion as well. She did not wish to force Christianity onto Asia as opium had been, and she was aware that her message was not always welcomed. In these situations she handled herself well. On one occasion she was invited to speak at a religious gathering of about six hundred Buddhist students. The first Christian speaker was drowned out by the hostile crowd. Ackerman was determined to speak and wrote, "When I assured them I had not come to ridicule their religion, but simply to tell them of ours, they seemed quite ready to listen." Her subject was "What Christianity has done for

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<sup>57</sup> "World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union Convention," (Miss Ackerman's Address) *Union Signal*, Nov. 2, 1893.

<sup>58</sup> "Miss Ackerman's Lecture," *The Queensland* (Australia), n.d.

the World.” She reported that the crowd listened attentively for more than an hour and even applauded a few times.<sup>59</sup>

From Japan, Ackerman intended to travel north to Russia. She was interested in seeing the Siberian prison system that she had heard about first from Russians she met in Alaska, and then Russian sailors and soldiers in Asia. Prison reform was one of Ackerman’s main concerns. She visited prisoners everywhere she went and found that most were there because of alcohol abuse. She became ill with a fever while in China and was advised to return to Australia instead. Years later she finally traveled to Siberia to take up this interest.

After another treacherous voyage at sea, Ackerman reached Australia. She had already become well known within temperance and missionary groups and received a warm welcome on her return. She immediately picked up her work where she left off and began forming more unions, focusing on one colony at a time. First, she traveled throughout New South Wales where temperance sentiment was not high and women rarely spoke in public. Her work was also interrupted by another attack of fever, which she was told she may have for years to come. Despite these obstacles, she still attracted large crowds, formed many unions, and awakened a new interest in woman’s work.<sup>60</sup> After traveling for three months in New South Wales, she reached Sydney in time for the colony’s Good Templars convention. Then, in May, 1891 she headed to Melbourne in preparation for a convention to form the first National Australian Union.<sup>61</sup>

The formation of a National WCTU for Australia was perhaps Ackerman’s

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<sup>59</sup> “Our Second Round-the-World Missionary,” *Union Signal*, Aug. 21, 1890.

<sup>60</sup> “Our Missionary in New South Wales,” *Union Signal*, Jan. 29, 1891.

<sup>61</sup> “Our Second World’s Missionary in Australia,” *Union Signal*, July 9, 1891.

greatest achievement. It is certainly what she is most well known for among Australian historians today. The National Union she organized went on to be an influential temperance and woman's rights organization. It was largely responsible for raising age of consent laws, reforming marriage and divorce laws, implementing prison reform, and winning the right to vote for women. At the Melbourne convention, the National Union was formed, uniting 8,000 Australian women. The meetings attracted much attention throughout the colonies and were attended in large numbers by the public. The women of Australia showed their appreciation by electing Ackerman as the first national president. Her first year in office she continued to travel across Australia with the goal of organizing every colony. Her mission was tremendously successful. After two years of work she reported that she traveled 23, 872 miles, gave 446 lectures, formed 61 unions, and added over 5,000 members.<sup>62</sup> Ackerman's work was recognized by the World Union's president, Lady Henry Somerset, at the first World's convention in November, 1891. She said, "In Australia, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union is the strongest of all the temperance influences. It is splendidly organized and correlated into a great National Union." Somerset credited Ackerman with the success of the Australian union.<sup>63</sup>

Ackerman finally took a break at Christmas, 1891. She was able to rest in Sydney at the home of a missionary friend and was also able to take in some of the local entertainment. But she resumed her work in early January, traveling to Western Australia and Tasmania where she was not always welcomed. In Tasmania she carried on her mission without any help from other temperance or women's groups. Even the ministers offered no assistance, as they did not approve of "talking women." Nevertheless, she was

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<sup>62</sup> "A National WCTU for Australasia," *Union Signal*, Nov. 12, 1891.

<sup>63</sup> "World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union," *Union Signal*, Sep. 15, 1892.

not discouraged. Because she had no place to meet, she distributed pamphlets in local saloons and held open air meetings in the streets. Of course, the appearance of a lady in the street addressing a large crowd of men created quite a sensation, but her bold tactics paid off. She wrote that she had never held a more successful meeting, but the work was taking its toll on her physically and emotionally. She reported to the *Union Signal* that she was “so tired and worn out with the heavy work of the day and the awful sense of being alone, humanly speaking, that I cried myself to sleep.”<sup>64</sup>

On her return to Melbourne, Ackerman was happy to meet two new, world missionaries, Mrs. E.W. Andrew and Dr. Kate Bushnell, who had been sent to carry on the work she had started. She wrote, “I was delighted to look into their dear faces. It did my heart good. They are the first of our workers I have seen since I left home.”<sup>65</sup> These two familiar faces raised Ackerman’s spirits, and she immediately began instructing them on the work needed to be done. After only a few days of training, Ackerman and the women separated, each carrying on the work in different parts of Australia. Ackerman formed another colonial union in Western Australia and led a group of women there to meet with the premier. This public and political act by women was something so new that many women were reluctant to go, but Ackerman convinced fifty-five to march through the streets of Perth to the premier’s office. The men and women of the town were astonished by this demonstration, but many expressed their sympathy with “such doings” by women. The women filed into town hall, and, Ackerman wrote, “We made known our wants to have the laws for Sunday closing and against selling to minors enforced, to

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<sup>64</sup> “Our Second Round-the-World Missionary in Tasmania,” *Union Signal*, Sep. 15, 1892.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

amend the licensing laws, and to raise the age of consent to sixteen years.”<sup>66</sup> The premier promised to enforce the laws, and the ladies promised to hassle him until he did. From there, they continued their procession through town to the depot where a coffee palace was being built. Ackerman was asked to lay the corner stone, which bore the inscription, “This stone was laid August 16, 1892, by Miss Jessie Ackerman, World’s missionary for the WCTU.”<sup>67</sup> The meetings held in Perth were the highlights of Ackerman’s very successful two months in Western Australia. From there, she prepared once again to travel to unknown territory. She planned to spend six months in India and then return to Sydney in time for the National convention.

After another miserable sailing experience, Ackerman reached Calcutta, India on November 7, 1892. She found that temperance sentiment was high among the natives, who had their own society, but the European association was dead. She chose not to try to revive it, feeling it was a hopeless cause until permanent temperance missionaries could be stationed there.<sup>68</sup> Instead, she focused all of her attention on the native population. For ten days she traveled with a Hindu priest who was a temperance worker and a scholar. He was educated in a Christian school and, although he never converted, knew the Bible very well, much better, Ackerman believed, than most Christians. Ackerman felt much admiration for this “grand old man,” and together they formed several temperance societies. In one place 2,500 natives attended their meeting, and a native temperance paper was started, the only one of its kind in India.

Ackerman continued to find much resistance among English-speaking people in

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<sup>66</sup> “A Spirited Letter from Miss Ackerman,” *Union Signal*, Dec. 15, 1892, p.15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> “Miss Ackerman in India,” *Union Signal*, April 20, 1893.

India. They were more reluctant to accept a public woman than the Indian natives in many places. In Delhi, she wrote, "There is a very strong feeling that 'women should be at home,' and one dear, good brother seemed very much worried because I was not there, and all agreed that I was quite out of my sphere."<sup>69</sup> Despite this criticism, Ackerman still held a large meeting with the natives and a smaller one among the English, and all prayed that the Christians of India would join the temperance movement.

She continued her journey through the most remote areas of India. Traveling alone in this unfamiliar country, she had a difficult time just finding someone who could understand her. She was tired, dirty, cold, and hungry, but she continued, traveling to a town near the border of Afghanistan where she heard there was no temperance work. She traveled into the Kyber Pass under protection of Indian troops. She wrote that the feeling in the region was uneasiness, and thousands of soldiers lined the border waiting for an outbreak. She was very disappointed to find out that after traveling so far into such dangerous territory she could not speak. "I have been to many places which did not believe in women speaking, but this is the only time I have not been *allowed* to speak," she wrote.<sup>70</sup> Even the Church of England chaplain refused to let her use the building. She had greater success in Kashmir where she met with the only Y, Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union, in India.

Ackerman then headed to Bombay where she was invited by a conference of missionaries to speak on temperance and opium. On her trip back she visited the Taj Mahal, and in one remote area had to ride on an elephant for five hours through the mountains. When she finally reached Bombay she was disappointed to find that many

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<sup>69</sup> "Miss Ackerman in India," *Union Signal*, May 4, 1893.

<sup>70</sup> "Miss Ackerman in India," *Union Signal*, May 11, 1893, p. 5.

missionaries did not take up the cause of temperance. She wrote, “When the native Christian church opens its doors to the whiskey bottle, they open to the darkest agency of hell, and deepest danger to this country.” Once again, she blamed Christian nations for the conditions she found in Asia. When she learned that many mission schools had been funded by Western governments, she wrote, “It really seemed too bad that the Lord’s work should be carried on by blood money, for English revenue here is from opium and rum largely.”<sup>71</sup> Once again, she was asked by many natives why they should accept a religion that has introduced so much vice into their country. Some of these questions left her shocked and speechless. During one lecture when she was trying to explain how Christianity elevated womanhood, an Indian Brahmin rose and said, “You will have to raise Christianity to a higher standard than we have ever heard of before you can expect an intelligent Indian to speak or even think about it. You call us heathen people,” he said, “I should like to remind you that there has never been a heathenism in all India so black that it has legalized vice and degraded the womanhood of the country.”<sup>72</sup> This certainly was a humbling experience for Ackerman. A Hindu had raised some legitimate questions about her religion. She listened to him and others and took their concerns to heart. She reported the conditions of India to the *Union Signal* and asked that a missionary be sent to live there. She had not wanted to visit Asia before, but now her experiences there changed the way she viewed her religion and her mission. She still hoped to win converts whenever she could, but she also wanted to convert Christians to become true followers of Christ.

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<sup>71</sup> “Miss Ackerman in India,” *Union Signal*, May 18, 1893.

<sup>72</sup> “World Woman’s Christian Temperance Union Convention,” (Miss Ackerman’s address) *Union Signal*, Nov. 3, 1893.

In October, 1893 Ackerman finally returned to the United States after traveling for five years abroad. She attended the second meeting of the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Chicago where she received a very warm welcome and spoke about her experiences. The convention delegates hailed the WCTU as the world's foremost representative of the new woman's movement. The round-the-world missionaries' testimony, they said, showed "the solidarity of sentiment among women everywhere, no matter what their complexion, language, or condition of servitude; they all believe in the white ribbon movement when it is explained to them."<sup>73</sup> In her address, Ackerman spoke about the opium trade and the role Christian nations played in bringing it to Asia. She said it was brought to China as merchandise by Christians and despite resistance by the so-called "heathen Emperor" was forced upon the people. "I wish some of the sentiment of that heathen Emperor could be imported to our legislative halls today."<sup>74</sup>

Despite all of the praise she received, Ackerman was also criticized at the convention for raising money to support Hindu women in missionary schools in India. Unlike some WCTU members, she felt it was her duty to help the needy whether they converted to Christianity or not. She was defended by another woman who wrote, "When Miss Ackerman raised the money she was in America on furlough and had a perfect right to employ her time as she thought best; she could hardly be better employed perhaps than in helping the most helpless human beings."<sup>75</sup> Most members supported Ackerman. After

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<sup>73</sup> "World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union Convention," *Union Signal*, Nov. 2, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> "World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union Convention," (Miss Ackerman's Address) *Union Signal*, Nov. 2, 1893.

<sup>75</sup> "Miss Ackerman in England," *Union Signal*, Jan. 4, 1894, p. 10.

all, it was hard to criticize someone who did not receive a salary and raised her own money to pay for travel.

After the convention, on November 1, Ackerman sailed to Europe for a short rest with Frances Willard. She visited France, Switzerland, and Italy and then returned to Australia in time for the next national convention in March, 1894 where she planned to resign as the Australasian president. Then, she planned to continue her work in South Africa, Madagascar, and Sierra Leone.<sup>76</sup>

She arrived in Sydney in January, 1894 and was enthusiastically welcomed by 350 WCTU members.<sup>77</sup> In the few months before her she held meetings and planned for the convention which she hoped to be the greatest temperance gathering ever held south of the equator. She was not disappointed. Delegates from Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, and Western Australia gathered in Sydney in March for the national convention. The presentations given show how far the National Union had come in only three years with Ackerman's leadership. Papers were given on a range of topics, including "Police Matrons," "Barmaids," "The Ideal Woman," and "Women as Wage Earners." The members also elected a new president, Mrs. Elizabeth Nicholls, and made Ackerman the honorary president of the Australian WCTU. One evening was devoted entirely to a discussion of womanhood suffrage, another to an anti-opium demonstration, and the last meeting was a farewell to Ackerman who planned to continue her work in Africa.<sup>78</sup>

She sailed from Melbourne on what would be her longest journey at sea and

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<sup>76</sup> "Miss Ackerman in England," *Union Signal*, Jan. 4, 1894, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> "New South Wales: Miss Ackerman's Welcome," *Union Signal*, April 5, 1894.

<sup>78</sup> "Australasian WCTU," *Union Signal*, May 31, 1894, p.10.

reached Cape Colony twenty-seven days later. She reported that temperance sentiment was very low in Africa, and that she could not carry out her work as she had in other lands. Nevertheless, she still held some union meetings and women's meetings, and concluded her trip with a temperance demonstration in Cape Town. She also encountered financial problems in Africa and had to schedule additional lecture engagements on her own behalf. After a month of this and in addition to five years of ceaseless toil, she was "in a state of complete nervous collapse." Very reluctantly, she followed her doctor's orders and decided to take a long break.<sup>79</sup>

In the fall of 1894, Ackerman returned to the U.S. after circling the globe twice in six years. On October 15 she began a series of two hundred lecture engagements.<sup>80</sup> In the same month she signed a contract with *Ladies Home Companion* to write several articles on her travels. The magazine promised her three hundred dollars for twenty-five thousand words separated into five contributions. They also told her they would consider a book on her round-the-world mission.<sup>81</sup> She had begun writing a book in Africa when she became ill and published *The World Through a Woman's Eyes* in 1896.

While in the United States Ackerman began planning her next world tour sending letters to various nations trying to find out the level of temperance sentiment in each. She received encouraging replies from Denmark, Bulgaria, Iceland, Argentina, and others, hoping she would bring her mission there. Frances Willard continued to praise her work and dedication, but she was also concerned about Ackerman's health. Since contracting

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<sup>79</sup> "Report of Second Round-the-World Missionary," WCTU of the United States, Annual Meeting Minutes, 1894, p. 247-48.

<sup>80</sup> WCTU of the United States, Annual Meeting Minutes, 1894, p.176-77.

<sup>81</sup> Mast, Crowell, and Kirkpatrick Publishing (*Ladies Home Companion*), to Jessie Ackerman, 18 October 1894, SLAA.

yellow fever in Asia, she had not been completely well. Willard suggested that she rest at Lady Somerset's home in England before departing on her next journey.<sup>82</sup>

She agreed to travel to England, but she still did not get much rest. She found it impossible to sit idly by when so many people in the world were suffering. In England, she was very concerned with the poor, especially women. In order to understand their plight better she decided to spend six weeks living in the slums of London. To make the experience authentic she assumed a new identity, rented a room, and attempted to make a living on the streets. She sold flowers and newspapers and then became a street musician, renting an organ to carry around the city. She even took a neighbor's advice and rented a baby to give her a greater advantage to make money. On the streets she saw how difficult it was to make a living. In the house where she lodged she became acquainted with many people who spent their entire lives scraping by on the streets. She met young mothers trying to feed their families. She met an elderly woman who had worked her entire life and saved nothing. Now, she was on her way to the work house because she could no longer carry on her trade. She saw the deplorable conditions that the system of sweating created for men, women, and many children in the slums. Ackerman never forgot this experience. It only confirmed her belief that Christians needed to reform themselves and reach out to the less privileged. "You need to hunger with them," she wrote, "to be glad to divide and share your last crust. Then you come to see what humanity really is; and you come to find applied there more than in any other aspect of life the principles of Christianity."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Frances Willard, to Jessie Ackerman, 9 February, 1895, SLAA.

<sup>83</sup> "Miss Jessie Ackerman. Traveler, Lecturer, and Journalist: 'In the Slums of London: How I Earned My Living,'" n.d., SLAA.

Ackerman also visited Iceland while she was supposed to be resting. She wanted to write about the island and also expand the temperance movement there. She was successful once again. After traveling eight hundred miles on horseback she organized a national union in Iceland.<sup>84</sup> She received many letters of gratitude from Icelanders and added this experience to her lecture series.

Despite her determination, Ackerman's health problems forced her to stop doing field work for a while and return home, but she remained associated with the World's WCTU as the World's Superintendent of the Anti-Opium department.<sup>85</sup> In the fall of 1896 she accepted a position as the assistant pastor of the Fourth Baptist Church in Chicago. This position allowed her to return home and work in one place after nearly a decade of constant travel. In addition to preaching, she was also in charge of the church's local rescue and mission work, which was exactly the type of work she wanted to do. She wasted no time creating controversy when she visited local saloons and invited the patrons to her services. On the night of her first sermon most of the pews were filled with the homeless or drunks she had met on the streets.<sup>86</sup>

Ackerman's many experiences caused her to take on many new reforms throughout the 1890s. Then, after Willard's death in 1898 she took a less active part in direct temperance work, broadening her mission as she thought Willard would have continued to do. She reminded temperance workers who took a narrow view that intemperance was only one of the many evils women needed to address. She continued to

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<sup>84</sup> "President's Address," Minutes of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention, U.S. National WCTU, Oct., 1895, p. 113.

<sup>85</sup> Jessie Ackerman, to Elizabeth Nicholls, ca. 1895, SLAA.

<sup>86</sup> "Lower Five at Church," [Chicago newspaper] 4 January, 1897, SLAA.

work for temperance, but she also addressed the condition of women throughout the world, woman's suffrage, labor and poverty issues, the opium trade, and world peace.

In February of 1904, Ackerman was appointed as a Peace Envoy for the Universal Peace Union. Once again she would travel the world, this time visiting the courts and influential bodies of Europe and Asia in the interest of peace.<sup>87</sup> Carrying credentials and letters of introduction from the United States State Department, she met with diplomats of many governments. She also continued to write on a variety of issues. One article in the *Washington Gazette* spoke out in favor of civil rights and blamed white trade unionists for resisting employment of blacks. She received a letter from an admirer who wrote, "I trust you will continue to use your pen and voice in advocating the just claims of the coloured races."<sup>88</sup> Apparently, she never forgot the group of people that made her a social reformer.

She continued to travel as an independent researcher and for several other organizations. In 1907 she made her third visit to Australia as the World's Organizing President of the Girl's Realm Guild of Service and Good Fellowship. The guild, which was founded by the Bishop of London in 1900 in connection with the *Girl's Realm Magazine*, organized privileged young girls in order for them to use their status to serve others. It also strove to establish a unifying spirit and fellowship between girls throughout the world. Each local guild could choose its own form of service, but they were all encouraged to help the sick and the poor and to collect toys, clothes, food, and other necessities. Ackerman's job was similar to her position with the WCTU. She was to organize local guilds throughout the world. The WCTU had united women

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<sup>87</sup> Universal Peace Union membership certificate, Feb. 10, 1904, SLAA.

<sup>88</sup> Letter, to Jessie Ackerman, 15 April, 1908, SLAA.

internationally; Ackerman hoped the Girl's Realm would do the same. She was thrilled to continue her worldwide reform work and wrote, "I have wanted to give all of my time to work of some kind, and now that I am once more well and strong the opportunity has come in the form of work for the Girl's Guild of Service – a wonderful thing."<sup>89</sup> She had always been very interested in young girls, who she believed held the key to the future of world peace. She also hoped to train and educate girls to become more independent and helped set up a trust fund for girls in need of an education. The key to women's emancipation was through women's suffrage and financial independence. Ackerman knew that without economic equality, women would never have political or social equality. Through the Girl's Realm she hoped to equip a new generation with the tools to achieve this goal.

She was also traveling as a representative for the *Westminster Gazette* and various American newspapers. By reporting on the conditions in Australia she was able to supplement her income and carry on her missionary work. She continued to write throughout her life, publishing two more books in 1913, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View* and *What Women Have Done With the Vote*, in addition to hundreds of journal and newspaper articles.

In 1914 and again in 1916 Ackerman returned to China, twenty-five years after her first visit. She lived in Shanghai for several years where she studied and wrote on the social, moral, and economic conditions of China.<sup>90</sup> She was impressed with the progress she saw, especially among the women who had made advancements in education and in

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<sup>89</sup> Marianne Farmingham, "The Girl's Century," n.d., SLAA.

<sup>90</sup> Chu Li-Chi, Secretary and Translator, Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, Shanghai, to Jessie Ackerman, 6 December, 1916, SLAA.

new occupations. She was a reluctant visitor to China at first, but now she felt very at home there. She predicted that China would continue to improve and would become a republic in fifty years.<sup>91</sup> She carried on her work even in the midst of the Great War, which she blamed on Western imperialist powers. A Peking newspaper reported that she remained neutral throughout the war.<sup>92</sup> For years she had criticized both sides of the conflict for their aggressive, colonialist policies. She would continue to be critical, years later predicting that Italy's invasion of Ethiopia could lead to a second world war. She hoped the war would cause people to value humanity more, especially women. "I believe that this war will be a great civilizing practice," she wrote. She hoped people would now start practicing Christianity instead of just preaching it. She also believed that future wars could be avoided by educating the masses and allowing women to vote.

In 1925, Ackerman took another break from her international travels and retired to Johnson City, Tennessee. It was the perfect place for her to rest, study, write, and keep her library. She was still able to work with young women at the teacher's college in town, now East Tennessee State University, and she also continued to lecture throughout the United States, although on a much more limited basis. She lived in Johnson City until about 1930 when she resumed her travels, once again visiting China and living for a while in California and Chicago.

Ackerman was a citizen of the world. She was never able to stay in one place for long. She died at age ninety-one on March 30, 1951, in Baldwin Park, California. Mrs. Celia M. Noll remembered Ackerman in the *Union Signal*. "Miss Ackerman made eight trips around the world and covered 380,000 miles," she wrote. "She visited every country

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<sup>91</sup> "China on Way to the Light, will Eventually Work Out a State Republic, Says Miss Ackerman," November, 1914, SLAA.

except Greenland in the interest of God, humanity, and temperance.”<sup>93</sup> Ackerman devoted her entire life to progressive social reform. Her work improved the status of women and children throughout the world and prompted many women to support suffrage for the first time. She was a pioneer of the women’s movement, yet her contributions have been overlooked. The next two chapters explore those contributions and the reasons for that neglect.

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<sup>92</sup> “A Famous Lecturer in Peking,” n.d., SLAA.

<sup>93</sup> *The Union Signal* (Chicago), 16 June, 1951.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTERNATIONAL WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE PIONEER

“While engaged in temperance work in 1887 in the British and American colonies and States I became profoundly convinced that success in all Christian effort was lessened and limited by the practical exclusion of one-half of the nation – the women.” This statement by Ackerman, made at the second triennial convention of the WCTU of Australia in 1894, outlines the philosophy for which she became an unwavering adherent for the rest of her life. In addition to being a temperance worker, Ackerman was also a suffragist. “Every day’s experience,” she wrote, “confirmed this conviction that any reform, in order to attain its limit of possible success, must have the unhindered influence and efforts of women in all conditions of life, especially of mothers.” Convinced that this goal should no longer be ignored or overshadowed by dominant men, she devoted her life to the development of political power and social status for women. She began to develop this philosophy early in life, and with the WCTU found a “practicable, common-sense scheme already in operation developing the powers and opportunities of women in their everyday surroundings.”<sup>1</sup> This statement reveals much about her own ideology. Her views were not shaped by the WCTU alone. Rather, she recognized the usefulness of a moderate organization in advancing the cause of woman, especially woman suffrage. From an early age she realized the limits that the notion of separate spheres placed upon women. She became a womanist, traveling the world to study and write on the condition of women and developing solutions to the causes of their subordinate status. Throughout the late 1880s and 1890s she further developed her womanist ideology and realized that

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<sup>1</sup> “Women’s Christian Temperance Union, The Forthcoming Convention,’ April, 1894, SLAA.

the only way for women to uplift themselves was with the weapon of the ballot. Only through political power and influence could women cause real social change, and Ackerman believed they would not only uplift themselves but would improve all of humanity with their superior moral influence. The result would be equality for men and women and people of all classes, and eventually with women taking the lead, the world would finally eradicate war forever.

Throughout much of the twentieth century the significance of the WCTU to the suffrage movement was overlooked. Historians dismissed the WCTU as a conservative, religiously fanatical organization and focused mainly on the work and activities of suffragists. Their interpretation of the WCTU was limited, however, by only viewing it as part of the larger temperance movement. The broad range of its influence, its activities and reforms have been overlooked. Recently many feminist historians have begun to study the WCTU as a woman's organization, not just a temperance group. They have looked at the many different aspects of the Union and how it influenced society. One recent trend in the historiography of the WCTU has been to compare its significance to the suffrage movement with suffragist organizations. Many contemporary feminist historians have agreed that temperance women did just as much as, and in some cases more than, suffragists in the struggle to win votes for women. Ackerman's work within both movements, temperance and suffrage, supports these claims. Traveling the world for the cause of temperance, she also very tactfully spread the message that women needed the vote.

At the end of the nineteenth century the WCTU was the largest woman's organization in the world. It was the first mass women's movement. It appealed to

women across socioeconomic, racial, religious, and national identities and may have done more to politicize women's culture than any other group. Women like Ackerman, working through the WCTU, improved daily living conditions for women and children worldwide while also convincing the average woman of the need for suffrage. That is perhaps their greatest achievement within the suffrage movement. Before the WCTU took up the cause, suffrage was viewed as a radical reform. Most women could not identify with suffragists, but the WCTU was an acceptable, moderate, religious organization.

From the inception of the WCTU in 1874 suffrage was a controversial issue that caused internal conflict among the members. Some women wanted the Union to focus solely on the goal of prohibition through moral suasion. Others agreed that the legislative reform needed to implement prohibitory laws required woman's suffrage in order to succeed. They supported woman's suffrage, therefore, as a necessary step to winning the struggle for prohibition. At the second national convention in 1875, the members adopted a resolution on the issue, stating,

“Resolved, That since women are the greatest sufferers from the liquor traffic, and realizing that it is to be ultimately suppressed by means of the ballot, we, the Christian women of this land, in convention assembled, do pray almighty God, and all good and true men, that the question of the prohibition of the liquor traffic should be submitted to all adult citizens, irrespective of race, color, or sex.”<sup>2</sup>

This resolution, however, did not end the conflict over the issue. Many members, including the first president, Annie Wittenmeyer, did not want the WCTU to endorse woman's suffrage. A personal battle also began between Wittenmeyer and Frances Willard who was the first corresponding secretary for the Union. At the Fourth Annual

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<sup>2</sup> WCTU Annual Meeting Minutes, 1875, in Helen E. Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet* (Evanston, Ill.: The Signal Press, 1949), 40.

Convention in 1877, the 1875 resolution was challenged by Wittenmeyer and even advocates of the Home Protection Ballot who did not want to further align themselves with the radical suffrage movement. At the 1878 convention another resolution was passed, stating, “We are as an organization and have been from the first, thoroughly committed against in any way affiliating with the woman suffrage movement.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite this opposition, the majority of WCTU women showed their support of woman’s suffrage when they elected Willard as the second president in 1879. Willard’s victory over Wittenmeyer ushered in a new phase of the WCTU’s history. From 1879 to her death in 1898 she led the Union, broadening the range of its reforms, and including woman’s suffrage as a top priority.

In the beginning, due to public animosity towards woman suffrage, Willard focused on education as a means to improve the status of women; but she gradually began to mold majority opinion within the Union that suffrage was absolutely necessary for the improvement of women and for the success of prohibition. Though not all members agreed, Willard began to argue for the “Home Protection” ballot, a limited form of suffrage permitting women to vote in local liquor licensing decisions.<sup>4</sup> She argued that men, being the weaker sex, would not voluntarily reform themselves; therefore, it was up to women to act as “citizen-mothers” to protect their homes and cure society’s ills.<sup>5</sup> She said that the WCTU’s aim in supporting suffrage was to “bring women and temperance in contact with the problem of humanity’s heart-break and sin, to protect the home by prohibiting the saloon; and to police the state with men and women voters committed to

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<sup>3</sup> Annual Meeting Minutes, 1878, in Tyler, 47.

<sup>4</sup> Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women’s Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

the enforcement of righteous laws.”<sup>6</sup> Willard asked WCTU members to support suffrage because “the mother-heart,’ she argued, “must be enthroned in all places of power before its edicts will be heeded.”<sup>7</sup>

Although the national union officially endorsed woman’s suffrage and set up a department of work for the issue, it remained optional for state and local unions to adopt the line of work. Some women, more focused on temperance, thought the vote was unnecessary to their cause. They argued that women could have political influence without voting. For example, they could wear pins on election day that read, “we have no votes – vote for us!” Women property owners could sign petitions against saloons in their neighborhoods, and other women could influence their male friends and relatives who could vote and hold office. In order to pass prohibition laws, “No ballot is needed,” Priscilla Leonard wrote in *Harper’s Bazar*. “The present tactics are sure of victory.”<sup>8</sup>

Ackerman acknowledged that in an ideal world, Leonard’s view would be true. Men would do their duty by passing moral legislation that would protect their families and communities, freeing women to raise moral children. In this ideal world there would be no need for women to vote; their husbands would protect their interests. But Ackerman knew this was an unrealistic expectation. Some women did not have husbands to support and protect them. Others had husbands who were drunks, unemployed, abusive, or who had abandoned them and their children. What about the interests of these women? Ackerman concluded that men had failed to use their rights to better society. It

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<sup>6</sup> Meyer, Annie Nathan, ed. *Woman’s Work in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Comp., 1891, reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 403.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>8</sup> Priscilla Leonard, “Temperance and Woman Suffrage,” *Harper’s Bazar* 44 (April 1910), 289.

was now up to women, the morally superior sex, to reform society for the good of men and women.

Ackerman, Willard, and other Union members also realized that moral suasion had failed to transform society. The traditionally “female” forms of political change, such as the petition, although still used, were becoming less effective. The WCTU was one of the earliest groups to recognize that women needed the ballot.<sup>9</sup> Even in the 1850s, many temperance women had strong woman’s rights sentiments. Susan B. Anthony is an example. She became a supporter of woman suffrage after her temperance work.<sup>10</sup> It was also due to the WCTU’s endorsement of woman’s suffrage that many Protestant churches and leaders began to support the measure.

The WCTU continued to use traditional benevolent rhetoric but did not rely only on moral suasion. They also sought legislation to change men through prohibition laws, age of consent laws, and reformed marriage and divorce laws, just to name a few. Women needed the ballot to pass these laws because men would not reform themselves. Willard became a suffragist in the name of “home protection,” but she believed that women could change the world if armed with the ballot. She believed they would use their political power to eliminate class, poverty, discrimination, and war. Ackerman followed Willard’s lead, envisioning an ideal, peaceful world led by women.

Carol Mattingly wrote, “It is not mere coincidence that the woman’s suffrage amendment was added to the Constitution in 1920, one year after the passage of the prohibition amendment.”<sup>11</sup> Although they have been overshadowed by suffragists,

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<sup>9</sup> Lori D. Ginzberg, “‘Moral Suasion in moral balderdash’: Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s,” *Journal of American History* 73 (Dec., 1986), 603.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 606.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Mattingly, *Well-tempered Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 9.

WCTU women did as much, and possibly even more, to promote votes for women. When Willard took the lead, she began promoting a “Home Protection ballot” that would allow women to vote in local, liquor licensing decisions.<sup>12</sup> Although guided by different ideologies, the temperance and suffrage movements were the two most important groups to challenge the traditional subordinate status of women at home and in the public.<sup>13</sup> They had similarities and differences, but each group was necessary in the struggle for woman’s suffrage.

At this time, suffragists still alienated the majority of American women who viewed them as radicals. The WCTU seemed to be a more feminine and appropriate organization in which women could participate.<sup>14</sup> The main difference was the reason each group wanted the ballot. Suffragists argued for the vote as a universal human right. WCTU women argued they needed the vote to protect their interests as mothers and wives and to create social reform.<sup>15</sup> Janet Zollinger Giele wrote, “Compared with the suffragist branch of the feminist movement, the WCTU was more oriented to personal reform and the quality of domestic life than to far-reaching structural change in public life and social order.”<sup>16</sup> For this reason, they have been perceived as narrow-minded and conservative, but their arguments for the ballot appealed to a larger number of women than the suffragist argument. They introduced suffrage to many women who would otherwise never support such legislation, and they kept the sentiment alive. Furthermore,

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 118.

<sup>13</sup> Giele, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

women like Ackerman, while certainly interested in the quality of domestic life and the status of women as wives and mothers, also strongly believed that woman's suffrage would bring far-reaching structural changes in all aspects of society. Many temperance women felt the same way, but they have been overshadowed by their more conservative counterparts or perhaps dismissed simply because they belonged to a religious organization.

The WCTU could also easily answer the fear that women would abandon their families if they had the vote. They saw votes for women as a means to protect women, children, and families from a society of vice and corruption.<sup>17</sup> Today, the natural rights argument of the suffragists seems much more progressive than the expediency argument used by the WCTU. The WCTU argument emphasized the differences between men and women, which could be interpreted as the conservative, old argument of separate spheres, but it actually gave women new importance in public affairs.<sup>18</sup> Temperance workers believed women could uplift men and save the world from their wrongs. They emphasized their differences from and, in many ways, their superiority to men. Suffragists focused on the rights of men that women should also have.<sup>19</sup>

Some historians have argued that the ideology of the WCTU was not a genuine feminist vision. Barbara L. Epstein believed the WCTU often contradicted itself. She wrote, "Conventional morality and, for that matter, Home Protection implied the defense of what was in fact a male-dominated family structure."<sup>20</sup> One could just as easily argue that suffragists defended a male-dominated culture when they argued there was no

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 18-20.

<sup>20</sup> Epstein, 132.

difference between men and women, and to achieve equality women must enter a traditionally male sphere and exhibit traditionally male behaviors and values. The WCTU distanced itself from feminism because it was too controversial. In order to appeal to a broader audience, they often used conservative language that today is misinterpreted as a narrow-minded and traditional ideology. Their priorities were in immediate social reform, and they demanded the vote in order to uplift morality, not as an end in itself.<sup>21</sup> Although this old-fashioned morality hurt the WCTU in the twentieth century, especially after winning prohibition and suffrage, the WCTU was instrumental in bringing the suffrage issue to a broader audience.

Ackerman received a card from Susan B. Anthony in 1901 that read, “The one weapon with which to fight the saloon - the gambling houses, the brothels – is the ballot. The hatchet is the weapon of barbarism – and is pardonable only where the ballot is divided.”<sup>22</sup> This letter is an example of the two movements cooperating and supporting each other. Their membership often overlapped. For example, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked for temperance as well as suffrage.<sup>23</sup> Ackerman was also first a temperance activist and then a suffragist, but she quickly came to realize the two issues were inseparable. Her acceptance of woman’s suffrage was gradual. She wrote,

I was born, reared, and educated in a country where lunatics, idiots, convicts, Red Indians and women are declared by constitution and usage unfit for the gift of citizenship. I was cradled, nourished, and cherished in an atmosphere of belief that women had, of course, been properly classified. I, therefore, in common with the girls of my time, accepted it in the passive way usual upon subjects on which we were not informed, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony, Susan B., to Jessie Ackerman, 15 February 1901, SLAA.

<sup>23</sup> Giele, 85-6.

in which we had no voice: satisfied, although we were not even designated as 'people.'<sup>24</sup>

Ackerman did not remain satisfied for long. She began to accept votes for women after studying economics and realizing women's value in the home and in national life. She included woman's suffrage as part of her mission during her first round-the-world journey, and gradually the issue began to occupy a central place in her activism, even becoming more important than temperance after the turn of the century.

She was further influenced after spending six weeks in the East End of London working menial jobs. This experience led her to believe that social problems existed that could only be solved by women.<sup>25</sup> She argued that the franchise would not bring women into politics because they had always been involved. A woman participated in public life "...when she reads the newspaper, when she sits on the charity board, when she sends a loaf of bread to a poor drunkard's family, when her son puts his first money on a race horse, and when every other licensed evil threatens her home and happiness."<sup>26</sup>

Ackerman's first world mission was focused mainly on temperance, but woman's suffrage was equally important to her. The Australian national WCTU was founded and led by Ackerman in 1892 with an emphasis placed on woman's suffrage.<sup>27</sup> Ackerman arrived in Australia as the woman's movement was gaining speed. The temperance women of Australia welcomed her and wrote, "Let Australian women follow the Christian womanhood of America, who fifteen years ago became convinced that they must rise in all their power and might against the drunkenness and vice of father,

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<sup>24</sup> Ackerman, *Australia from a Woman's Point of View* (New York and London: Cassell and comp., 1913), 217-218.

<sup>25</sup> Ackerman, *What Women Have Done With the Vote* (New York: William B. Feakins, 1913), 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> "Western Australia Women's Roll of Honour," [www.php.highway1.com.au/wpo/search.php3?find=A2/11/02](http://www.php.highway1.com.au/wpo/search.php3?find=A2/11/02).

brothers, and sons...”<sup>28</sup> Frances Willard wrote that Ackerman developed the WCTU of Australia to become the “strongest moral force in the country,” which was “federated into a National Organization of which Miss Ackerman was the first president.”<sup>29</sup> Local unions had operated since 1885, but due to Ackerman’s powerful lectures, a national Union was formed in 1892.<sup>30</sup> She quickly led the Australian women to reach goals no other women’s group had met. In 1894, New Zealand became the first nation to enfranchise women. All of Australia followed in 1901.<sup>31</sup> The organized feminist movement in Australia was created and directed by WCTU women, and they followed the American model. By 1891, the Victorian WCTU had gathered 30,000 signatures for a woman’s suffrage petition, and only in Sydney was a Woman’s Suffrage League not led by temperance women.<sup>32</sup>

Ackerman wrote of her experiences there in 1913 in *Australia From a Woman’s Point of View*. It was the first book written on the young nation from a woman’s point of view. Ackerman wrote on the process of social evolution taking place in Australia and how women had contributed as equal citizens with men in the formation of the country. Her knowledge of many different forms of government and her interest in social and industrial issues are apparent from her work. The formation of the Australian government was a social experiment and a huge opportunity for women. She called it “Eve’s paradise re-discovered.”<sup>33</sup> Ackerman felt that innovations in democratic and socialistic legislation

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<sup>28</sup> Second and Third Year’s Report of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of South Australia. 1887 and 1888. SLAA.

<sup>29</sup> Frances E. Willard, “Miss Jessie A. Ackerman. Round the World Missionary of the World’s W.C.T.U.,” n.d., SLAA.

<sup>30</sup> Joyce R. Henderson, *The Strength of White Ribbon* (West Perth, Western Australia: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Western Australia, 1992), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Giele, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists: Women’s Emancipation Movements in Europe, America, and Australasia, 1840-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 60-61.

<sup>33</sup> Jessie Ackerman, *Australia*, 69.

were needed in order to avoid the evils of the Old World.<sup>34</sup> She wrote, “Australia... must be acknowledged as the coming country for ‘the people.’”<sup>35</sup> She believed the influence of Australian women was needed in order to set the young nation on the right course, however, women did not possess the most crucial tool necessary to achieve their goals, the vote.

From the mid 1880s the WCTU was the most important national and international organization that supported the suffrage movement in Australia. When Ackerman arrived in 1889, she began working to unify women across class and party lines. In order to attract a broader audience she used the expediency argument and stressed the advantages politically active women would bring to the nation as morally superior beings. At the same time she made sure to stress the importance of women’s roles as homemakers, wives, and mothers in order to answer fears that women would abandon these roles once they got the vote.

For Ackerman the two issues of temperance and woman’s suffrage were inseparable. She could not talk about one without referring to the other. In Australia she was a great motivator. At the 1889 WCTU Colonial Convention, the South Australian delegation, influenced by Ackerman’s visit, declared that “as the franchise is the symbol of freedom, and half the members of our nation are deprived of that right, we petition our Legislature to enfranchise the women of South Australia.”<sup>36</sup> As she continued her tour of Australia, each colonial union found similar strength from Ackerman and included suffrage as one of their departments of work. She had a huge impact on Australian

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>36</sup> Kirsten Lees, *Votes for Women. The Australian Story* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1995), 17.

women, and they never forgot her for it. Two Western Australian women wrote a letter of thanks to Ackerman in 1912. It read, “I wished an opportunity to say to the public that woman’s franchise in Australia owes its present position to you more than to any other single person. Your visit gave the initiation and the impetus to woman’s public work in Australia. Until you came there had been (as far as I can recollect) only one public meeting in Perth promoted by a woman.”<sup>37</sup>

Ackerman wrote a book in 1913 entitled *What Women Have Done With the Vote* in which she evaluates the affect votes for women had on several nations. She wrote that the book was not a discussion of the justification of granting suffrage to women because that was already an accepted fact. Because the woman question was such a critical issue at the time, she visited countries in which women already had the vote to see what affect this had on national life and whether there was a decline in domestic interests and women in the home. She spent the most time in Australia and wrote that she had the authority to evaluate women’s enfranchisement because she was “in close touch with every phase of the franchise movement, both as to the efforts in securing citizenship and also the results of the practical operation of women in politics...”<sup>38</sup> Ackerman wrote that suffrage was granted earlier in New Zealand and Australia because enfranchisement for women was more accepted in a new land. In New Zealand, she found that women took voting seriously, and they used it to realize the ideals of the nation and to uplift humanity. The most important factor leading to this success was that women truly wanted the vote and led the fight. It was not forced upon them, and they were not manipulated and used by

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<sup>37</sup> Letter to Ackerman, 19 March 1912, SLAA.

<sup>38</sup> Jessie Ackerman, *What Women Have Done With the Vote*, 5.

political parties.<sup>39</sup> She wrote, “One of the impelling motives to claim citizenship for women in New Zealand was a firm belief that women would in some effective way deal with the liquor traffic. It is a well-known fact, which may be stated without one being accused of trying to preach a temperance sermon, that women and children are the greatest sufferers from the curse of strong drink.”<sup>40</sup>

Some achievements gained by New Zealand women were uniform divorce laws for men and women. Legal separation was now easier and inexpensive, protecting women from “worthless husbands.” Labor laws were also enacted, fixing the hours of labor, improving conditions, and establishing a minimum wage.<sup>41</sup> Ackerman concluded that votes for women in New Zealand had a moral influence on the country, and there was little or no criticism towards the new legislation.

As in New Zealand, Ackerman found that only “lunatics, idiots, and women” were excluded from politics in Australia.<sup>42</sup> But the situation in Australia differed from many other countries. Women were granted the vote in some colonies such as Western Australia before public sentiment demanded it, and they were manipulated by political parties because they were unprepared for full citizenship. Australian, feminist historians today are focused on refuting the claim that Australian women were handed the vote without a fight. They argue that Australian women faced a long, hard fight similar to their American counterparts. Ackerman expressed mixed feelings on this issue. In *Australia from a Woman’s Point of View* she wrote that in some colonies women were given the vote without much of a fight or for less than honorable reasons. For example, in some

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 21.

colonies women were granted citizenship on the same conditions as men; therefore, they had to meet certain property qualifications to vote. Legislators granted these women the vote, not to help women, but to give property owners more political influence.

Few women voted in some early local elections. Some even expressed indifference to the subject. Their lack of participation prompted harsh criticism. Ackerman answered the charges when she wrote, “Men have been citizens for hundreds of years, and are directly responsible for all defects of our social order, and yet the moment woman is dragged without asking for it (in Australia) from political seclusion to which usage has neglected her, the world expects her over-night to remedy the results of centuries of bad legislation.”<sup>43</sup> Ackerman also identified two types of women voters, those who wanted the vote and fought for it, and those who did not. The latter, usually wives who were well provided for, saw citizenship as a burden. The remedy was through education, and by the time federal enfranchisement was passed in 1901 women had developed the skills necessary to exercise their political rights. They demanded equality not only in voting, but in all things.

The situation was very different in other colonies, such as Victoria, where women demanded the vote and fought hard for it. Victorian women were the last to become enfranchised. When they did get the state franchise, they polled the largest percentage of votes cast by women in any state.<sup>44</sup>

Kirsten Lees wrote that Jessie Ackerman had “an enormous impact on the votes for women movement in Australia.”<sup>45</sup> She formed unions and franchise departments in every colony, always stressing the link between the union’s goals and votes for women.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>44</sup> Ackerman, *Australia*, 213.

She organized the first colonial convention of the WCTU in Melbourne, which declared its commitment to votes for women, created a suffrage department, and appointed a national suffrage supervisor. The suffrage department united the colonies and became the most important division of the WCTU. The WCTU was a large, prominent organization. It published its own newspapers and had the support of many churches and politicians. “By linking the issues of temperance and votes for women,” Lees wrote, “the union was able to reach a much wider cross-section of women than were some of the suffrage groups.”<sup>46</sup>

In Australia, Ackerman was extremely outspoken on the subject of woman’s suffrage; and she often used very bold tactics to spread her message, such as leading a delegation of women into the premier’s office in Western Australia and speaking to crowds of men and women in the streets. A “speaking woman” was very controversial and unusual at the time. Australian historians have remembered Ackerman as a pioneer for women’s rights in Australia because of her courage and uniqueness; but she has not been remembered by American historians, who continue to credit suffragists, not temperance women, for the passage of the Nineteenth amendment. There are several reasons for this. First, historians of today tend to dismiss religious organizations as being conservative. The WCTU especially has often been overlooked as a fanatical organization of old women. The suffragists seem much more progressive and radical by today’s standards. But some of Ackerman’s statements and actions have also contributed to her dismissal as an important woman’s rights leader.

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<sup>45</sup> Lees, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 93.

Some statements by Ackerman definitely do not sound very progressive or radical. During her second visit to Australia she said of the WCTU, “We are not a woman’s suffrage society and our objects are not to take women out of their homes. What we desire is to secure their influence in their own homes.”<sup>47</sup> This hardly sounds like a radical statement by today’s standards. Even though Ackerman claimed women had “discovered themselves” in the nineteenth century, she also insisted that their duty was always to the home first. She argued that women should follow the example of Christ and self-sacrifice for the good of their families and communities.<sup>48</sup>

The WCTU has also been criticized for defending Victorian morality and demanding sexual purity for women, arguing that sexual freedom would undermine family life and women themselves. Ackerman may have demanded sexual purity for women, but she also pointed out the sexual double standard. She was very critical of laws that punished men and women differently for similar crimes. For example, a prostitute was often fined or imprisoned, while the male customer was given a slap on the wrist at best. She worked very hard to raise the age of consent law, arguing that girls at age sixteen could not sell any possessions but could sell their virtue on the streets. “Girls will never be properly protected in this or any other country until women, as citizens, make it their business to see that proper laws are enacted.”<sup>49</sup> Ackerman argued that men would not reform themselves. Barbara L. Epstein wrote, “Only female equality would ensure responsible male behavior and give family issues their proper place in public life.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “Miss Jessie Ackerman, An Interview,” n.d., SLAA.

<sup>48</sup> “Miss Ackerman’s Mission,” 6 April 1892, SLAA.

<sup>49</sup> Ackerman, *Australia*, 231.

<sup>50</sup> Epstein, 129.

Ackerman also often sacrificed one issue for the sake of another. For example, she sometimes claimed that women in Australia, if granted the ballot, would not seek public office, a main fear of many men. “Women do not particularly want to hold office,” she said, “they are not office seekers, but they do want women and children to have the consideration and justice due them.”<sup>51</sup> She was never reluctant, however, to point out the positive results of women voting. “In Australia,” she wrote, “through the women’s legislation children born out of wedlock are not longer ‘illegitimate children,’ the fathers are ‘illegitimate fathers’ instead.”<sup>52</sup> This was just one of many examples of women’s moral influence on politics.

Ackerman was always wise enough to pick her battles. In China, she omitted suffrage work from her mission. *The Bangkok Times* reported, “While earnestly advocating the cause of Temperance, Miss Ackerman states that Woman’s Suffrage forms no part of her programme. By making this avowel we feel sure that the lady will claim the respect and attention of Bangkok people...”<sup>53</sup> She understood that the needs of women in China and Australia were completely different. In China, she was more concerned with the immediate needs of very poor women. They needed food, shelter, and protection from abusive men first. When she returned to China in 1914 and again in the 1930s, after women had made much progress in education, she included woman’s suffrage as part of her reform agenda.

Ackerman may also be considered conservative because she was critical of the British militant suffragists, usually declining from commenting on their tactics; however,

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<sup>51</sup> “‘Women are Not Office Seekers’ Miss Ackerman,” n.d., SLAA.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *The Bangkok Times*, 18 December 1889, SLAA.

when she did express her opinion it was clear that she had mixed feelings about her English sisters. While she claimed she was not in sympathy with them, she also pointed out the reasons for their militant tactics. “You must know,” she said, “that there are 5,500,000 women in England who work for less than 2 [lbs] a. week. You must know, too, that the Suffrage bill has been in Parliament for forty years...”<sup>54</sup> Although she may not have supported their strategy, she certainly understood their plight. Ackerman lived and worked among the poorest classes of English women in order to try and understand the suffrage fight there. This experience seems to have caused her to change her opinion of the militants, even if she remained reluctant to share those opinions. She said, “After living in the East End of England, I was more than ever convinced that woman suffrage is the soundest principle in political economy.”<sup>55</sup>

Although she often used conservative language throughout the 1890s, she became much more outspoken on the suffrage issue after living in the London slums. She began to write more on suffrage than on temperance, even modifying her argument somewhat from expediency to natural rights. In “The Twentieth Century Woman,” a series of four articles by Ackerman, she wrote on the place of woman in the state.

Woman at the ballot box is a settled question, regardless of what an individual’s views may be upon the subject. It is only a matter of time – and a very short time – when the franchise will be extended to every woman in the land. From the standpoint of simple justice, the ballot belongs to woman, and when this argument is the basis for suffrage, well and good.<sup>56</sup>

She felt less inclined to associate woman’s suffrage with home protection. Now, she began to argue that votes for women would cure many of society’s ills. She still did

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<sup>54</sup> “Woman’s Voice,” *Australian Christian World*, n.d., SLAA.

<sup>55</sup> “Girl Traveler Talks Suffrage,” n.d., SLAA.

<sup>56</sup> “The Twentieth Century Woman,” n.d., SLAA.

not openly express support for women officeholders, but she was leading in that direction. She questioned the judgement of male voters and pointed to society's many problems as evidence. She argued that women were morally more developed than men, and to answer the fear that women would not know how to use political power she wrote, "The very worst of blunders of women at the ballot box could not bring about a greater degree of general corruption and disaster than that produced by the male voter."<sup>57</sup>

Ackerman also began to defend more militant suffragists, forgiving their methods because of what they were fighting for. And through it all she kept her amazing sense of humor. After Australian women won the fight for woman's suffrage in 1901, Ackerman spoke to a group of women there and marveled that she was in a land where women were citizens. She spoke about the United States and said,

In our country, it is said, we have a government of the people, for the people, by the people. The women said, 'We are people, aren't we?', but the men said, 'No, we don't think you are.' So we sent a committee of women up to Congress to ask if we were people. Our committee said, 'Now, gentlemen, we want to know if we are people,' The committee appointed by Congress to meet us looked grave and said, 'We will take into consideration ladies.' (Laughter) At the end of three days they again met the women and said, 'After serious consideration it is our belief that the framers of the Constitution, when they said people meant it for men.' (Laughter) They never told us what we are, and we don't know today.<sup>58</sup>

Ackerman's humor was a constant strength in her lectures. No matter how serious or frustrating the issues became, she was always able to connect to the audience in this way.

When Ackerman set out to travel the world she was determined to find out what women were, whether they were people or not. In most places she found that women,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> "The Suffragettes, A Word in Defence, How Miss Ackerman Sees Them," n.d., SLAA.

along with lunatics, idiots, and savages, were not considered people by their governments. She began to believe that the only remedy was through woman's suffrage, even if the methods were sometimes unconventional or even radical.

Ackerman realized that suffrage, although a very important goal for women, was not in itself going to solve all of their inequalities. To an interviewer she said, "Women have advanced along all the lines of cultural and social development far more rapidly than the most sanguine of us could have anticipated a few years ago," and "suffrage is just one phase of the change..."<sup>59</sup> Even after suffrage was won in the United States, she argued it would be useless unless women armed themselves with the knowledge necessary to use it. It was not enough just to get the vote; women had to inform themselves and get involved.

*What Women Have Done With the Vote* provided evidence that women, when armed with the vote, could effect social change and improve the quality of life for women, children, and their nation. The enfranchisement of women was a significant part of Ackerman's worldwide mission, especially in Australia where she is considered the first and the most prominent suffrage leader. But Ackerman did not see the vote as an end in itself but rather as a tool to carry out more important social changes. She worked tirelessly to achieve these changes throughout her life. In New Zealand, she was not only concerned with the effects of alcohol on women but also because of its negative effects on the native population.<sup>60</sup> In Australia, she spoke out against the evils of gambling, which was a favorite past-time of all classes, including men, women, and children. She was disturbed by large numbers of women who played cards and bet at the races.

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<sup>59</sup> "Woman's Voice," *Australian Christian World*, n.d., SLAA.

<sup>60</sup> Ackerman, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, 79.

Interestingly, she concluded that "...women are more easily demoralised than men, or that the latter have already reached the limit."<sup>61</sup>

Ackerman also wrote on the effects of women voting in Finland, Norway, and China. The women of Finland got the vote after their country was released from Russian control. Their constitution, restored in 1905, demanded complete suffrage for all adults twenty-five years and older.<sup>62</sup> Ackerman attended a session of the Finnish Parliament, which included a significant number of women, and found "...they took their part in national housekeeping with an intelligent dignity which is certainly a credit to womankind."<sup>63</sup> She was impressed with the women in Parliament who had introduced bills concerning the poor, government midwives, and the prohibition of alcohol.<sup>64</sup> Ackerman also found the women of Norway and China using their new citizenship status.

Ruth Bordin, one of the first historians to compare WCTU members with suffragists, wrote, "Perhaps instead of being criticized for its oblique approach to the suffrage question, the Union should be credited with putting the focus of feminism on reform, on social feminism rather than the ballot, on emphasizing suffrage as only the means to a broader end."<sup>65</sup> The WCTU's endorsement of suffrage heightened women's personal and civic consciousness, and many women learned the practice of politics for the first time. Women like Ackerman had an impact on women's movements throughout the world. She is certainly an example of a Union woman emphasizing suffrage as only the means to a much broader end. She envisioned a world with no discrimination based

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<sup>61</sup> Ackerman, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View*, 53.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>65</sup> Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance, The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 158-159.

on class, gender, and to an extent, race. With temperance reform and woman's suffrage she believed women could lead the way to forming this perfect society. Although her language sometimes seems conservative and could be mistakenly associated with the cult of true womanhood, Ackerman was wise enough to know she needed the support of mainstream women's, religious, and political organizations. As evidenced by her comments on the British militants, she believed radical tactics would only delay her goals. As a result of her methods, she appealed to women across socioeconomic, racial, religious, and even national identities, influencing the suffrage movement worldwide.

## CHAPTER 4

### A TEMPERATE FEMINIST? ACKERMAN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO FEMINISM AND WOMAN'S RIGHTS

Jessie Ackerman, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's second round-the-world missionary, traveled around the world to promote the cause of temperance and world peace. She also worked diligently for the advancement of women throughout the world. Working mostly during the 1890s, for an organization that has often been labeled as a religiously fanatic, conservative group, and even before the word 'feminism' was coined, can Ackerman be considered a feminist? At first glance the answer seems to be no, but a careful examination of Ackerman's life, her ideology, her reform activities, and her writing provides evidence that she had many feminist characteristics. Ackerman can be considered a feminist in many ways. Her main goal was to improve the status and condition of women worldwide. She believed the first step to achieving this goal was through temperance reform, for women bore the abuse from alcoholic husbands. She also promoted reform measures such as woman's suffrage, uniform marriage and divorce laws, raising the age of consent, shelters for abused women, and improved education for women and girls. Ackerman believed the nineteenth century was the "Woman's century," claiming, "...the girl has been misunderstood. The world has accepted the verdict that women think in 'flocks,' that they can have no individuality of opinion. And yet I have found this 'flock' theory to be entirely false."<sup>1</sup> Ackerman confronted the woman question head on and aimed to prove that women, like men, were individuals who deserved the same social, political, and human rights. All women were not the same, and although she

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<sup>1</sup> Jessie Ackerman, "The Century of the Girl," Sherrod Library, Archives of Appalachia, Jessie Ackerman Collection, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, (subsequently referred to as SLAA).

considered it the noblest profession, they were not all content to be mothers and wives. She wanted to give them control over their own destinies, whatever role they chose.

Ackerman and other WCTU women have feminist characteristics because their main objective was to improve the condition and status of women through social reform. This argument satisfies the criteria of feminist historians today who judge all women of the past on their status as feminists or anti-feminists. This question has dominated women's history recently, and while it is an interesting and worthwhile question to ask, it should not be the only measure of a woman's worth. This chapter addresses that question, but also goes one step further and asks a broader question. Should Ackerman be judged on her status as a feminist? And does this label adequately describe such a complex woman who had so many diverse interests throughout her life?

Throughout much of the twentieth century the WCTU has been misunderstood by historians who have studied it only as part of the larger prohibition movement. By focusing on just one of its many reform issues, historians have overlooked the Union's ideology, methodology, and its significance to the women's rights movement. The main interpretation of the Union has been one of failure because prohibition failed. Its members have been labeled as conservative, religiously fanatic old women whose main goal was a desperate attempt to impose their Protestant, middle-class values on the rest of society. Joseph Gusfield wrote extensively on the WCTU in the mid-twentieth century and contributed to this narrow interpretation of the Union in works such as *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. Gusfield wrote, "The Eighteenth Amendment was the high point of the struggle to assert the public dominance

of old middle-class values.”<sup>2</sup> Other works that have contributed to this interpretation include Jack S. Blocker’s *Retreat From Reform: The Prohibition Movement in the United States, 1890-1913* in which he views Union members as prohibitionists who wanted to create a middle-class cultural consensus and extend it to lower and upper classes.<sup>3</sup> Their arguments may be narrowly true, but they do not capture the essence of the Union. They focus on only one aspect of the WCTU while it actually made a greater impact in many other areas.

Only recently have historians begun to study the WCTU itself instead of identifying it as part of the prohibition movement. Researchers of social, religious, and women’s history have reexamined the Union as being crucial to understanding developments in each of these areas. Most importantly, they are asking what the Union did for women, and many have concluded that the WCTU can be considered a feminist organization. In *Well-Tempered Women*, Carol Mattingly argues that temperance women have been mistakenly associated with the cult of true womanhood and because the WCTU was a religious organization it is not seen as progressive by today’s standards. She also claims that the WCTU is misinterpreted as conservative because they chose careful language in order to convince the average woman of the need for suffrage. She wrote, “It is not mere coincidence that the woman’s suffrage amendment was added to the Constitution in 1920, one year after the passage of the prohibition amendment.”<sup>4</sup> Mattingly argues that temperance women were just as, if not more, important than

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Jack S. Blocker, *Retreat From Reform: The Prohibition Movement in the United States, 1890-1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 9.

suffragists to the women's rights movement. Ackerman spent much of her time working for temperance and women's rights in Australia. Researchers of Australian women's history have come to similar conclusions recently and have credited the WCTU with contributing significantly to the early suffrage victory there.<sup>5</sup>

This recent interpretation of the WCTU may pose new questions and use new language, such as the word 'feminist,' but it is actually a return to the initial interpretation of the WCTU given by members themselves. Since its founding in 1874, its members have written extensively on the Union's activities, ideology, goals, and successes. They made many of the same conclusions that historians are making today. What has changed the most is language, which brings up another important question. Can the word 'feminist' be applied to a woman who lived and worked before the word was even coined?

There has been an ongoing debate over the last few years over the definition of the word 'feminist,' as well as how it should be used. Nancy F. Cott, the leading scholar on this issue, said it best when she wrote, "Feminism is nothing if not paradoxical. It aims for individual freedoms by mobilizing sex solidarity. It acknowledges diversity among women while positing that women recognize their unity. It requires gender consciousness for its basis, yet calls for the elimination of prescribed gender roles."<sup>6</sup> Because of this paradox, scholars have struggled to agree on an exact definition for feminism. Does a feminist stress her differences from men, or does she strive to demonstrate her similarities with men?

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<sup>5</sup> Kirsten Lees, *Votes for Women: The Australian Story* (St. Leonards, Aust.: Allen and Unwin, 1995); Joyce R. Henderson, *The Strength of White Ribbon* (West Perth, WA: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Western Australia, 1992); Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Ackerman is a perfect example of this paradox, which makes it so difficult to categorize her and the WCTU. She definitely recognized the differences between men and women, often claiming that women were superior morally and spiritually. She argued that women were better suited to carry out social reform because they were mothers. She even argued that their most important role in society was as mothers, but she did not limit them to this role. But because she stressed this traditional role for women, she and others like her have been dismissed by some feminist historians. So, the question remains, what is a feminist? The term was first used in 1919, a year before the suffrage amendment was ratified. Since then, it has not disappeared, but its meaning has changed over time.<sup>7</sup> Even through all those changes, the women's movement today is still focused on similar issues such as child care, violence against women, and equal employment, all issues that Ackerman dealt with as well. From the beginning, the women's movement has had a set or sets of ethics having to do with justice, equality, and virtue. Today, however, those similarities are being overlooked by people who point to the many differences between various women's groups. They are broken down into specific categories and labeled social, domestic, radical, Marxist, or liberal feminists. But despite their differences these women can also be categorized by their common traits.

In general, they share one goal, to be free from and equal to men. They also agree that woman's status has been socially constructed, rather than predestined by God, so it can change through social reform. Finally, they see women not only as a biological group

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Cott, "Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: The Past Before Us," in *What is Feminism*, Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 49.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Sapiro, "Feminism: A Generation Later," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 515 (May, 1991), 21.

but also as a social group that should bind together to affect change.<sup>8</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that these similarities should be the defining feature of feminism. Rather than one moral or ethical theory of feminism, she sees overlapping theories.<sup>9</sup> She addressed the question of women's sameness with or difference from men, writing, "There are feminists who embrace a strong notion of women's difference and others who reject any such idea as itself sexist. Feminism remains an essentially contested concept."<sup>10</sup> But Bethke argues that all women have been victims of oppressive social institutions, and when they fight their oppressors they can be considered feminists.

Other historians have also questioned the necessity of assuming unity within feminism. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley agree that all forms of feminism are paradoxical because they require gender consciousness but want to eliminate difference. They wrote, "Can feminism be defined simply by virtue of its object of concern – women? Is it not feminist to profess an interest in human welfare more generally?"<sup>11</sup> Ackerman would have agreed with this statement. She would also have agreed with the argument that women have more in common than not. Using this assessment, the question of whether or not Ackerman can be considered a feminist is resolved. Even though the language has changed, the issues have remained the same. Ackerman's work within the WCTU and afterwards will provide evidence that she had feminist characteristics, but she was also much more than that narrow description implies.

A graduate in the early 1880s of the University of California at Berkeley,

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Ethics in the Women's Movement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 515 (May, 1991), 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *What is Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 3.

Ackerman was part of a group of young educated women who found they had few options after college.<sup>12</sup> Like many others she found a place in the progressive reform movements that were emerging at the time. She was influenced by her mother who participated in the Great Crusade of the 1870s that led to the formation of the WCTU and spent most of her youth studying, traveling, and working for various reforms. She had an insatiable thirst for knowledge from an early age. Her curiosity about the world never waned. She continued to enroll in university classes whenever she could throughout her lifetime. Ackerman thought about teaching for awhile, an acceptable occupation for a woman, but she quickly discovered she was not content in this limited role. She wanted to see the world and to make a difference. Today, she probably would have become a sociologist. The WCTU provided her with an outlet. She became the second world's missionary and thus began her career as a reformer, suffragist, journalist, and lecturer.

Her early experience with the Good Templars prepared her to become a missionary for the WCTU. Ackerman's activities during her travels centered around temperance reform and the advancement of women. The WCTU sent her mainly to establish new temperance unions throughout the globe, but Ackerman could not separate temperance and women's political autonomy. Men consumed the alcohol, and women were left politically and socially powerless to defend themselves from the consequences. The only solution was to uplift women and give them the authority to control their lives. This authority was needed in many different areas. Women needed control over their bodies and within their marriages. They needed control over their future through educational and occupational opportunities. This would also give them economic power,

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<sup>12</sup> Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied By Portraits of Leading American Women In All Walks of Life*

which was essential to their freedom. They needed protection from drunken husbands and unfair laws. These are all issues that Ackerman faced and that feminists today are still confronting. To effect change in all these areas, Ackerman saw the need for one crucial tool. Women had to be armed with the ballot in order to uplift themselves. While many women, even within the WCTU, shied away from this controversial issue, Ackerman made woman's suffrage part of her worldwide mission.

First, women needed control over their bodies. Ackerman found women throughout the world, especially in underdeveloped nations, who were sexually abused or exploited. On her first WCTU mission Ackerman visited Alaska to study the condition of native women there. She was very critical of white American men working there who exploited native women and then abandoned them. She blamed white men for the poor condition and status of Alaskan women, evidence that Ackerman firmly believed in fundamental rights for women.

After Alaska, Ackerman left for her first journey around the world. Her goal was always to study the condition of women, especially native women, and to find ways to improve their status in society. Ackerman believed her help was needed in underdeveloped lands more than in Christian America. She admonished English-speaking women for complaining about a lack of opportunity when they should have been using the opportunity they did have to save the underprivileged women of the world. In this regard, she can even be considered a more radical feminist than most. "English-speaking women," she asserted, "are the recipients of more courtesy and greater civility than those

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(Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 4.

of any other race or tongue.”<sup>13</sup> She was concerned with the rights of all women, but she believed the needs of the underprivileged far outweighed those of middle-class America.

Ackerman was also concerned with the sexual exploitation of women in Asia. The WCTU has been credited with introducing ideas of liberation and equality in Africa and Asia, and Ackerman spent a lot of her time traveling in these areas and lecturing and writing on the condition of African and Asian women.<sup>14</sup> She found some of the most degraded women in China. She addressed one issue that is still a major concern today, the disregard of female life. While in China, Ackerman saw a “baby tower” that was still standing but no longer used for discarding baby girls. Although the practice had died out somewhat, the destruction of female life was still not a crime. Ackerman was just as disturbed that she found two dead children by a riverbank on her first visit that caused little concern among the villagers.<sup>15</sup> For middle and upper class Chinese women the first step to physical freedom was outlawing the practice of foot-binding. Ackerman found one woman willing to remove her bandages and display her feet. They had been wrapped since she was a young girl, and the toes had drawn under the sole where they began to grow.<sup>16</sup> Foot-binding was supposed to leave women with very small feet, which Chinese men found attractive. In order to meet this standard of beauty women deformed themselves and most were left crippled for the rest of their lives. Many never walked again. Ackerman was horrified by this practice, and she wrote and lectured on foot-binding extensively throughout her career.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>14</sup> Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ackerman, *The World*, 156.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 151-52.

In order to give women control over their bodies, Ackerman realized that marriage and divorce laws had to be reformed. For example, in Japan divorce was easy to obtain for men. They only had to give one of seven reasons for divorcing their wives, including if she talked too much, and were not legally responsible for economic support afterwards. In contrast, Ackerman emphasized, “Under no circumstance or plea can a woman get a divorce from her husband.”<sup>17</sup> Women were left powerless to defend themselves against abusive husbands or against husbands who neglected their financial obligations to their families. Another problem in Japan was polygamy. If a wife was unable to give her husband the number of children he desired, he could take on one or two “handmaids.”<sup>18</sup> Under these conditions, Japanese women were little more than baby machines. They had no authority over their bodies or within their marriages. They even had no authority over their children.

Ackerman also found the practice of polygamy in Africa. African women were commodities to their husbands, performing all the hard labor. “When a man is the happy possessor of three or four wives,” she asserted, “it means support and laziness for the rest of his life. He places the same value on a wife that he would on any live stock.”<sup>19</sup> She found the African men she encountered unintelligent and lazy, their only goal to obtain cattle so they could purchase additional wives.

Ackerman’s opinions on the institution of marriage were also forward thinking for the times. She understood the inequalities some women endured in unhappy marriages. The women she found in Asia and Africa were suffering because of these inequalities. She may not have found the practice of foot-binding or polygamy in more developed

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

countries, but these women were also trapped in unequal relationships. In an article on the newly formed League of Nations she commented that the league had failed because not all nations had been included, but she also recognized the potential it had to standardize the position of women throughout the world. She hoped the league would take measures to standardize the marriage ceremony, claiming, “Such a service would respect the right of women and establish them upon an equal basis with men in all respects.”<sup>20</sup>

Ackerman herself never married, devoting her entire life to reform. “We women who do not marry miss something, perhaps,” but she reasoned, “we are spared many things.”<sup>21</sup> Although she sometimes expressed sadness and loneliness at being an “old maid”, she also suggested in her writing that she accepted other forms of marriage that were considered extremely radical at the time. While in Africa, Ackerman visited Olive Schreiner, an advocate of woman’s rights and an author whom she greatly admired. Ackerman accepted Schreiner’s unconventional marriage, even commenting acidly that her intelligence was not lost in her union like so many other wives. Of Schreiner she noted, “The same elements that gave her the courage to dip her pen in a new color of ink, as it were, and give her convictions to the world – which were only new in so far that she was brave enough to write them – these elements will always maintain for her a striking personality.”<sup>22</sup> Schreiner’s convictions included egalitarian marriage, something Ackerman believed all women hoped for but were reluctant to demand. Schreiner’s

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>20</sup> Ackerman, Newspaper clipping, SLAA.

<sup>21</sup> “Lincoln Visitor Has Received Diploma from Geographical Society for Being the Most Traveled Woman in the World,” Lincoln, Nebraska newspaper, 15 July, 1928, sec. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ackerman, *The World*, 291.

husband even took her last name. Ackerman thought most men would never accept this arrangement, but most men were not as strong as Mr. Schreiner.<sup>23</sup>

Ackerman seemed to approve of the Schreiner's relationship because she realized that even most middle and upper class women suffered from unequal marriages. In Australia, she was concerned for mothers in distant settlements who lacked medical care. Like some women's rights activists today, she argued that the state should value mothers more and provide them with medical services.<sup>24</sup> While Ackerman believed mothering was the most appropriate role for women, she also saw the need for reform of this role. She vehemently defended mothers' most sacred right, to decide when to have a child. At the time, opponents of woman's rights blamed the movement for the decline in the birth-rate, which was traditionally seen as a measure of a nation's strength. They argued that women would even abandon their families if they were given the ballot or new opportunities. Ackerman answered these accusations, saying the decline was due to women's newfound understanding of how great the responsibility of mothering was. She argued it was becoming more difficult to raise many children, primarily because it was becoming more expensive.<sup>25</sup> By limiting the number of births, she stressed, women would devote more time and attention to fewer children. Like many women today, she also pointed out that mothers made all of the sacrifices when having children. Fathers did not fully realize the burdens of homemaking, and society did not reward women for fulfilling this traditional role. She also questioned the lack of legislation preventing

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ackerman, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View* (New York and London: Cassell and Comp., 1913), 61.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 94.

procreation of the unfit, pointing out that in lower life the unfit are destroyed.<sup>26</sup> This was not atypical. In fact, many advocates of birth control, including Margaret Sanger, also supported and promoted the new “science” of eugenics, as did many other Progressives and Socialists. Sanger marveled that “anyone, no matter how ignorant, how diseased mentally or physically, how lacking in knowledge of children, seemed to consider he or she had the right to become a parent.”<sup>27</sup> Ackerman agreed that like doctors and lawyers, parents should not apply for the position without being adequately qualified.

Ackerman also realized that economic independence was necessary to make any meaningful and lasting changes for women. In an article on the condition of South American women she pointed out that their lack of money was contributing to their poor status. With a typically understated sarcasm, she noted, “That is one of the characteristics of the start of a woman’s movement. Women have no purse and no place to put it. I sometimes think that there is a conspiracy between the husbands and the tailors so that women shall not have pockets in their clothes.”<sup>28</sup> Without economic independence women would always be bound to men. Uniform marriage and divorce laws would be useless if women had no economic opportunity outside of marriage. Being financially independent herself, Ackerman must have realized the freedom and increased status this would give women. The WCTU did not finance Ackerman’s travels. She supported herself by lecturing and writing.

In addition to economic independence, Ackerman believed women must have political power in order to protect their interests. For this reason, she championed

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Sanger, *Margaret Sanger: Pioneering Advocate for Birth Control, An Autobiography* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1938; reprint, New York: Cooper Square Press, 1999), 195.

<sup>28</sup> Ackerman, “Rise of Club Movements,” SLAA.

woman's suffrage. Only armed with the ballot would women throughout the world be able to uplift themselves. Although Ackerman's main mission was temperance reform, she could not separate this from women's political autonomy. She is best known by Australian women's historians as a pioneer of women's suffrage there. Kirsten Lees wrote, "Jessie Ackerman's views on women's rights were as outspoken as any expressed today. Women and work, women's right to fair pay, women as sex objects in advertising, women and the law, women's right to education, and women's right to vote were all regular themes in her lecturing and writing."<sup>29</sup> Lees wrote of a confrontation between Ackerman and a public school inspector. When he commented that it was a pity to over-educate girls, Ackerman jumped on the opportunity to defend her sex.<sup>30</sup> She was outspoken and never shy about asserting her opinions.

Ackerman is better known by Australian women's historians than by Americans because she was so significant to the woman's rights movement there. Her work in Australia is also evidence that she was a feminist. Ackerman believed the young nation provided a great opportunity for women, or as she called it, "Eve's paradise re-discovered."<sup>31</sup> She argued that women had contributed as much as men to the settlement of Australia, therefore, they should have a political voice in the formation of the young federation. Ackerman's visit to Australia in 1889 sparked greater interest in the suffrage movement, and like other WCTU women she mobilized widespread support for the suffrage movement from women who until then had not been involved in the campaign. Because of her influence the suffrage department became the most important division of

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<sup>29</sup> Kirsten Lees, *Votes for Women, The Australian Story* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1995), 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ackerman, *Australia*, 69.

the Australian WCTU. She played a major role in the suffrage victory, making Australia the second nation to grant women the vote in 1902.<sup>32</sup> Audrey Oldfield wrote, “Everywhere she emphasized how necessary the vote was to women if they were to establish either prohibition or controls on the liquor industry, and if they were to change the laws which discriminated against them.”<sup>33</sup> Australian historians consider Ackerman a major voice in the suffrage movement there. Oldfield and many others have produced a substantial amount of scholarship recently that identifies women like Ackerman as early feminists.

Ackerman realized that suffrage, although a very important goal for women, was not in itself going to eliminate all of their inequalities. To an interviewer she stressed, “Women have advanced along all the lines of cultural and social development far more rapidly than the most sanguine of us could have anticipated a few years ago,” but “suffrage is just one phase of the change...”<sup>34</sup> Even after suffrage was won in the United States, she argued it would be useless unless women armed themselves with the knowledge necessary to use it. It was not enough just to get the vote, women had to inform themselves and get involved.

Ackerman was also a pioneering feminist in an occupation that is still predominantly held by men. She was ordained as a pastor in the Baptist Church. The idea of a woman in the pulpit was extremely radical at the end of the nineteenth century. Even today, female pastors are rare in the Baptist denomination. Ackerman stood in many pulpits throughout her career as a guest lecturer, and after her ordination as a visiting

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<sup>32</sup> Lees, 187.

<sup>33</sup> Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 29.

<sup>34</sup> Ackerman, “Woman’s Voice,” *Australian Christian World*, SLAA.

pastor. In one newspaper in Northampton, England she was called “the world’s foremost lady preacher and traveller.”<sup>35</sup> She was recruited by several churches before returning to her old home in Chicago. The First Baptist Church in Pittsburg, Kansas wanted Ackerman to become their main pastor. One letter invited her “...to supply the pulpit for one month, as early as possible, with a view to the pastorate.”<sup>36</sup> The church was willing to undertake Ackerman’s ordination in order to make her their pastor. Another church officer wrote, “Your ordination would be a life gift, and would not merely benefit you but help to destroy the cruel prejudice against our sex in the great Baptist denomination.”<sup>37</sup> If church women were ready to be led by a female pastor, Ackerman herself must have thought ordination was the logical next step for her and other missionary women like her. She had been doing the work of several ministers for nearly a decade with her round-the-world mission. Ordination was formal recognition of her ability to guide her global flock.

She also must have been influenced by her friend and mentor, Frances Willard, who had been writing and speaking in favor of women’s ordination for years. In 1889, Willard wrote *Woman in the Pulpit* in which she defended her arguments in favor of female ordination with scriptural evidence and criticized the church hierarchy for interpreting the Bible too narrowly and excluding women. Willard herself was a devout Methodist, and arguably was one of the most famous and influential Methodists of her day. She wrote the book after she was denied a seat at the 1888 meeting of the General Conference, the highest governing body of the Methodist Church. The snub was widely reported in newspapers, and Willard responded with harsh criticism directed at the Methodist hierarchy in her book. She argued that male clergy members’ main objection

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<sup>35</sup> “Remarkable Lady Preacher,” SLAA.

<sup>36</sup> Carrie King, to Jessie Ackerman, 24 September 1897, SLAA.

was that they did not want to share their power with women, and they especially did not want to compete with women for jobs. She wrote:

It is a whimsical fact that men seem comparatively willing that women should enter any profession except their own. The lawyer is willing that they should be doctors, and the doctor thinks they may plead at the bar if they desire to do so, but each prefer to keep them out of his own professional garden-plot. This is true of ministers with added emphasis, for here we have the pride of sex plus the pride of sacerdotalism.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, Willard included scriptural evidence that women belonged in the pulpit. She pointed to Galatians 3:28 which reads, “There can be no male and female; for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus.”<sup>39</sup> For Willard, the scriptures clearly stated God’s intentions, but the problem was that only men had been the interpreters of the Bible. Until women began commenting on the Bible, its meaning would remain one-sided. She even urged women to learn Hebrew and Greek so they could interpret scripture in the original languages.<sup>40</sup> Finally, Willard claimed that women were inherently more spiritual than men; having mothering capacities, ministering was actually the most natural occupation for women. Ackerman shared the opinion that women were superior morally to men. Ackerman and countless other women like her made up the majority of church members and the majority of reform workers at the time, so why should they be excluded from clergy positions?

In 1896, she became the assistant pastor for the Fourth Baptist Church in Chicago. Frances Willard, who had argued so diligently for years in favor of female

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<sup>37</sup> Edith Hill-Booker, to Jessie Ackerman, 23 September, 1897, SLAA.

<sup>38</sup> Frances Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Cullen Murphy, “The Gospel According to Eve,” *American Heritage* 49 (Sep., 1998), 74.

clergy, congratulated Ackerman on her new position.<sup>41</sup> In addition to her preaching duties, she was also in charge of the church's local rescue and mission work. Ackerman was critical of Christians who felt that giving money was enough. She believed that philanthropy meant getting personally involved, and she set out to visit Chicago saloons to invite the patrons to her Sunday service. When Ackerman gave her first address to the Fourth Baptist Church part of the audience was made up of the "houseless vagabonds" she had met the night before. As a pastor, Ackerman was just continuing the grass-roots work that brought her into the temperance movement. This was not her first visit to the saloons. In her first address she said, "Many years ago, when I was looking around for a life vocation, my attention was called to temperance work. I prepared myself for it in a systematic way; and I believe I have never been more successful than I was during my early career. I went immediately to the saloons, and the man who kept one of the first saloons I visited shortly gave up his business."<sup>42</sup> Returning to church work in Chicago was a homecoming for Ackerman who had been traveling for nearly a decade, and she returned to the work that first brought her into the temperance movement.

Ackerman showed the breadth of her views in regards to the beliefs of so-called heathens, recognizing and respecting types of worship that were at odds with her own religion. When someone objected that a certain nation worshipped gods of stone, Ackerman replied, "Oh well, maybe they see God through the stone."<sup>43</sup>

As a citizen of the world she studied many different religions. When asked which

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<sup>41</sup>Frances Willard, to Jessie Ackerman, 30 December, 1896, SLAA.

<sup>42</sup>"Lower Five at Church," [Chicago newspaper] 4 January 1897, SLAA.

<sup>43</sup>"Miss Jessie Ackerman, Champion World Traveler and Explorer, Tells of Circling Globe Eight Times," *New York Herald*, 1918.

she accepted she replied that she had her own interpretation of God. “I believe the future religion of the world will be an individual religion in which every person will worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience,” she said. “I have found that we all know the same God, only we know him in a different way.”<sup>44</sup> She did believe, however, that the fundamental teachings of Christianity would predominate in the world.

Ackerman’s ideology, her reform activities, and her entrance into a male-dominated profession all support the argument that she can be considered a feminist. There is, however, some evidence to dispute this claim. Some statements by Ackerman definitely do not sound like feminist ideology. During her second visit to Australia she said of the WCTU, “We are not a woman’s suffrage society and our objects are not to take women out of their homes. What we desire is to secure their influence in their own homes.”<sup>45</sup> This hardly sounds like a radical statement, but Ackerman was wise enough to know when to pick her battles. This could also be seen as a tactical statement designed to counter the claims of male anti-suffragists and to allay the consensus of moderates. Even though Ackerman claimed women had “discovered themselves” in the nineteenth century, she also insisted that their duty was always to the home first. She argued that women should follow the example of Christ and engage in self-sacrifice for the good of their families and communities.<sup>46</sup> Ackerman turned the separate spheres argument on its head, arguing that women in the home needed the vote to protect their children. At the Second Triennial Conference of the Australasian WCTU she said, “Home is, and ever

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<sup>44</sup> “Lincoln Visitor Has Received Diploma From Geographical Society for Being the Most Traveled Woman in the World,” (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1928.

<sup>45</sup> “Miss Jessie Ackerman, An Interview,” [Australian newspaper, ca. 1894], SLAA.

<sup>46</sup> “Miss Ackerman’s Mission,” 6 April 1892, SLAA.

will be, the chosen kingdom of woman. She could not, if she would, eradicate the instincts which make her the homemaker of the race.”<sup>47</sup>

Ackerman used the expediency argument to advocate woman’s suffrage, saying the vote was necessary to protect the home. In speeches she claimed that women did not want to be men, take men’s places, or do men’s work, but because men had failed in coping with alcohol, women must protect her own rights and homes.<sup>48</sup> Ackerman and other women have been criticized for using this argument rather than the natural rights argument of most suffragists, but perhaps this is evidence that Ackerman was wise enough to use conservative language. The suffragists were not attracting a large following with their radical rhetoric. By using the expediency argument the WCTU attracted many more women. Ackerman and others convinced average women that suffrage was an extension of their traditional role. Political participation was like national housekeeping. This may not seem radical today, but in the late nineteenth century it was anything but conservative. Ackerman was also wise enough to pick her battles, such as omitting suffrage from her agenda in more conservative and underdeveloped countries like China. Sometimes she had to make temporary sacrifices for the overall good of the women and children she hoped to reach, but she never abandoned her cause. When she returned to China years later, she also brought back woman’s suffrage as part of her reform agenda.

Ackerman’s actions and language should be kept in context. By today’s standards she may not seem very radical, but few late nineteenth century women would. In comparison, she was far ahead of her times. Many of the issues she tackled are still part

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<sup>47</sup> WCTU of Australasia, Report of Second Triennial Conference, 1894, in Oldfield, 199.

<sup>48</sup> *The Otago Daily Times*, 25 April 1889, SLAA.

of the feminist agenda today. Sexual exploitation of women, domestic abuse, educational and occupational opportunities, economic independence, and political participation are all feminist issues. Although she did not know the word at the time, many of Ackerman's characteristics fit the definition of a feminist. Her main concern was the advancement of women worldwide. She was even more radical than many suffragists, recognizing the more immediate needs of women in underdeveloped countries. She also saw women as a social group rather than just a biological group that shared one common trait, being oppressed by men. She hoped to unite women into a worldwide sisterhood that would not only uplift women but would also bring world peace. Constant correspondence between herself and women throughout the world shows that she was building a sisterhood and touching lives. A woman from Denmark pledged her allegiance to Ackerman's cause in 1894, writing, "...I am to fight, till death will deliver me from all this misery. Meanwhile it is a great help to me to know myself in perfect sympathy with the doing and working of my dear American and English sisters of the white ribbon."<sup>49</sup>

Ackerman's activities encompassed an enormous range of progressive reforms. They have only recently been given credit for their "domestic feminism," but WCTU women contributed to feminism in several aspects. First, their ideology linked women's power in the home to power in the public sphere. Female leaders like Ackerman set goals and conveyed new ideals of American womanhood. She also helped organize a worldwide social movement on a grass-roots level that introduced ordinary women to a feminist ideology for the first time. And finally, her reform strategy linked temperance with woman's rights and created more widespread support for woman's suffrage.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> WCTU member, Copenhagen, Denmark, to Jessie Ackerman, 2 February 1894, SLAA.

<sup>50</sup> Giele, 64.

Ackerman devoted her entire life to social reform that benefited women and children around the globe. In many ways, she was a pioneer of the feminist movement, but she was also so much more.

While she displayed many feminist characteristics, the term does not adequately describe her. In fact, Ackerman herself would balk at this narrow description of herself. Miss Ackerman cannot be easily labeled. The only thing she is for sure is a humanist. Although she studied women throughout the world, she claimed she was not a feminist. “Men and women will improve together,” she said. “There is no use being a feminist. Woman must improve with man, co-operating in a state of harmony.”<sup>51</sup> She was determined to improve humankind, to eradicate class and racial distinctions, and to end poverty and human suffering, and ultimately to eradicate war forever.

She also hoped to improve the status and condition of all women, not just those like herself, white, middle-class, college educated Protestants. Her vision was much broader, and when she claimed the twentieth century as the “girl’s century” she meant it for “all girls,” not, “any particular class, but every girl.”<sup>52</sup> The WCTU and Ackerman aspired toward a global focus. Her internationalism was genuine and her type of work significantly spread the American influence and cultural hegemony throughout the globe. The WCTU and Ackerman identified women in foreign lands as part of an “international sisterhood.”<sup>53</sup>

In assessing her own life’s work, Ackerman wrote, “I have made a life study of

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<sup>51</sup> “Lincoln Visitor Has Received Diploma From Geographical Society for Being the Most Traveled Woman in the World,” (Lincoln, Nebraska), 1928.

<sup>52</sup> Ackerman, “Greatest Woman Traveller,” SLAA.

<sup>53</sup> Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review* 96 (Oct., 1991), 1051.

social conditions which involves all the interests of women, and here I wish to add that the theory that women's interests and men's interests are separate is a fallacy. They are inseparably interwoven."<sup>54</sup> She argued that men and women could only improve society together. She did not want to separate the issues facing men and women as some feminists did, and she did not believe an aggressive approach to change was affective. She wrote,

Women have stepped out into the consciousness of humanity. Womankind all over the world has simply discovered freedom. Woman's vision, mentality and ability have broadened since the great revelation of the world war and in the future women will keep pace with men. This achievement has not been the result of feminism or any radical measures. It has simply grown as a thing from the soil of the world. It has not come from preaching nor from women's admission to citizenship. It has come from within. It is an inner awakening of all women today.<sup>55</sup>

While perhaps she underestimates the influence she had on women's rise, this statement reveals much about her views. She does not credit feminists, men, politicians, or any other group with women's admission into the world as citizens. She gives women themselves, as an empowered group, full responsibility for their awakening.

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<sup>54</sup> "Miss Ackerman Talks About Woman's Progress," n.d., SLAA.

<sup>55</sup> "Woman's Rise General: Freedom Discovered Says Miss Ackerman," n.d., SLAA.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

As a young, educated woman coming of age in the Victorian era, Ackerman faced an uncertain future with few opportunities open to her. She was determined, however, to put her talents and energies to good use. She traveled around the world six times, visited every continent except Antarctica, had three books published as well as hundreds of articles, worked for temperance, and advocated woman's rights as well as human rights throughout her lifetime.

As the second round-the-world missionary Ackerman spread the WCTU message of temperance around the globe and helped make the Union the largest woman's organization the world had ever seen. She was especially influential in Australia, where she created the first National Union in 1891. Although she was not always welcomed, she never wavered in spreading her message. Because of her aggressive methods in Australia, she is remembered there as a pioneer of woman's rights.

Ackerman set out on her journey to set up temperance unions, but she included a broad range of reforms as part of her international agenda. One of the most significant was woman's suffrage. She hoped to improve the status and condition of women throughout the world, and only armed with the ballot did she believe women could uplift themselves. The WCTU and Ackerman appealed to women across socioeconomic, racial, religious, and national identities, and may have done more to politicize women's culture than any other group. This is one of her greatest achievements, convincing the average woman of the need for suffrage. This contribution to the suffrage movement has only recently been acknowledged. More research of women like Ackerman will provide more

evidence that the WCTU was just as important, and in some aspects more important, to woman's suffrage victories in dozens of countries. Ackerman herself had a major role in winning votes for women in Australia in 1902, making it only the second nation behind New Zealand to grant woman's suffrage.

Ackerman was a pioneer of the woman's rights movement in other ways as well. She included reform measures such as uniform marriage and divorce laws, raising the age of consent, shelters for abused women and children, and improved education for women and girls, many of the same issues feminists today are still advocating. Although the WCTU has often been dismissed as a religiously fanatical, conservative organization by today's standards, Ackerman was extremely radical and outspoken for her time. Although she had many feminist characteristics, she was much more than that. She would consider herself a humanist. She hoped to change the structure of society, not just women's roles in it.

Her vision for the world was much broader than just a feminist vision. She hoped to end poverty and class distinctions. She believed racial discrimination was another barrier to human progress. "It is all wrong," she said, "for one race to impose its thought, its philosophy, creeds and government upon another race."<sup>1</sup> She spoke out against colonialism, arguing that each country should be free and self-governing. She even criticized her own country and her own religion for degrading and exploiting less fortunate peoples throughout the world.

Ackerman devoted her entire the life to the improvement of humankind throughout the world. Her contemporaries called her the 'world's most traveled woman,'

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<sup>1</sup> "Advanced Woman Sees More Wars," n.d. SLAA.

and the 'original world citizen.' Ackerman was truly a world citizen, sacrificing much in her own life, including a family and sometimes her health, in order to uplift those less fortunate than she. But those sacrifices, in her opinion did not compare to what she received in return. "It is a great privilege to look upon the wonders of creation," she wrote, "but it is a greater privilege to lend a helping hand to fallen humanity."<sup>2</sup> "Could I again stand with the flush of health and youth upon my cheek," she wrote, "and had I to choose once more, I would do the same thing over again, dare the long journeys, face the unceasing hardships, and spend the last years of my life for humanity."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ackerman, "Civilization's Crimes," n.d., SLAA.

<sup>3</sup> Ackerman, magazine clipping, n.d., SLAA

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