

# The Well-Tempered Women Movement

At a time when women were discovering their rights and full potential in the nineteenth century, the Well-Tempered women movement offered the necessary backbone to see all their agendas come to light. Characterized as one of the largest and most influential women groups to ever exist in the history of America, the Temperance movement did a great work of putting women in the limelight, advocate for their fair treatment, and improve the quality of their lives

Who are the Well-Tempered Women, and what was their agenda?

These were a group of women in the nineteenth century who had set agendas that looked forward to promote and enhance the role of women in the society. They were against a number of issues that withheld women from fully participating in the significant concerns of their country. Women for example did not have a right to property once married. The temperance movement acknowledged the fact that married women just like their husbands needed to be given a right to own property as well. They advocated for women jails to have female matrons employed as opposed to the initial practice whereby it is only men who were in all the places of authority in the society. What they wanted was for the needs of the women to be met unconditionally. Some other issues that they saw addressed was the establishment of the right and legal age for sexual consent for the women, which at the time was as a matter of fact seven in some states. The needs of the children were similarly addressed, children were working and their wages needed to be stabilized and these women stood by their word to ensure there was justice in the whole process.

Apart from all these inequality issues that were being voiced, the women also took the opportunity to address the social communal concerns that women in the society faced on a day to day basis. Women were often abused and assaulted by their male counterparts and this lead to an outcry whereby the women would open up and discuss their experiences as they sought to find a lasting solution to the same. Women were constantly enlightened on how to deal with a wide variety of societal issues; they were for instance given the mandate to seek justice to marital infidelity. The legal system had to be straightened since they contributed to the overall unfair system to the women in the society; women were ill treated when they reported cases of assault to the police who at time exacerbated the whole incident as some would deliberately physically assault the victims. Another important issue they were seeking to address was the alcoholism factor, women at the time experienced challenges when bringing up their families as the men were often alcoholics and failed in their roles as fathers, they were against excessive consumption of alcohol since their effects were disastrous and in the end quite a number of times the family income would be spent and drank away in the bars as the women were left to look after their children by themselves. In general

women faced a lot of resistance for their own advancement and as a result they were coming out in large numbers to exert force and create awareness to the fact they were tired of all the oppression and it was their time to prove their worth in the society.

### Frances Willard, her role in the Temperance Movement

Frances spent most of her life in Wisconsin though she was born in Churchville near New York. Willard was brought up an educated woman who had a strong passion for reforms in areas around her life that she was never satisfied with. Her devotion to administration of social justice and a deep concern for service to the community is partly credited to the fact that her family was converted to Methodists while they were in Wisconsin. The Methodists had a call towards ensuring that there was justice in the community and that people were treated well whoever they were.

Before starting a career on the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Willard was the President to the Evanston College that was formed in 1870, and when it was merged with the Northwestern University in 1871 she was further on elected the Dean of the women. These leadership roles had prepared her well for the responsibility that was awaiting her when she would begin working with the WCTU. Most of her formal work began when she was requested to work with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Chicago, she later on accepted the role and that is where her significant role in the women's movement was to be defined.

Frances was a determined young woman and working in Chicago alone was not satisfactory to her. This is actually what drove her to pursue the post of president for the National Council of Women in the United States in 1888. She was then able to form the Worldwide WCTU with her influence which she was to lead for the rest of her life.

### Some of the works of Frances Willard

The impact that Francis Willard created to the realization of women's rights in the society were very significant. To begin with, Miss Willard had a great concern to create an opportunity for the presence of women in the different fields in the society; she felt their contribution towards the growth of the country would be huge when they are assigned leadership positions in their societies. She would constantly repeat to the Women to "Do Everything". According to her women had in them the power to make the change that they needed and it was up to them to drive them to prosperity. Another critical societal issue she was concerned with was the Temperance movement that was against alcoholism. Though most of the advocates against alcoholism looked towards reducing the overall consumption of alcohol, Frances Willard and her group were against alcoholism in the broader sense, they explained that it was a contributing factor to violence, black criminality and slow economic development in the country. They pushed to ensure that there was no trade in liquor in the society, though in the end they were still not able to see it come to realization. Frances Willard further more worked to create political awareness for the women, she addressed them and told the women that

their role in the politics of the country was very critical as they would have the opportunity to take part in the process of law making. Though she assisted the Prohibition Party in the election of the year 1884, she was inclined to the women's suffrage movement as well and wanted them to speak up against injustice towards them especially labor issues concerning wages and work time.

Apart from that she would also address the topic of "social purity" an issue most women preferred not to talk about. She was able to travel around the world to her large audience base and supporters, and this was a good opportunity to make the women's concern international so as to capture the attention of the world on the women's revolution that was being created.

Yet another important role that Frances Willard played was to advocate for the right of women to vote and take part in the significant decision making process of elections. She argued that since they were good home keepers they would play the role of preserving their country and working to ensure that the society is more inclined to purity. They believed the women had a significant role to create reformations in the different sectors of the society.

Critical societal issues like child labor, alcoholism, and fair wages among others were argued that it is the care of the women that was needed to ensure that the necessary action was taken to address them. Women's maternal nature was explained to be able to play the role of having reformations in the expected areas.

However in their Suffrage movement, the women's concern was often counter acted by the prohibition movement since they both had different agendas though their concern was one, alcohol consumption.

### The Woman's Christian Temperance Union-Brief History

Women in the nineteenth century were experiencing a major challenge that was affecting their family life, alcoholism. They were convinced the side effects of alcoholism in the society were far more destructive than any of them had ever imagined. With a strong will to see to it that that the habit came to a halt various women decided to begin holding meetings in churches where they would hold long discussions, pray and further on proceed to stage marches and crusades where they would go to saloons and ask for the establishments to be closed. These were the precursor activities that preceded the official formation of the WCTU.

In the winter of 1873-1874, there was a major crusade which opened up a platform for the formation of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in early 1874. Therefore in Chautauqua, the women decided to found the WCTU, Mrs. Annie Whittenmyer was selected the president of the Union whereas Miss. Frances. E. Willard was the corresponding secretary. Mrs. Mary Johnson and Mrs. Mari Ingham were elected the recording secretary and treasurer respectively. With all their leaders ready and

determined the WCTU were on the road to see the realization of their goals and aspirations for their community.

This group later on became to be known as one of the organizations in history with one of the largest following. Their numbers kept on growing since there were many women who initially suffered in secret before the movement was established, through the WCTU; they got an appropriate channel to speak out against the injustices and challenges they faced as a result of alcoholism in their societies. They advocated for social and religious reform in order to achieve their target of creating a pure world that did not have social societal ills.

Their reform on “protection of the home” was to keep them focused on what it was they really wanted to achieve. They similarly had a slogan, “For God and Home and Native Land”, this was however later on changed to “Every Land”. They wanted women from other parts of the world as well to join in the struggle to free themselves from the male dominance in the society. This they were able to achieve as other countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand who were similarly able to form their own unions in the 1880s with their own leaders who steered them as they worked together as a whole.

Xenophon, a Greek writer was an inspiration to the women’s groups with his definition of temperance that the women used to describe what they expected to achieve. According to Xenophon, temperance was “moderation in all things healthful and total abstinence in all things harmful”. Alcohol to them was a bad influence and they wanted it to be completely avoided by people in the society if at all there was to be a positive change in the communities where alcohol was being sold.

Their numbers helped to create a greater impact throughout their surroundings. However a major drawback was the fact that few women from other religious backgrounds were allowed to join in the fight or rather were not attracted as the movement was founded on a “Christian” background. This meant that, Moslems, Catholics, Buddhists and even Hindus rarely took part in the revolution even though they were similarly for the idea of abstinence from alcohol and even tobacco. Apart from all these however they also focused on the suffrage movement which united all of them together to the realization of their political ambitions and participation.

#### How the WCTU dealt with Alcohol Prohibition in the 19th Century

During the 1873 crusades before the formation of the WCTU, women would practically drop down to their knees when they went to the saloons or even in pray-ins and they would ask for the stop of the sale in alcohol. This was after Dr. Dio Lewis gave a lecture in 1874 on the dangers of alcohol and the measures needed to be taken, these women from Fredonia, Hillsboro and New York worked together in unison and were able to in three months alone to get rid of alcohol in almost 250 communities. There was a realization that they had the ability to achieve much more if only they worked together in unity.

Therefore they launched non-violent protests whereby they walked in different communities to protest against alcohol sale, in their marches they would especially visit the saloons and bars where alcohol was sold to customers preferably, soldiers, gamblers, cowboys, prospectors and the likes. This was done under leadership offered by Mrs. Esther McNeil. This was usually done on a day to day basis as they walked in pairs singing, they would then go on and pray when they were denied entrance and kneel down, they were persistent and most of the saloons closed down their businesses when they realized the dangers they were causing to the society.

The media publicity and press that covered their stories were instrumental in spreading their gospel around the country and beyond, they were regarded as heroines who braved the hostility in their crusades just to preach against alcoholism, a cause that was supported by many.

However much they were a religious organization they were against the use of wines in the different religious celebrations especially the Holy Communion. They were convinced there was no way the blood of Jesus Christ would be symbolized by the partaking of the Wine. They explained that the wine had alcohol in it, and as they all knew alcohol was not good to be taken especially by Christians. Because of this they protested against the practice and advised for the church to instead have unfermented grape juice be taken as the Blood of the lamb.

Willard created the White Life for Two program during her leadership, here the men were advised to reach out to where the women were and join them in practicing the good morals they were preaching. They were to live alcohol free, lust free and tobacco free marriages. Apart from that different other institutions were targeted as well like the Military, Indian Reservations and even the Washington Institutions. One of the factors that assisted Willard so as to have greater success was the fact that she politicized the whole movement and this meant that it was able to get more attention and coverage.

They faced challenges however as a number of brewer associations were against the suffrage movements. In a bid to prevent further damage that was already being created , these brewer associations would pay some anti-suffrage movements personalities so as to shut up the women who were succeeding in bringing their businesses down.

Did they change any Role in the American Society, were they able to succeed?

It is very evident that the works of the WCTU were effective and that they were able to pursue their cause to the end. Apart from the Temperance and suffrage movement, these women engaged themselves in a host of several other different roles in the society. To begin with, Frances Willard led the movement as they protested against the injustice of unequal salaries.

The WCTU became successful in many other significant temperance agendas. From their concerted efforts by 1901, the WCTU led to the creation of a program whereby

each and every state in the country initiated programs in which children in public schools were alarmed about the dangers of alcoholism.

Labor reforms were similarly in their list of successes since they were able to establish the eight hour working rule and were furthermore given the right to organizations in their places of work. Yet another important role they played was to ensure that women and children were given protection both at home and at work.

There are many other concerns in the society that these women were able to address through their peaceful protests and participation in lawmaking after being granted the opportunity to take part in the politics of the country.

The child labor practice had been a major concern to the women and they saw to it that children were respected and valued in the society, the practice reduced in occurrence after then. Drug trafficking a booming business was similarly in their list of agendas, since they were against anything that was not pure, they definitely had their stand especially against narcotics, they proposed a ban on the sale of the narcotic drugs and for some time there was reduced activity in that area.

Slavery was during the nineteenth century a common practice; the Black people were mistreated and given excessive labor by the whites. The WCTU as a Christian organization was against this inhuman practice and they were able to stop it and spread love in the country that all people were equal.

The army brothels that used to serve the soldiers were also a concern to the WCTU; they wanted the women to respect their bodies as temples of God and they therefore constantly addressed the issue to see to it that it came to a halt.

There are several other concerns that these women were given the opportunity to change for a positive impact in their society. Frances Willard severally asserted that "Our policy is 'The Do-everything-policy, and do it all the time. Consequently, it had the opportunity to address several other reform issues, these included, sanitation, public health, homosexuality, prostitution, abortion, labor rights, dress reforms, premarital chastity, gambling, eugenics, pornography, same sex marriage, international peace, illicit drugs, the "War on Christmas," women's rights, the display of Scripture in public areas, and conservation of Blue laws prohibiting golf together with other leisure activities on Sundays. Today, these women advocate for abstinence from drugs and alcohol, pornography, premarital sex, same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and keeping Christ in Christmas.

Their work since the formation of the movement has not gone unnoticed and the present world women have a lot to thank the WCTU for the reformations they catapulted that makes life for women much easier.

Conclusion

Women in the nineteenth century were withheld and prevented from public participation as compared to the present world women. This is because civilizations years back viewed women as the weaker sex and that they could not be trusted with leadership in any sector of the society. However this notion would later on change when influential women of the century like Frances Willard amongst others took the situation in their hands and worked together with other women to create revolutions that led to the eventual reforms.

Were it not for the persistence and willful protests by this women, women today would still be playing behind the curtain roles as men take all the recognition and power.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union formed in 1874, was the vehicle of change employed to steer changes in the world and give women respect and dignity they deserved.

Perhaps one of their greatest achievements was their fight against alcoholism, their suffrage movements and the labor reforms.

These women did a great work to advocate for changes in many other significant areas in their lives. It is their hard work, unity and determination that drove them to acquire success in achieving their goals and recognition, in the end they were able to make a name for themselves as one of the most popular and influential women groups in the United States.