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### **Defeminizing the Non-Elite Woman**

Feminist activism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century laid claim to the universal sisterhood of women, but created undeniable divides between racially and socio-economically differentiated women by defining non-white, working-class women as unfeminine. Most importantly, the Woman's Movement depicted the class and race qualifications attached to the term "woman" that allowed the movement to exclude women expressing non-normative femininity. To this point, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn's *Discrimination Against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830-1920* and Ellen Carol DuBois' *Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance* illustrate the defeminization tactics employed by the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Woman's Movement to alienate racially marginalized and working class women from women's rights activism.

To begin, Terborg-Penn explores the manner in which the Woman's Movement consciously defeminized Sojourner Truth in the public sphere in order to exclude non-white women from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century women's activism. Notably, women in attendance of the Akron, Ohio, Woman's Rights Convention in 1851, feeling that Sojourner Truth "would ruin the movement by giving the public the impression that their cause was 'mixed with abolition and niggers,'" barred Truth from addressing the group and, further, at an antislavery meeting in northern Indiana in 1858, "demanded that she submit her breasts to inspection by the 'ladies' present to prove that she was not a man in disguise" (Terborg-Penn 20). Essentially, by questioning Truth's sex, racially white women associated racially marginalized women with masculinity and, as a consequence, with non-normative, deviant forms of femininity. In doing so, the Woman's Movement successfully estranged racially non-white women from the activist

group, ultimately divorcing the white Woman's Movement from civil rights activism affecting African American women. Moreover, paralleling Sojourner Truth with abnormal femininity and, therefore, creating a racial divide between the socially acceptable femininity of white women and socially deviant femininity of non-white women, allowed the Women's Movement to exclude the voice and visibility of racial minorities from organized women's rights activism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Continuing, DuBois's work illustrates the Woman's Movement's deliberate alienation of working-class women through the defeminization of socioeconomically non-elite suffragettes acting in the public sphere of society. To this point, upper-class, racially white women of the characterized militant tactics utilized by working-class suffragettes as violating "standards of respectable femininity" by emulating deviant femininity that turns "away from nineteenth-century definitions...of women that emphasized their place in the home, their motherhood, and their exclusion from the economy" (DuBois 185). Centrally, the Woman's Movement, largely composed of elite, racially white women deemed "feminine" by patriarchal societal standards, ostracized working-class, activist women by characterizing women who express voice and visibility in the male-dominated public sphere as embodying non-normative femininity. In other words, the Woman's Movement alienated socio-economically non-elite women by asserting that as females expressing agency in the public sphere, working class women were masculinized, improper females that were not encompassed by the Woman's Movement's sisterhood of "women". At the crux, racially white, socio-economically elite activist women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries excluded women from the Woman's Movement by illustrating working class women acting in the public sphere as unfeminine and, by relation, as non-woman females in order to augment the rights solely of upper-class women.

In conclusion, the Woman's Movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries utilized patriarchal societal ideals of femininity to ostracize the intersectional concerns of socio-economically non-elite and racially marginalized women. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn's *Discrimination Against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830-1920* delves into the Woman's Movement's masculinization of Sojourner Truth to illustrate the general parallels constructed between racially non-white women and deviant femininity that allowed the Woman's Movement to exclude racial minorities from organized women's activism. Additionally, Ellen Carol DuBois' *Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance* builds on Terborg-Penn's analysis, portraying the Woman's Movement's further use of defeminization tactics in alienating working-class suffragettes by portraying women's militant activism in the public sphere as improper and exemplifying non-normative femininity to ultimately discourage intersectional, non-white women's activism.