

## From Relief to Revolution:

American Women and the Russian-American Relationship,

1890-1917\*

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, a number of separate reforms loosely coalesced into the broad American movement known as progressivism. These reforms sprang out of attempts to come to terms with urbanization, industrialization, and immigration and with the nation's increasingly influential position in international affairs. Two components of this general movement, the drive toward women's suffrage (and a larger role for women in society more generally) and the internationalization of ideas of domestic reformism, converged within a seemingly unlikely medium: the American relationship with tsarist Russia. As the North's supposed benefactor during the U.S. Civil War, Russia retained a special place in the hearts of grateful Unionists. As Europe's last great despot and the oppressor of dissidents and Jews, however, the tsarist empire was also emerging as a pariah state in the eyes of American progressives. Within this ongoing debate, two women, Clara Barton and Alice Stone Blackwell, became pivotal figures. Their diverse careers illustrate not only the expanding role of women in American society, and even the nation's foreign relations, but also the gradual disintegration of a diplomatic relationship between these two formerly friendly powers.

This changing relationship needs to be viewed within the larger context of turn-of-the-century American reformism. The tsarist political system was emerging as a popular target for the criticism of American progressives, such as Lyman Abbott, editor of the *Outlook*, because of its repression and particularly because it struck these critics as increasingly anachronistic, as a virtual insult to modernity. When these individuals looked beyond America's borders, they retained their basic domestic frame of reference, which was grounded in a belief in the virtues of democratic and efficient government and capitalist economic development. Most shared the belief that, as an advanced

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nation, the United States had a special developmental role to play in the world. To Americans fighting for universal suffrage in their own country, Russia's denial of any franchise to its people evoked images of medieval barbarism. Next to the corruption and inefficiency of the tsarist bureaucracy, America's urban political machines seemed models of democratic representation. To those seeking spiritual reformation within a democratic system, the ritual-laden and ultraconservative Russian orthodox church seemed barely Christian.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, American opposition to tsarism did not crystallize as a significant, organized, Judeo-Christian force until the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 provided an apparently progressive and Westernized adversary to oppose the decadent and brutal Romanov regime.

To look at the subject on a more general level, progressivism exercised a strong influence on American foreign relations during this period, and American women played prominent and important roles in the progressive movement. Only recently, however, have historians begun to link these two developments and to examine the means by which American women sought to extend their public activity into not only the national but also the international arena.<sup>2</sup> The American relationship with tsarist Russia proved to be particularly fertile ground for women's participation. Issues of philanthropy, temperance, and governmental reform, including suffrage questions, all informed the American debate over tsarist Russia. This argument over tsarism fit into a larger political debate in which women were able to exercise a voice.

Clara Barton and Alice Stone Blackwell emerged as significant figures in the American-Russian relationship. Barton, president of the American Red Cross, became involved with Russian affairs through famine relief. Her connections were relatively brief, but they represented an important moment in both the Russian-American relationship and the history of the Red Cross specifically and American international philanthropy more generally. Blackwell, a leader in the women's suffrage movement and the editor of the *Woman's Journal*, helped shape the antitsarist movement in the United

1. Gerald E. Markowitz, "Progressivism and Imperialism: A Return to First Principles," *Historian* 37 (February 1975): 257-75. On spiritual aspects of progressivism see Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920* (New York, 1982), ix. Other progressive goals are described in John A. Thompson, *Reformers and War: American Progressive Publicists and the First World War* (New York, 1987), 117-19; and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967), chap. 9.

2. On women and the progressive movement see Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, KY, 1991); and Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York, 1993). On progressives and Russia see Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1962); and Arthur W. Thompson and Robert W. Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade: America and the Russian Revolution of 1905* (Amherst, MA, 1970). Recent works on women and foreign relations during this period include Judith Papachristou, "American Women and Foreign Policy, 1898-1905: Exploring Gender in Diplomatic History," *Diplomatic History* 14 (Fall 1990): 493-509; and John M. Craig, "Lucia True Ames Mead: American Publicist for Peace and Internationalism," in *Women and American Foreign Policy: Lobbyists, Critics, and Insiders*, ed. Edward P. Crapol (New York, 1987), 67-90.

States; along with Jane Addams, Raymond Robins, and William English Walling, she belonged to a subset of progressives who embraced the cause of Russian reform and made it their own. The careers of these two women reveal some of the different levels of interaction between the United States and Russia, and they illustrate two strands of the American reform impulse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Barton and Blackwell represent different types of women's activism and of reformism more generally. In part those differences were generational. Barton (1821-1912) first rose to national prominence through her work with the wounded during the Civil War, an experience that may well have enriched her gratitude to the one European power that had appeared to stand by the United States during its moment of supreme crisis. Through nursing and then through her determination to forge a national Red Cross, Barton carved out a place for women at the forefront of American charities. Blackwell (1857-1950), who came from one of New England's most prominent suffragist families, worked in politics rather than philanthropy and approached reform from a considerably more ideological standpoint. Blackwell came to the cause of Russian freedom for many of the same reasons that she had long fought for women's suffrage and that later in life brought her to the struggle against colonialism in India: In each situation she sought to correct the injustice that denied all or part of the population fundamental political rights. Each of these women thus personified different aspects of the reform movement at the century's turn and occupied distinct positions in the increasingly prominent debate over American-Russian relations.

Barton's introduction to Russia came in 1891, when a devastating famine struck seventeen provinces in that country. Millions faced potential starvation or death from cholera or typhus; ultimately the famine took an estimated 375,000 to 400,000 lives. In response to the disaster, the Russian government organized a massive relief effort. Upon learning of the crisis in Russia, a number of Americans, most notably in the Midwest, especially Iowa and Minnesota, and in the cities of Philadelphia and New York, organized a multifaceted campaign to send flour and corn to the starving. Although this effort was dwarfed by the tsarist government's own relief campaign, American contributions represented by far the largest foreign donations to the Russian cause. This relief came exclusively from private rather than governmental sources; Congress rejected a proposed bill to provide transport for the donated grain for a variety of reasons, including budgetary constraints, opposition to the principle of foreign aid, and reluctance to assist the despotic Russian government.<sup>3</sup>

3. On the famine and American relief efforts see Richard G. Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892: The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis* (New York, 1975); James Y. Simms, "The Impact of the Russian Famine of 1891-92: A New Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976); George Queen, "American Relief in the Russian Famine of 1891-1892,"

Women played a particularly important role in the procurement and distribution of the donated flour and grain. Such women's groups as the Iowa Red Cross Ladies Auxiliary raised thousands of dollars in contributions in kind and in cash. Individuals, including author Alice French, who helped organize the Iowa Russian Famine Relief Commission, and writer, translator, and tsarist sympathizer Isabel Hapgood, who directed much of the relief drive in New York, helped lead the campaign. French used the Ladies Auxiliary to spread word of the crisis in Russia among the women of her state: "Through the farmers' wives and daughters," she wrote Barton, "we shall reach the farmers." The *Tynehead*, one of the cargo ships laden with corn and flour, was sent in the name of American women, some of whom accompanied the shipment in order to help the Russian people nurse the sick and teach the peasants "how to prepare and cook palatable and nutritious dishes made from American grains and their products." Both American and Russian reports of the relief effort stressed the importance of the women's contributions.<sup>4</sup>

The woman who assumed the largest role in the campaign was Clara Barton. The Russian relief expedition represented the first international effort undertaken by the American Red Cross. Barton, who had established the American relief society in the aftermath of the carnage of the Russo-Turkish War, had requested permission from the International Red Cross Association to enlarge the scope of the American affiliate to include the relief of national disasters caused by calamities other than war. She initiated this international involvement with the Russian famine because of the impending catastrophe in that country and because of the high degree of attention and sympathy the cause had already garnered in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Barton's national reputation, dating back to her widely known service during the Civil War, helped spur on the relief drive; it reassured state leaders and other potential donors that the aid would, in fact, reach its intended destination. Alice French declared in a letter to the Red Cross administrator, "You do not know what a household word your name is in

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*Russian Review* 14 (April 1955): 140-50; and "Help for the Russian Starvelings," *Review of Reviews* 5 (February 1892): 38.

4. Alice French to Clara Barton, Clara Barton Papers, roll 83, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; "The Woman's Gift to Russia," *Harper's Weekly* 36 (23 April 1892): 402; John Hoyt, *Report of the Russian Famine Relief Committee of the United States* (hereafter *Report of the RFRC*) (Washington, 1893), 16; V. Max-Gakhan, "Pis'ma iz Ameriki: Kak amerikantsi pomogaiut Rossii" [Letters from America: How Americans are helping Russia], *Severnyi vestnik* (April 1892): 99-100; Graf Andrei Bobrinskii, "Amerikanskaia pomosh' v 1892 i 1893 godakh" [American help in 1892 and 1893], *Russkii vestnik: Zhurnal literaturnyi i politicheskii* (February 1894): 252-64.

5. District of Columbia Auxiliary Red Cross Association to the Citizens and Residents of the National Capital, 22 February 1892, in RG 200, Gift Collection, Records of the American Red Cross, 1881-1906, box 59, file 894.5: "Russian Famine, 1891-92," National Archives, Washington, DC. On Barton and the Red Cross see Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago, 1988): 88-90; and Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Clara Barton: Professional Angel* (Philadelphia, 1987).

Iowa. . . . We should not know *how* to give, unless we gave through you.”<sup>6</sup>

Barton noted that gratitude for Russia’s role as Union ally strongly influenced the American desire to offer assistance. Memories of Russia’s diplomatic support during the Civil War also helped explain why the relief campaign proved so much more successful in the northeast and Midwest than in the South. In her memoirs, Clara Barton proclaimed, “these tributes of America to Russia in her hour of temporary distress were not to be counted as gifts, for they had been richly earned; not even accounted as loans, for they had been anticipated a hundred-fold in an hour of our own peril—far greater, God grant, than Russia may ever know.”<sup>7</sup>

In January 1892 the House of Representatives defeated a proposal for the federal government to provide transport for the donated grain that was being collected for the Russian starvelings. Barton initially viewed Congress’s refusal to finance shipping as a disaster for the American effort. She worried that the Red Cross would have to admit to the Russian consul that it would be necessary for the Russian government to arrange for shipping of the donated grain. Barton viewed such an admission as humiliating for the United States and as diminishing considerably the value of the American contribution.<sup>8</sup> The generosity of American donors and the effectiveness of the relief organizers, however, apparently surpassed Barton’s expectations: Railroad companies offered free passage of the foodstuffs to the East Coast; several steamship companies then provided vessels to transport the goods to Russian ports.

Russia’s previous acts of goodwill toward the United States may have cast the relief effort within a framework of reciprocity rather than simple charity, but for some Americans the outbreak of famine within the empire also symbolized Russia’s increasingly tenuous status as a civilized power. “Here are at least a people of 20 millions recently out of bondage and barbarism, out of a serfdom worse than slavery, blind to the light of civilization, held by ignorance and superstition, but capable of human suffering,” read one of Barton’s appeals. For Barton, like many Americans involved in

6. French to Barton, 3 December 1891, Barton Papers, roll 83 (emphasis original). See also Benjamin Tillinghast (secretary, Iowa Russian Famine Relief Committee) to Barton, 19 and 20 December 1891, Barton Papers, roll 83.

7. Barton, *The Red Cross in Peace and War* (Washington, 1898), 178. For similar statements see Hoyt, *Report of the RFRC*, 6; Samuel P. Town (asst. adjutant-general, Headquarters Department of Pennsylvania, Grand Army of the Republic) to Posts, 1 April 1892, in Frances B. Reeves, *Russia Then and Now, 1892–1917: My Mission to Russia during the Famine of 1891–92 with Data Bearing upon Russia of To-day* (New York, 1917), 7–8; and “Gov. Merriam’s Call,” *Northwestern Miller* 32 (11 December 1891): 818. The Russian government also connected American famine relief to memories of Civil War aid. See Instruktiiia ministra inostrannix del Muravieva poslanniku v Vashingtone, 29 January/10 February 1898, *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 52 (1932): 133.

8. Barton to Delia Robbins, 19 January 1892, Barton Papers, roll 26; Tillinghast to Barton, 31 January 1892, Barton Papers, roll 26; Sara A. Spencer (secretary, District of Columbia Auxiliary Red Cross Association) to the Citizens and Residents of the National Capital, 22 February 1892, in RG 200, box 59, file 894.5: “Russian Famine, 1891–92.”

the campaign, the outbreak of famine in Russia was indicative of the political and cultural backwardness of the tsarist empire. In her estimation, the peasants may have emerged from barbarism, but only barely so. For the Red Cross president and other American observers, the famine seemed to demonstrate the primitive cultural and agricultural level of the Russian peasantry and the political and technological failures of the Russian state. Awareness of famine in Russia, while sparking a significant philanthropic impulse, also contributed to increasingly negative perceptions of Russia's standing among the hierarchy of nations.<sup>9</sup>

The American famine relief effort, which eventually fed between 70,000 and 125,000 people for a period of weeks during the crisis, represented one of the first major American efforts to export assistance. The campaign widened the range of American charitable efforts and demonstrated to its participants some of the complexities of international aid, particularly when dealing with political systems very different from their own.<sup>10</sup> In the realm of international relations, it represented a concrete and symbolic expression of both a long-term diplomatic friendship and an outpouring of sympathy from Americans as diverse as Iowa farmers and New York stevedores. Despite its success, the famine relief campaign marked the last real signpost in the vaunted Russian-American friendship.

By internationalizing American philanthropy, the organizers of the famine relief campaign also enlarged the sphere of female influence. Philanthropy represented an arena in which middle-class American women could exercise their talents and energies in the name of Christian charity. Woman's Christian Temperance Union president Frances Willard had laid claim to "woman's mighty realm of philanthropy [that] encroaches each day upon the empire of sin, disease and misery."<sup>11</sup> In the case of the Russian famine,

9. Barton, American Red Cross Circular, [February–March] 1892, *fond 170, opis 512/1, delo 737, listok 129*, Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossii (hereafter AVPR), Moscow. Repeated comparisons to colonial India, for example, demonstrate the relatively low opinion of Anglo-American observers of the Russian famine: "The Precautions against Famine in Russia and India," *The Nation* 53 (20 August 1891): 137–38; "The Famine in Russia," *The Spectator* 67 (14 November 1891): 666. See also "The Russian Crisis," *The Contemporary Review* 62 (July 1892): 43; E. A. Brayler Hodgetts, *In the Track of the Russian Famine: The Personal Narrative of a Journey through the Famine Districts of Russia* (London, 1892), 11; and Andrew Dickson White in 1905, quoted in *The American Image of Russia, 1775–1917*, ed. Eugene Anshel (New York, 1974), 22.

10. Estimates are drawn from, respectively, excerpt from Mabel Elliott, *The History of the American National Red Cross*, vol. 20-A, *American Red Cross Disaster Services, 1881–1918* (Washington, 1950), mimeograph in RG 200, box 59, file 894.8; and Louis Albert Banks, ed., *T. De Witt Talmage: His Life and Work* (London, 1902), 219. Previous U.S. efforts included relief shipments to Ireland in both 1847 and 1879; in 1879, however, in contrast to the Russian case, Congress authorized the use of a naval vessel to transport donations. See Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1963), 93–94, 119. Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York, 1982), 33–34.

11. Frances Willard, 1891 address to the WCTU national convention, quoted in Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia, 1981), 95.

American women had an opportunity to address all three provinces of that empire.

The relief campaign, which highlighted the suffering of women and children, also incorporated another area of recognized "female concern," the temperance issue. Among the many causes for the famine, including severe drought and primitive agricultural practices, American observers blamed peasant drinking habits. Temperance offered one primary avenue for the expansion of the international influence of American women. The presence of Frances Willard on the United States Russian Famine Committee underlined the growing American belief that excessive consumption of alcohol contributed to the shortage of food.<sup>12</sup>

While Clara Barton began her association with Russia by organizing charity to ameliorate famine, activist Alice Stone Blackwell became involved not to offer relief but to promote revolution. As such she stood at the forefront of the ranks of American progressives who embraced the cause of political reform in Russia, and like others, including William Dudley Foulke, the president of the Friends of Russian Freedom and a former president of the American Woman Suffrage Association, she embraced this cause in part as an extension of her suffrage work at home. For Blackwell this terrain was intensely personal as well as political. The daughter of suffragists Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell and the niece of both the first woman minister and first woman doctor in United States, Alice Stone Blackwell was active in a number of liberal causes, including the Anti-Imperialist League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice, and later the American League for India's Freedom.<sup>13</sup> Once she took up the antitzarist crusade, Blackwell used her editorship of the weekly *Woman's Journal* as a pulpit to speak out to Americans, and especially women, against the tsarist regime. She connected the political struggles of women in one of the most democratic countries in the world to those of both men and women in one of the least.

Alice Stone Blackwell's interest in Russian affairs was first awakened, she later recalled, by reading the memoirs of the "anarchist prince" Peter Kropotkin. Unlike most Americans interested in Russian affairs, Blackwell was little bothered by the revolutionaries' terrorist tactics and radical politics. A self-proclaimed socialist in opinion though not in party membership, she embraced the cause of Russian revolution and accepted the idea that the

12. See, for example, Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 110; W. Barnes Stevoni, *Through Famine Stricken Russia* (London, 1892), 28-34; *Consular Report* 106 (Washington, 1889), 278; Queen, "American Relief in the Russian Famine," 140-41; Ian Tyrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, 1991); and Hoyt, *Report of the RFR*, 9.

13. Blackwell Family Papers, roll 2, Library of Congress; Marlene Deahl Merrill's afterword to *Growing Up in Boston's Gilded Age: The Journal of Alice Stone Blackwell, 1872-1874*, ed. Marlene Deahl Merrill (New Haven, 1990), 240.

struggle against the tsarist government would be violent.<sup>14</sup> She never questioned the readiness of the Russian people to take up the responsibilities of democracy any more than she questioned the capacity of American women to undertake the obligations of the suffrage.

Blackwell became actively involved in the antitsarist movement through the Friends of Russian Freedom; she was one of the leading members of the Boston branch of the society and for a number of years served on its national committee. The formation of the organization was inspired largely by the writings of traveler and lecturer George Kennan on the evils of the Siberian exile system. Kennan, a cousin of later Russian specialist George Frost Kennan, had emerged as America's leading Russian expert by the 1890s. Kennan had also nominally served as national secretary of the American Red Cross during the early part of the decade, though he had played almost no role in the famine relief campaign.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, his close association with Barton may have helped spur her original interest in the Russian crisis. Kennan was thus connected to both Barton and Blackwell, but through very different organizations.

In both its membership and its rhetoric, the Friends of Russian Freedom revealed direct ties to broader reform movements, most notably the abolitionist and women's suffrage crusades. For example, the organization branded a proposed extradition treaty between the United States and tsarist Russia, which was first brought to the Senate in 1887, as a "new fugitive slave law." In 1891, Francis Garrison, the son of the famous abolitionist and a close friend and associate of Blackwell in the antitsarist cause, explained the goals of the society in a letter to Andrew D. White, the newly appointed ambassador to Russia: "We seek to give [the Russian revolutionaries] precisely the sort of sympathy which the English abolitionists gave their American brethren during the struggle which preceded the Civil War. . . . Rulers may tighten the chains and expend their wrath," he continued, "but in the long run they cannot ignore the enlightened sentiment of the civilized world."<sup>16</sup>

Alice Stone Blackwell first joined the newly formed Friends of Russian

14. Alice Stone Blackwell to Peter Kropotkin, 11 March 1904, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), Moscow, *fond* 1129, *opis* 2, *edinnyi xran* 615, 11.1, 2-4; and Blackwell to Petr Lazarev, GARF, *fond* 5824, *opis* 1, *edinnyi xran* 292. Blackwell to Isabel Barrows, 8 September 1893, Barrows Family Papers, Letters from Alice Stone Blackwell, file: I, bMS Am 1807.1 (56), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (by permission of the Houghton Library); Merrill, afterword in *Growing Up*, 242.

15. On Kennan and the relief campaign see Tillinghast to Barton, 8 March 1892, Barton Papers, roll 83.

16. Friends of Russian Freedom circular, 25 February 1893, Tamiment Archive, file: "American Friends of Russian Freedom," Bobst Library, New York University, New York; unnamed newspaper clipping, letter to the editor, "Russian-American National League," in Tamiment Archive, file: "American Friends of Russian Freedom." Francis Garrison to Andrew D. White, 5 June 1891, Andrew Dickson White Papers, roll 55, Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.



Freedom in the early 1890s, when Kennan's lectures and writings on the evils of the Siberian exile system were at the height of their popularity. By the middle of the decade that attention had largely turned elsewhere and, plagued by fund-raising problems and demoralized by the passage of the extradition treaty in 1893, the organization faded into hibernation. In 1904 the Friends of Russian Freedom reemerged, to a significant degree because of Blackwell's efforts,<sup>17</sup> as the Russo-Japanese War again riveted American attention on Russian affairs.

Blackwell used the *Woman's Journal* as a vehicle to promote the antitsarist cause. The magazine, the organ of the American Woman's Suffrage Association, took on a much more internationalist focus, with particular emphasis on Russian affairs, after 1893 when she was named co-editor, along with her father. After his death in 1909, she became the sole editor. From the pages of the *Woman's Journal*, Blackwell strongly urged the support of Japan in its war against Russia. A 1904 editorial declared, "In the two countries now at war, a difference of black and white is shown, as judged by the standards of national progress in America. Never a nation on earth has come so far forward to embrace what was good, to seek enlightenment, to find the best and adopt it, as has Japan."<sup>18</sup> For Barton, Russia's peasants had appeared barely civilized at best. For Blackwell, it was the country's rulers, not its peasants, who fell short of the minimum standards of a civilized society. The Japanese, in contrast, did not fall short.

Along with many American women who became involved in foreign affairs during the first decades of the twentieth century, Blackwell belonged to the American Peace Society. Despite her membership in this organization, the Boston activist retained a very militant attitude toward the Romanov regime. Like Mark Twain, who at a lecture on Russian affairs in 1888 cried out, "If dynamite is the only remedy for such conditions, then thank God for dynamite," Blackwell regarded violence against the tsarist state as a justifiable and probably essential means of reform. Describing conditions in Russia in 1893, she declared, "War is bad enough but it seems to me there are some things which are worse."<sup>19</sup>

Blackwell was more receptive to both the tactics and the socialist politics of many Russian oppositionists than were most of her American companions in the antitsarist cause, and she served as a bridge between the more moderate and radical groups. In 1904, anarchist Emma Goldman, whom the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* described as the "most dangerous woman in America," approached her suffragist friend and asked her to arrange a

17. "American Friends of Russian Freedom," *Free Russia* 15 (1 April 1904): 40-41.

18. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Our Attitude toward Russia," *Woman's Journal* 35 (19 March 1904): 90.

19. See John M. Craig, *Lucia Ames Mead and the American Peace Movement* (Lewiston, 1990); and Papachristou, "American Women and Foreign Policy." Twain quoted in "The Movement in America," *Free Russia* [American ed.] 1 (September 1890): 12; Blackwell to Barrows, 3 September 1893, Barrows Family Papers, Letters from Alice Stone Blackwell, file: I.

meeting between the leaders of the Friends of Russian Freedom and Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, the most famous woman revolutionary in Russia and a leader in the Socialist Revolutionary party. As a result of this encounter, in which Goldman used a pseudonym lest she shock the more conservative members of the Friends of Russian Freedom, the group helped finance Breshkovskaia's lecture and fund-raising tour through the United States. On this speaking tour the "little grandmother of the revolution," as Breshkovskaia was called, soft-pedaled both the radical politics and the violent methods of the Socialist Revolutionaries. At the first public event of the campaign, in New York, Goldman, however, was recognized and arrested.<sup>20</sup>

Blackwell and Breshkovskaia became life-long friends. Breshkovskaia continually praised Blackwell for her efforts to help the disenfranchised in both Russia and the United States. For the American suffragist this venerable Russian revolutionary symbolized the causes of both political freedom and women's rights. The *Woman's Journal* proclaimed, "She is a living refutation of the argument that 'women cannot be induced to take an interest in politics.' One such woman may offset a hundred Flora McFlimseys." Moreover, in Blackwell's estimation the demand of Russian revolutionaries for universal suffrage could serve as a model for more democratic nations. A St. Petersburg resolution calling for such an advance, Blackwell wrote, "must have been startling to many conservative Americans, who have fondly imagined that the demand for equal rights for women was limited to a handful of discontented spinsters in the United States. The movement is world wide. . . . It is further advanced in some respects among the 'intellectuals' of Russia than it is in the United States."<sup>21</sup>

For many conservative Americans, including the U.S. ambassador to Russia, George von Lengerke Meyer, the Russian revolutionaries' demand for women's suffrage only confirmed suspicions that the oppositionists were dangerously radical and wholly unrealistic, if not unbalanced. "The people are all nearly crazy here," Meyer wrote during the turmoil of the Revolution of 1905, "and to cap the climax they demand universal suffrage for women as well as men, not withstanding that there are a hundred million illiterates in the empire."<sup>22</sup>

The radicalism of Russian women had long intrigued American observ-

20. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 24 January 1905, quoted in Thompson and Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade*, 39-40; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2 vols. (New York, 1931, 1934), 1:360-65. On Breshkovskaia see Jane E. Good and David R. Jones, *Babushka: The Life of the Russian Revolutionary E. K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia, (1844-1934)* (Newtonville, MA, 1991).

21. For example, Breshkovskaia to Blackwell, 9 June 1911, George Kennan Papers, box 3, file: "Correspondence from Exiles," New York Public Library, New York. "For Russian Freedom," *Woman's Journal* 35 (3 December 1904): 388; "Advanced Russia," *ibid.* 36 (25 February 1905): 29.

22. George von L. Meyer to Henry Cabot Lodge, 12 December 1905, George von Lengerke Meyer Papers, box 5, file: 5.15, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

ers. In 1880, E. L. Godkin of the *Nation* wrote that Russia's women had "furnished Nihilism with its most courageous missionaries and martyrs, and with the most audacious expression of its contempt for social conventions." When street fighting broke out during the Revolution of 1905, even Ambassador Meyer was impressed, if also appalled, by the role played by women in joining male strikers and revolutionaries at the St. Petersburg barricades, where, the diplomat recorded in his diary, they "showed great courage and even ferocity." After Bloody Sunday, the *New York Times* declared, "The blood which crimsoned the snow had fired the brains and passions of the strikers and turned women as well as men into wild beasts." Here women were not only seeking the vote and basic rights, but they were willing to die and, perhaps more importantly in this connection, to kill for their beliefs. In the summer of 1917, an article in the progressive *Munsey's Magazine* asserted that women had been at the forefront of revolutionary movements in Russia for a hundred years and, further, that in that country far more women than men were capable of intelligently exercising the franchise. One of the first acts of the provisional government had been to recognize the political and social rights of women; "anything less," the author concluded, "would have been the basest ingratitude."<sup>23</sup>

In the decade and a half prior to the apparent creation of a democratic government in Russia in the spring of 1917, Blackwell continued to speak out against disenfranchisement in her own country and in the tsarist empire. Blackwell's *Woman's Journal* was one of few predominantly white publications, for example, that openly compared Russia's oppression of its Jews to her own country's treatment of African Americans and other minorities. "Our own misdeeds," a Charlotte Perkins Gilman editorial read in 1904, "are too patent for us to take any very lofty ground. . . . We can say little of the slaughtered Jew while we burn the Negro alive; but we do have a record of progress not yet matched, and we blame in others the very evils we have to admit in ourselves." African American editors made this connection with ease in their description of violence and discrimination in Russia, but unlike Blackwell and Gilman most of their colleagues in the white press apparently failed to see the resemblance.<sup>24</sup>

23. [E. L. Godkin], "The Secret of Nihilism," *The Nation* 30 (11 March 1880): 189-90; Meyer Diary, 28 December 1905, George von L. Meyer Papers, box 2, Library of Congress; *New York Times*, 23 January 1905. See Blackwell, "Attention Girls!" *Boys and Girls of the World*, 1929, Ekaterina Breshkovskaia Papers, box 2, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, California. On the role of women and the Russian revolutionary movement see Linda Harriet Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900-17* (Stanford, 1984); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York, 1983); and Richard Stites, *The Woman's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, 1978); Stephen Bonsal, "Woman's Part in the Russian Revolution," *Munsey's Magazine* 61 (July 1917): 219-23.

24. "Our Attitude toward Russia," 90. For examples of the attitudes of the African-American press toward Russia see the *Colored American Magazine* 9 (March 1905): 121-22; Paul Lawrence Dunbar in the *Baltimore Afro American*, 8 August 1903; and Arnold Shankman,

Two of the basic objectives of the Friends of Russian Freedom were to publicize reports of government brutality in Russia and to attempt to place these human rights issues on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. International pressure, the group's members believed, could help drive the Russian government forward along the road to reform. The financial resources of the organization were always limited, but both the Friends of Russian Freedom and Blackwell personally sought to assist more direct antitsarist efforts. In 1904, for example, Blackwell raised money to finance the efforts of George Kennan and Nicholas Russel to conduct a propagandizing campaign among Russian prisoners of war in Japanese custody. She also contributed to this project from her own limited funds.<sup>25</sup>

Despite her acceptance of both political radicalism and terrorism in the advancement of the antitsarist cause, there were limits to Blackwell's willingness to cross certain boundaries of moderation and sensibility. In 1906, as he was embarking on a fund-raising campaign in the United States, Russian governmental sources leaked to the American press the news that Russian writer and revolutionary Maxim Gorky was traveling with a woman who was not his wife. The resulting scandal derailed Gorky's fund-raising plans and at least temporarily damaged the antitsarist cause in the United States. Blackwell sympathized with Gorky's dilemma, since divorce in Russia required both substantial money and government approval, but asserted that most Americans would nonetheless conclude that a couple should "submit to the injustice, and work to get the law changed, rather than to set the law at defiance and form irregular unions." She also declined to act as an intermediary in an attempt to introduce the now thoroughly infamous author first to the president of the Friends of Russian Freedom and then, through him, to Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>26</sup> Blackwell recognized that, in the United States, Gorky's ties to his traveling companion had proven more damaging to his cause than had his better-concealed connections to the Bolshevik party.

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"Brothers Across the Sea: Afro-Americans on the Persecution of Russian Jews, 1811-1917," *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (Spring 1975): 114-16.

25. Kennan to Felix Volkhovskii, 14 December 1904, Felix Volkhovskii Papers, box 9, Hoover Institution; Kennan, "How Russian Soldiers Were Enlightened in Japan," *Outlook* 109 (17 March 1915): 622-26. References to FRF fund-raising are found in Blackwell to Hourwich, 22 and 26 April and 12 May 1905, Alice Stone Blackwell Papers, file 1, Radcliffe College, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts. See also Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865-1924* (Athens, OH, 1990), 256-63; and idem, "The Kennan-Russel Campaign among Russian Prisoners of War in Japan, 1904-1905," *Russian Review* 40 (July 1981): 263-77.

26. *The Woman's Journal* 37 (28 April 1906): 66; and Blackwell to N. I. Stone, 19 April 1906, Boris Nicolaevsky Papers, box 431, series 242, Hoover Institution. On Gorky's visit see also N. Burenin, "Poezdka A. M. Gorkogo v Ameriku" [The trip of A. M. Gorky to America], *Novyi Mir* 16:6 (1940): 192-201; Jane E. Good, "Strangers in a Strange Land: Five Russian Radicals Visit the United States, 1890-1908" (Ph.D. diss., American University, 1979), 175-241; and Ernest Poole, "Maxim Gorky in New York," *Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 22 (May 1944): 77-83.

As one of the leaders of the antitsarist movement in the United States, Blackwell at times felt constrained by the social conventions that limited the activities of women in the public arena. In making arrangements for a loan from her own funds to advance the prisoner of war propaganda project, for instance, Blackwell worked to ensure that her father would not learn of the transactions, although, she added, "I have a perfect legal and moral right to dispose of my own money as I choose." In another case Blackwell declined to express a written opinion on the question of the possible repudiation of debts if a revolutionary government took over, on the grounds that an offering from a man would carry far more weight with the public.<sup>27</sup> Although a firebrand on other issues, especially suffrage, Blackwell displayed a distinct pragmatism regarding public opinion and certain social barriers, even as she sought to break them down.

Blackwell nevertheless played a leading role in the American antitsarist crusade. To evaluate her place in that movement one must first examine the impact of the movement itself. In 1911, American antitsarist forces gained their most significant victory with the congressional vote to abrogate a commercial treaty between the United States and Russia that dated back to 1832. That repudiation came about as a result of growing U.S. opposition to religious and political persecution in Russia. The American Friends of Russian Freedom acted as a significant lobbying force in the drive to abrogate the treaty. This group of middle-class reformers helped increase public opposition to the Russian autocracy and helped shape a more antagonistic U.S. policy toward Russia during the years immediately preceding the First World War. Subsequently, the image of fighting a war "to make the world safe for democracy" on the side of such a despotic power significantly compounded the American debate over whether to enter the conflict.

Blackwell argued that Americans, men and women alike, had an obligation to support revolution in the distant Russian empire on the grounds of basic humanity and in the name of democracy. A fellow member of the Friends of Russian Freedom's national committee, Jane Addams, shared this viewpoint and argued further that Russian despotism had, in fact, become an American issue through the massive immigration of its persecuted citizens. "The residents of Hull House," she wrote, "have always seen many evidences of the Russian Revolution." This distant struggle had been brought home to the prominent Chicago reformer by the scarred back of a young girl beaten by Cossacks and through the eyes of orphans whose parents had been killed in the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, as well as because of her acquaintanceship with Leo Tolstoy and Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, who she termed one of the "oldest and sanest" of Russia's revolutionaries. Withstanding the frequent storms of criticism that Hull House was consort-

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27. Blackwell to Isaac Hourwich, 26 April 1905, 28 December 1904, and 11 January 1906, Blackwell Papers, file: 1.

ing with anarchists through its connections with Russian revolutionaries, Addams maintained her public support for the antitsarist cause, although, unlike Blackwell, she appeared troubled by the violent methods of the oppositionists and the possible repercussions of such terrorism, even when undertaken in a worthy cause.<sup>28</sup>

Blackwell's political approach to affairs in Russia was considerably more radical than that of many of her fellow reformers. In the face of continuing repression, the Boston suffragist not only condoned but supported the practice of terrorism as a revolutionary strategy in the tsarist empire. The dilemma for most American progressives working for the cause of Russian reform came when that country actually experienced a thoroughgoing revolution. Blackwell proved less disturbed than most by these changes. In the aftermath of the February and October revolutions she refused to condemn the policies of the Soviets utterly, instead maintaining that there were "both good and bad features" in the Soviet regime. Although she had not actively participated in the Russian famine relief campaign of the 1890s, in the early Soviet period Blackwell worked for the American Committee for Relief of Russian Children to raise funds for the Million Cans of Milk Campaign, an undertaking highly reminiscent of the earlier drives for corn and flour.<sup>29</sup> Once again Americans, and especially women, were urged to give generously to the starving women and children of Russia, however distasteful they might find the Russian state.

In the 1920s, Blackwell developed interests in still more international causes, most notably decolonization in India, while retaining her long-term sympathy for the plight of Armenians and her interest in Russian affairs, as well as her ties to Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, who had been forced to flee the revolution for which she had once struggled. Blackwell continued to speak out on behalf of the dispossessed and disenfranchised abroad even as the American women's suffrage movement celebrated its greatest victory at home. Blackwell's activities made her a well-known figure in Boston; in 1922 she was selected in a *Boston Sunday Post* survey as the city's "Most Interesting Woman." Amelia Earhart finished second.<sup>30</sup>

Alice Stone Blackwell and Clara Barton were active in very different aspects of the American-Russian relationship and represented different segments of American reformism. Each sought to help the Russian people but with radically divergent perceptions of the country's needs. The efforts of Blackwell and Barton exemplify the growing involvement of women in American domestic and external affairs at the turn of the century. Blackwell

28. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910; reprint, New York, 1981), 276-90.

29. Blackwell to Hourwich, 27 December 1905, Blackwell Papers, file: 1; Blackwell, October 1934, clipping from *Zion's Herald*, 968-69, Blackwell Family Papers, box 54, file: 699, Schlesinger Library; American Committee for Relief of Russian Children to Blackwell, 12 April 1922, Blackwell Family Papers, roll 2, Library of Congress.

30. Clipping, [1922], *Boston Sunday Post*, in Blackwell Family Papers, file: 701, Schlesinger Library.

encountered, or at least acknowledged, more difficulties based on gender in her attempts to influence American political discourse than Barton apparently did in her efforts to internationalize the scope of the American Red Cross in the 1890s through the famine campaign in Russia. Barton had overcome formidable obstacles earlier in her career; by 1890 her reputation served to insulate her somewhat from criticism on the basis of gender, though within fifteen years that reputation would be eroded by pressures from within her organization. Nonetheless, philanthropy proved a more accessible avenue of female participation than did politics.

The careers of these two women differed in part because they represented two different generations within turn-of-the-century activism. Blackwell, a college graduate and Phi Beta Kappa member, worked at the center of the New England suffrage movement and was a prominent member of a new generation of women reformers, many of them the daughters of abolitionists, who had now turned to a variety of national and even international causes. Barton represented an earlier prototype of woman activist—less educated and less professional in her management style. While her philanthropic activities constituted an important breakthrough for women as leaders at the national level, she herself eventually resigned from the Red Cross in 1904 after a long internal battle in which her critics charged that more professional leadership was needed, particularly in terms of managing the organization's finances.<sup>31</sup> To a certain extent Barton fell victim to the growing professionalism of the progressive movement.

Both Barton and Blackwell acted as leaders in organizations with male as well as female membership. Barton's accomplishments in this area were particularly notable. While by the 1890s middle- and upper-class Americans may have widely accepted the idea that philanthropy as a field of endeavor fell partially within the woman's purview, few women exerted leadership within charitable organizations on the scale that Barton did. Moreover, Barton herself had helped American women to stake their claim to that empire.

Blackwell, while continuing to concentrate much of her energy on more purely "women's issues" and seeking to reduce gender barriers in these areas, blatantly crossed others in her efforts to influence American public opinion and foreign policy. Both American supporters and Russian revolutionaries singled the Boston activist out in praise of her efforts on behalf of the antitsarist cause and emphasized her importance to the movement. Through the *Woman's Journal*, she reached a largely female audience; with her coverage of international affairs she sought to broaden the views of her readers in addition to promoting causes such as revolution in Russia. Blackwell maintained that women possessed a valuable identity as an "autonomous moral force in politics" and, even after suffrage was attained, believed

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31. See Crunden, *Ministers of Reform*, chap. 1; Pryor, *Clara Barton*, 351–53.

that they should seek to preserve that identity outside the narrow boundaries of the party system.<sup>32</sup> She also clearly believed, and acted on the idea, that women could and should interact in what had formerly been the virtually exclusively male arenas of national and international politics. Blackwell's engagement in the antitsarist crusade, undertaken on both moral and political grounds, demonstrated both principles.

The careers of these two reformers expanded the arena of opportunity for women in the United States, in part through their encroachment into the very male dominated arena of international relations. Their divergent experiences reveal a broader shift within American attitudes toward tsarist Russia. Barton's great charitable endeavor, undertaken in the name of national friendship and gratitude, represented the last real demonstration of the famed Russian-American friendship, one of the most consistent diplomatic relationships of the nineteenth century. Blackwell's long campaign on behalf of Russian revolutionists, grounded in her ideas of suffrage and her belief in the right of a nation's citizenry to representative government, symbolized the deterioration of that friendship as American progressives rejected old loyalties and turned on an autocratic and anachronistic political system in a distant empire. Blackwell stood to the left of many of her middle-class comrades in arms in this political movement but shared with them a fundamental commitment to the goal of Russian reform. Both Barton and Blackwell were engaged in a genuinely radical undertaking of their own, albeit on different fronts, in their struggle to expand opportunities for women in American society. Their careers, then, in terms of their efforts on behalf of both American women and those suffering in Russia, reveal the road from relief to revolution.

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32. "American Friends of Russian Freedom," *Free Russia* 15 (1 April 1904): 40-41; George Lazarev, "Alisa Ston Blyakvell: Emansipatsii zhenshchin v Amerike" [Alice Stone Blackwell: The emancipation of women in America], draft manuscript, 1925, GARF, *fond* 5824, *opis* 2, *edinnyi xran* 41, 11. 4-9; Breshkovskaia to Ellen Starr of Hull House, 11/25 January 1911, Kennan Papers, box 3, file: "Correspondence from Exiles," New York Public Library; Merrill in *Growing Up*, 241.



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