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HENRY MIDDLETON AND THE ARBITRAMENT OF THE ANGLO-AMERICAN SLAVE CONTROVERSY BY TSAR ALEXANDER I

HAROLD E. BERQUIST, JR. *

Early in 1820 it became necessary for President Monroe to accept the resignation of George Washington Campbell of Tennessee, the American minister in St. Petersburg, Russia. Because Alexander I, the Russian Tsar, had recently been selected by both the British and American governments as the "friendly sovereign" who would arbitrate the dispute which then existed between England and the United States over the slaves taken by the British during and after the War of 1812, it became highly desirable to replace Campbell with another southerner who "would be especially vigilant regarding the slave-owners' interests."¹ Henry Middleton, a wealthy South Carolinian slave-owner, former governor and congressman of that state, and scion of the great Middleton family of South Carolina, was suggested by John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War in the Monroe administration, and became Monroe's final choice.²

Secretary of State John Quincy Adams was surprised by Monroe's selection of Middleton, though it is quite apparent that Adams had no misgivings about Middleton's qualifications for this important post. Adams thought, in fact, that Middleton was a fine writer—equal to Henry Clay, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, who had objected to the appointment (which might explain Adams' surprise over Monroe's selection), but inferior to Clay as a speaker.³

Adams' wife, Louisa Catherine Adams, was herself pleased with Middleton's appointment. Shortly after Middleton's confirmation by the Senate on April 6, 1820, she wrote her aged father-in-law, ex-President John Adams, that

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¹ Samuel F. Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949), p. 263.

² John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, ed. by Charles F. Adams, 12 vols., (Philadelphia, 1875), 4: 505.

³ *Ibid.*, 5: 132.

appropriate and even necessary. The "remarkable intellectual leadership" of the American Revolution had been nurtured in a world where gentlemen ruled, where statesmen "believed that their speeches and writings" need influence only "the rational and enlightened part" of the population. A "decline in the intellectual quality of American political life and an eventual separation between ideas and power" was, according to Gordon Wood, the price paid for "what we have come to value most—our egalitarian culture and our democratic society."²⁷ But the old ways had lived on in the elitist and deferential politics of South Carolina, whose economy allowed planters time both for politics and for study and whose political system encouraged "the felicitous debates of disinterested aristocrats" who had often first come to know each other at the South Carolina College in Columbia. In such a society, and perhaps only there, a man could rise in influence unhindered by the jealousies of a deTocquevillian democracy; there a man could, like Calhoun, still aspire to the approbation only of the "intelligent and disinterested."²⁸ There, in short, in the increasingly anachronistic politics of South Carolina, ideas and power could remain united, as they had been in what was rapidly becoming for Americans elsewhere only the heroic days of a revolutionary past.

²⁷ Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition*, p. 69; Gordon S. Wood, "The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution," in *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, 1974), pp. 64, 67.

²⁸ Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, p. 14; Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, Sept. 8, 1831, in Wilson ed., *Papers of Calhoun*, XI, p. 468.

Mr. Middleton's appointment to Russia [is] very popular. He is a man of very good talent, not brilliant, of genteel deportment, perfectly conversant with fashionable European manners. Speaking French with ease and fluency and has—independent of his Salary [as minister] fifty thousand dollars a year which will enable him to live as a Minister should live in Russia. . . . His family are well educated and highly accomplished and his Lady an English woman with a decided taste for Court life.⁴

Beginning on June 15, 1820, while the nearly fifty-year-old Middleton, his wife Mary, and several of his nine children were crossing the Atlantic, going first to London before continuing on to St. Petersburg, John Quincy Adams drafted Middleton's general instructions. Adams labored over these instructions very diligently and did not complete them until sometime between June 29 and July 5,⁵ at which time he gave them to two of Middleton's sons, Arthur and John, then, respectively, twenty-five and twenty, who delivered them to their father in London early in August.

Nearly all of the last and longest part of these instructions were devoted exclusively to the reference to the Russian Emperor on the question of the slaves liberated by the British during and after the War of 1812.

The meaning of the language of the first article of the Treaty of Ghent was, in effect, what the dispute between the British and American governments was about, and was what the Tsar had been asked to decide. Under the British construction the article had not been violated when the English had liberated—or confiscated—and had not restored the slaves; under the American construction, it had been. If the British had violated the article, then the slave-owners who had lost slaves would be entitled to an indemnification from the British government for the 'property' they had lost.

The first article read in part:

All territory, places and possessions whatsoever, taken by either party from the other during the war, or which may be taken after the signing of the treaty, . . . shall be restored without delay, and without causing any destruction or carrying

⁴ Louisa Catherine Adams to John Adams, Apr. 17, 1820, *The Adams Papers* Microcopy # 449; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Journal*, 16th Cong. 1st sess. 1819-1820, pp. 205-206.

⁵ Adams, *Memoirs*, 5: 152.

away of the artillery or other public property originally captured in the said forts or places, and which shall remain therein upon the exchange of the ratifications of this treaty, or any slaves or other private property.⁶

After the exchange of the ratifications of the treaty on February 17, 1815, the British claimed that only those slaves should be returned who were "originally captured" in the forts and places to be restored and who were still in those places at the time of this exchange. The British interpreted the first article as if its prescriptions about public property also applied to slaves and other private property.

The United States, on the other hand, claimed that there was a clear distinction in the treaty between public and private property, and that the stipulations which applied to one could not apply to the other. In 1816 the English had modified their position after the expostulations of John Quincy Adams (who was then the American minister in London) and agreed that they had been obliged to return slaves originally captured at places to be restored even if at the time of the exchange they were no longer in those same places but were in other places to be restored. Yet Viscount Castlereagh, the British foreign secretary, refused to admit that private property removed to British ships prior to the exchange of ratifications was properly indemnifiable.⁷

Middleton and his party arrived in London on July 12, 1820. Both Middleton and Richard Rush, the American minister in England, decided to seek an immediate interview with Castlereagh, who was still the foreign secretary, about the "reference." Middleton was anxious to get on with the negotiations. Such an interview took place within three days after Middleton's arrival,⁸ but little was decided, and, in fact, the next meeting with Castlereagh did not occur until August 21. Even then Castlereagh was little prepared for the meeting. He had been preoccupied with the closing of Parliament and with Queen Caroline's state trial in the House of Lords, which had begun on August 17.⁹

⁶ John B. Moore, *History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to Which the United States Has Been a Party* (Washington, 1898), 1: 351.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 357.

⁸ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Aug. 28, 1820, *Diplomatic Dispatches, Russia* (Washington: U.S. National Archives), VIII, #1, (cited as *DD, Russia*).

⁹ *DD, Russia*, VIII, #1; Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh 1815-1822: Britain and the European Alliance* (London, 1947), p. 222.

Although Castlereagh was ill-prepared for the meeting, he did say that he thought it would be better to allow the Tsar to decide the extent of the total claims, including the average indemnity for each slave lost, rather than to have a commission do it, since commissions seldom agreed.

On Friday, August 25, Rush and Middleton met with Castlereagh for the third time.¹⁰ Castlereagh gave Rush a *projet* of the formal application (or compromis) to be submitted jointly by the United States and Great Britain to the Russian Emperor, and stressed again the importance of limiting the sphere of competence of a commission, on which, because of Middleton's instructions, the Americans continued to insist.

On Wednesday, August 30, Rush and Middleton met with Castlereagh for the fourth time. Henry Goulburn, one of the English diplomats at Ghent, was also present.¹¹ Although Goulburn reported he had failed to find any Admiralty records of lost slaves, he did produce a copy of the letter John Quincy Adams had written on September 15, 1815, which listed the 702 slaves removed from Cumberland Island, Georgia, and which Goulburn asserted was the entire number of slaves taken away. But Middleton and Rush told him and Castlereagh that this list was only partial. Other slaves were carried off from other places.

Rush and Middleton also refused to accept a limitation on the number of American claims, which had been in the British *projet* of the joint application. The British wanted to limit the function of the proposed commission to making final judgments over pre-existing claims.

Castlereagh thereupon offered a way of implementing an arbitral decision favorable to the United States: he suggested a tribunal similar to the one provided in a convention signed by Great Britain with Spain in 1817 to suppress the slave trade. This tribunal would fix the amount of the indemnity. It would consist of two judges and two arbitrators, with England and the United States each furnishing a judge and an arbitrator. The judges would "settle all differences if they can agree, and in the case of disagreement of the judges, one of these arbitrators is called in by Lot to decide between them."¹²

¹⁰ DD, *Russia*, VIII, #1.

¹¹ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Sept. 15, 1820, DD, *Russia*, VIII, #2.

¹² Ibid.

After the fourth meeting, there was once more further delay. Rush again had to request another meeting, and so a reluctantly compliant Castlereagh (who was naturally averse to negotiating about what ought to be done if England were placed in the role of a debtor) invited Middleton and Rush to Cray Farm, his country residence, for the fifth and final meeting with the two Americans together. At Cray Farm, on September 8, the two Americans and Castlereagh came to an agreement about the substance, not the exact wording, of the compromise that Middleton and the British ambassador in Russia, Sir Charles Bagot, would deliver to the Russian government. Middleton also left a memorandum with Castlereagh on all the points on which they had concurred.¹³

With these points in hand Middleton was at last in a position to initiate the reference in St. Petersburg as soon as Tsar Alexander had authorized it. With Rush's assistance, Middleton had effected these agreements with busy statesmen who were loath to discuss the matter, several months before a possible application could be made, and while he was unaccredited to the government whose officials were his adversaries. His achievement in London was the first example of his very great ability as a diplomat to move and persuade foreign statesmen, an ability which he would demonstrate several times during his ministerial career.

The Middletons arrived in St. Petersburg from London after a leisurely, nearly two-month long journey during which they did much sight-seeing. They arrived in St. Petersburg in November, 1820.¹⁴

Since Alexander was out of the country when the family arrived, there was little that Middleton could do about the reference, but he must have been pleased to learn near the end of April from Adams about Washington's satisfaction with the results of the London visit.¹⁵

¹³ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Aug. 28, 1820, *The Adams Papers*, Microcopy #450.

¹⁴ Mrs. Henry Middleton to Septima Rutledge, Nov. 16, 1820, Box 5 Cadwalader Collection, Fisher Section, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (cited as CC, Fisher).

All the dates used in this article are "new style" dates, the dates used in the United States and in Western European countries. In the nineteenth century Russia used the "old style" or Julian calendar which in the 1820s lagged 12 days behind the western or Gregorian calendar.

¹⁵ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Dec. 18, 1820, #3; Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, April 20, 1821, #4, *DD, Russia*, VIII.

The only displeasing feature was the type of commission Castle-reagh had demanded, since Adams did not care for the idea of settling differences "by lot." Nevertheless, if necessary, wrote Adams, the United States would accept Castlereagh's proposed commission. Adams also informed Middleton that he had sent a circular to the governors of twelve slave states to inform them about the negotiations going on in St. Petersburg and to ask the governors to notify the "sufferors"—those who had lost slaves—to transmit without delay to the State Department authenticated information about the slaves carried away and about their value.¹⁶

After the successful repression of Italian revolutionaries by Austrian and royalists forces, Alexander returned to St. Petersburg. He had been absent ten-and-a-half months.¹⁷ Middleton was therefore able to seek an audience and be fully accredited. On Sunday, June 17, 1821, Middleton had a *private* audience with Alexander, then probably the single most powerful man in the world. This was at the Tsar's summer palace, Peterhoff, located in Kamenni Ostrov, a little island on the Gulf of Finland. On this official and highly ceremonial occasion, the Emperor, who was seven years younger than Middleton, was gracious and cordial and made several inquiries about the United States. To Middleton, it seemed as though Alexander knew more about the United States than any other man in Russia that he had yet met. During the audience the two men merely discussed general topics and made no mention of the reference, since that would have been too time-consuming.

After Middleton's accreditation, the Russian ministers urged him to proceed in the reference, and on July 4, Count Nesselrode, the Russian foreign secretary, formally accepted for the Emperor the request that he, the Emperor, should be the arbiter of the Anglo-American slave dispute, and requested that he, Nesselrode, be sent the pertinent documents.

During the month of July, 1821, Middleton and Bagot collaborated in writing their joint application, both through written correspondence and through private conversation. The two men settled

¹⁶ Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, All Countries, IX, 57, 60, 61 National Archives. The copy of Adams' circular to the governors of slave states that Middleton received can be seen in American Legation, St. Petersburg, Various Documents Received #4329 (1816-1829), National Archives.

¹⁷ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, June 20, 1821, #5 DD, Russia, VIII.

on the wording on the final draft of the compromis before the end of July. Middleton passed this on to the Russians on July 30 along with a printed memoir, one which had the rather lengthy title, which, when translated into English, was "Summary of the Question, or Short Statement of the Dispute which Happened in Regard to the First Article of the Treaty of Ghent, between the United States of America and England, with Supporting Documents." In conformity with Middleton's wishes, the compromis did specifically describe the reference as an arbitration, it did commit both the English and American governments to regard Alexander's decision as binding, and it did provide that either party could have "recourse to the intervention of His Imperial Majesty in the event some ulterior difficulties present themselves in the execution of His decision."¹⁸

Brief summaries of both British and American arguments were in the compromis. In it Middleton argued that to interpret the first article of the Treaty of Ghent, one had to apprehend the literal sense of its stipulation for the general restitution of the territories and properties of both England and the United States and not to be confused by the "elliptical construction of the last member of the sentence." The interdiction about taking away private property was "absolute" and without any condition, while the condition about restoring property still remaining in the place where taken was "expressly limited to public property." Middleton wrote that the article made a clear distinction between private and public property because there is an essential difference between them. Often there is good reason for stipulating the right of destroying public property, such as forts, when there was no reason for adopting the same measure for private property. In fact, Middleton stated, any stipulation about not destroying slaves, a form of private property, would be "unprecedented." Furthermore, he continued, if the negotiators at Ghent had meant to subject "private property to the limitations contained in the terms 'originally taken and which will still be found in the said forts and places,' they would have put that phrase at the end of the sentence after the words 'or any slaves or other private properties.'" This would have subordinated all properties, regardless of type, to the same condition. Actually, in the article, "the restrictive clause was placed immediately after the words

¹⁸ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Aug. 1, 1821, #6, *DD, Russia*, VIII. Enclosure I of this dispatch is a copy of the compromis.

'artillery and other public properties'; and consequently the restriction is found limited to public property alone; without affecting in any manner private property."

Middleton also raised a subject which a purely linguistic interpretation did not require, namely, that of the illegality of emancipating the slaves of the enemy in time of war.

Bagot, in his arguments, asserted that this subject appeared to have no relation to the question of the true sense of the article. Bagot also claimed that many of the slaves came to the British as fugitives and deserters who had fled their masters for private motives or from the invitations of the British naval officers, and that accepting them was, in truth, "in conformity to the law and to the usages of war."

There was obviously, between the two governments, a disagreement not only about the meaning of the article but about what were the laws of legitimate warfare.

In his purely grammatical or linguistic arguments, Bagot asserted that the terms of the treaty did not permit one to make a distinction between slaves and other types of private property and that consequently any stipulations that pertained to private property must necessarily pertain to slaves as well. Bagot also reasoned that if "one holds that private property is exempted from all the conditions by which it is agreed that public property had to be restituted, it would result that the restitution of private property would not be subjected further . . . to any condition." Bagot then stated that nothing could have been further from the minds of the negotiators at Ghent. They intended that the restitution of private property was to be subject to certain conditions, the conditions of the first article, and which "one admits to govern the restitution of the artillery and other public property."

In his "Summary of the Question" memoir, Middleton developed the American arguments more fully. He attacked Castlereagh's refusal to pay for the slaves which had been taken on board British ships before the treaty exchange (before February 17, 1815) and which were still in American waters at or after that date. It must be emphasized that Castlereagh had promised in 1816 to pay compensation for slaves taken from American *soil* after the exchange of the treaty ratifications. Middleton skillfully exploited Castlereagh's partial admission of wrongdoing by enlarging upon it to encompass other slaves removed by the British. Middleton wrote that the territorial waters of the United States also comprised places

and possessions to be restored at the time of the exchange just as much as did forts and other sites on the land. Therefore, slaves on board British ships in American territorial waters at the time of the exchange could not be carried away either.¹⁹ This argument strengthened the American case. It was not one that Adams ever suggested.

It was not until October 20, 1821, that Bagot's memoir on the slave controversy was ready. Like his superiors in London, Bagot had been preoccupied by the Near Eastern crisis of that year, arising from the Greek rebellion against the Turkish Empire, and especially from Russia's desire to help the Greeks by going to war with Turkey, something which the English strongly disapproved. This crisis partly explains Bagot's slowness in replying to Middleton's memoir.²⁰

Bagot's strongest counterargument was a restatement of one that Castlereagh had previously made in a letter to Adams written in April, 1816. This letter had stated that the negotiators at Ghent could not possibly have intended that the prohibition against removing property could apply to property which had been removed before the end of the war. Only about things still in the places to be restored could there have been any such prohibition. "What was already taken away could not be subject to the prohibition. If not found in the places to be restored, then it was impossible to carry it away." Bagot also claimed that British ships had rights of extra-territoriality in American waters and that the slaves aboard the British ships in those waters did not have to be surrendered.²¹

Middleton wasted no time in answering Bagot's memoir and sent a rejoinder to Nesselrode on November 16, four days after he had received a copy of Bagot's paper. In order to disprove the first most convincing argument, Middleton wrote that it was not the intention of the negotiators at Ghent that was under scrutiny but the "significance of the words of the text of the article which exists."²² He derided in a mocking tone, or in a tone of restrained

¹⁹ *DD, Russia, VIII, #6, "Precis de la Question,"* pp. 10-11. All official notes were written in French, the official diplomatic language of the Russian government.

²⁰ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Sept. 30, 1821, #9, *DD, Russia, VIII.*

²¹ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Nov. 17, 1821, #13, enclosure b, *DD, Russia, VIII.*

²² *DD, Russia, VIII, #13, enclosure c.*

indignation, the lesser, undocumented arguments of Bagot's memoir but otherwise devoted little attention to them. He did, however, resist at some length Bagot's allegation that freeing slaves was not against the usages of war among civilized nations, as well as Bagot's allegation that British ships in American waters had extraterritorial rights which allowed the slaves to be taken away. Middleton rejoined that the British claimed for themselves the right to invade private property in freeing the slaves, and that the slaves found on board British ships in the ports of the United States were in the territory of the United States, according to the law of nations and "according to the nature of things."²³

On February 13, 1822, after the completion of the period of argumentation, Middleton learned orally but unofficially that the Tsar had made a decision in the reference favorable to the United States.²⁴ Yet by April 25, 1822, there still had been no formal announcement. The delay was partly occasioned by differences of opinion among Alexander's advisers about the reference. The Emperor said to Middleton on one occasion (most probably at either a diplomatic *cercle* or at a lavish state ball), "Never have I been so occupied with grammatical subtleties since you gave me the honor of naming me arbitrator."²⁵ But Middleton more correctly analyzed the cause of the delay as the Tsar's preoccupation with more important political problems.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that Alexander's decision in the reference was not grounded just on political considerations, whatever they might have been. The linguistic justification for the decision was communicated to Middleton and to Bagot in a paper entitled "Grammatical Observations" at the time the decision was announced at the office of the Russian Foreign Ministry.²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Feb. 13, 1822, #16, *DD, Russia, IX*.

²⁵ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, Apr. 25, 1822, #17, *DD, Russia, IX*.

Alexander may have said these words to Middleton on the occasion of the *fête unique* given by the Empress Mother in Feb. 1822 to celebrate the birthday of her daughter, the Grand Duchess of Saxe Weimar, a grand costume ball, which impressed Mrs. Middleton greatly. Mrs. Middleton to Septima Rutledge, Apr. 27, 1822, CC, Fisher, Box 5.

²⁶ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, May 6, 1822, #18, enclosure #3, *DD, Russia, IX*.

At this private meeting Nesselrode made a preliminary statement in which he asserted that the Tsar's opinion rested entirely on grammatical considerations; no inference about the laws of nations either contributed to the verdict or should be supposed from it.²⁷ Nesselrode then read the award.

The Emperor is of opinion :

That the United States . . . are entitled to a just indemnification from Great Britain for all private property carried away by the British forces; and as the question regards slaves more especially, for all such slaves as were carried away by the British from the places and territories of which the restitution was stipulated by the treaty, . . .

That the United States are entitled to consider as having been carried away all such slaves as may have been transported from the above-mentioned territories on board the British vessels within the waters of the said territories, and who, for this reason, have not been restored.

But that, if there should be any American slaves who were carried away from the territories of which the first article of the Treaty of Ghent has not stipulated the restitution to the United States, the United States are not to claim an indemnity for the said slaves.²⁸

This award, so advantageous to the United States, immediately led to an inquiry by Bagot. He wondered if the award meant that Great Britain would have to indemnify the United States for slaves which had voluntarily surrendered themselves to the British and were consequently not forcibly removed from the territories which had to be restored. Middleton merely said to Bagot at this time that the award made no distinction between slaves captured and those which voluntarily went to the British. He also stated that it could not have been the Tsar's intention to countenance the legitimacy of the mode of warfare contended for by the British, a fact which Middleton had previously perceived and exploited

The Russian government answered Bagot a week later.

. . . In quitting the places and territories of which the Treaty of Ghent stipulates the restitution to the United States, His Britannic Majesty's forces had no right to carry away from

²⁷ *DD, Russia, IX, #18, enclosure #1.*

²⁸ *DD, Russia, IX, #18, enclosure #2.*

these places and territories, absolutely, any slave, by whatever means he had fallen or come into their power.²⁹

In other words, it was not how the slaves were taken (or even when they were taken, as Castlereagh and Bagot had maintained) but from where they were taken which would determine in each instance whether the British had violated the first article.

Middleton and Bagot had little difficulty drawing up a convention to carry into effect the Tsar's decision. By June 22, 1822, they met with the responsible Russian ministers to give them a draft. A few days later, on July 4, in another conference, Middleton and Bagot learned of Alexander's approval of the convention.³⁰

The Russo-Anglo-American convention established a commission of the type suggested by Castlereagh, which would sit in Washington, to take evidence about the value of each of the slaves and claims. According to the convention, the judgment of the commission regarding the value and validity of each claim for lost property that would be investigated would be final and conclusive.³¹ The convention actually provided for a rather complicated method for effecting the Tsar's award, one which at many points could—and did—lend itself to squabbles between the American and British commissioners. If Alexander had wanted to stimulate and keep up tensions between the British and American governments, this convention served nicely.

After the signing of the convention on July 12, 1822, Middleton sent the official American copy of the convention and all the ancillary public documents to Washington with the secretary of the American legation in St. Petersburg, Charles Pinckney.³² In dispatching these papers in this manner Middleton virtually ended his role in the slave dispute, and, as it turned out, Russia's as well.

On January 3, 1823, The Senate approved the convention unanimously, and in the end the British paid to American slave owners \$1,204,960.³³

²⁹ DD, *Russia*, IX, #18, enclosure #4. The official date of the award was May 4, 1822.

³⁰ Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, July 6, 1822, #19, enclosures #1, #2, #4, #5, and #9, DD, *Russia*, IX.

³¹ Both the French and England language versions of this convention are in Department of State, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, III, ed. by Hunter Miller (Washington, 1933), pp. 91-102.

³² Henry Middleton to John Quincy Adams, July 28, 1822, *The Adams Papers*, Microcopy #455.

³³ U.S., Congress, Senate, *Journal*, 18th Cong., 1st sess. 1822-1823, p. 318; Moore, *Arbitrations*, I, 366, 367, 371-78, 381-82.

FIGHTING THE ODDS: MILITANT SUFFRAGISTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

SIDNEY R. BLAND*

The South was slow to develop an organized woman suffrage movement, and South Carolina was certainly no exception. Yet well before the end of the nineteenth century there were signs of suffrage sentiment and involvement within the state. The American Equal Rights Association, formed shortly after the Civil War to further the interests of women and Negroes, listed a South Carolina woman among its vice-presidents in 1869. A woman's rights convention was held in Columbia in 1870 with the blessing of the Reconstruction government.¹ Such examples were relatively few and far between, however, and the first significant organizing efforts in the South did not occur until the 1890s. For South Carolina the beginnings came with the formation of a state association of about 250 women and men who believed in equal rights and were willing to circulate literature on the subject. Their cause was buttressed as such notables as Susan Anthony, Henry Blackwell, Alice Stone Blackwell and Laura Clay gave addresses in the state around the turn of the century.² The movement then suffered a decade of stagnation (known as the doldrums), revitalizing itself in the South around 1910 as suffragists became active in attempts to end child labor, improve working conditions for women and in other struggles identified with the cause of progressivism. The rebirth in South Carolina came with the establishment of a State Equal Suffrage League in May 1914, consisting of three city leagues (Spartanburg, Columbia and Charleston) and a membership of about 450. That number increased threefold in less than two years with the number of leagues totalling eight, all affiliated with the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).³

The spark that most dramatically affected the American suffrage scene, however, was the transposition of the tactics of the

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¹ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 171-172.

² Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, IV (Indianapolis, 1902), p. 922, VI (New York, 1922), p. 579.

³ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 580; *The Suffragist*, I and II, June 27, 1914, p. 8.