

ARTICLES BY AND ABOUT FLORENCE LUSCOMB

1957-
1977

M. I. T. Jan. 15, 1976.

A WOMAN AT M. I. T.

What was it like to be a woman student at M. I. T. (or as everybody called it then "Tech") in the first decade of this century? For me it was a preview of heaven. I was thrilled with what I was learning and experiencing.

I entered in the fall of 1905 and graduated in June, '09. with an S.B. in architecture. At that time the two main buildings were Rogers and Walker, they were located on Boylston St., Boston, just below Copley Square, between Clarendon and Dartmouth Sts., with several other buildings containing laboratories and drafting rooms on Clarendon towards Stuart St. and the railroad tracks. We had no campus.

What Rogers and Walker buildings and the heart of downtown Boston looked like then with very few automobiles and many horse drawn carts you will see in the motion picture taken at that time, which will now be shown.

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When I was at M. I. T. the total student body was about 1200, of which 12 were co-eds, that is, 1%. This has now increased to about 10%. My class of '07 had the unusually large number of 5 co-eds. At that time the tuition at Harvard was \$250, but Tech was extra costly -- \$300. All of the women students were enrolled in one of two courses -- chemistry or architecture. One of the girls who entered in my class enrolled as an engineering student, but shortly she became convinced that she could never get a job with any engineering firm, and as she had to earn her living she switched to architecture.

It was customary in those days for architectural students after their Junior year to get practical knowledge of building processes by working as unpaid volunteers with an architectural firm. I figured that if it was wise for my male fellow-students to do this I would do it also, but I knew that many architects had great prejudice against employing women. So I asked my Professor to give me a list of firms which might accept me as a free, summer

draughtsman. He compiled a list of 12 such firms. I went to 10 of them before I found one which would accept me. One of those who refused said to me, "I asked Tech if they would send me a volunteer draftsman, but I never dreamed of taking a woman!"

How I came to go to M. I. T. is an amusing coincidence. No child was admitted to a public school without being vaccinated. So when I reached school age mother took me to a doctor to be vaccinated. But that doctor's young son had died from an infected vaccination, so he bitterly opposed them, and convinced mother also. So I could go only to private schools. My high school was coeducational, and it specialized as a preparatory school for M. I. T. So I decided that as most of my male fellow-students were going there I would also. Undoubtedly had I been vaccinated and gone to public schools it would never have occurred to me to go to Tech.

When I was there it was the tradition that the men students would be polite to the co-eds, but not associate with them. But one of the girls in our class was so beautiful and charming that she was irresistible, and her draughting table was a magnet for the men. Her name was Helen Longyear. She was the only ~~woman~~ co-ed who up to that time (and perhaps since) was elected to the class committee to edit our annual volume of Technique, and in addition they appointed her its art director.

I was always on good terms with my male fellow students, and I am convinced that one incident was a prank rather than an expression of ill-will. It occurred in a large lecture theatre, where I was the only woman with 150 or more men. In the middle of the lecture a student some distance away from me in the same row opened a box and let out a mouse headed down the row towards me. The men stood up and gaped at me, and "oh'd" and "ah'd". It was an axiom in those days that women were terrified of mice, and would scream, and leap up on chairs and tables to escape them. It so happened that I thought mice were charming little animals, so I sat still and smilingly watched it running toward me. It leaped into several other rows and ran by me, finally escaping from the room, and the professor was able to resume

his lecture.

While I was a student at M. I. T. all of what little spare time I had was devoted to the cause of votes for women. My first contact with that issue was when my mother was a delegate to the National American Woman Suffrage Ass'n. convention in 1822, and took me with her as a child of 5, and I heard Susan B. Anthony speak. Of course as a 5 year old I cannot tell you what she said, but I remember being there, and hearing them tell me, "That woman is Susan B. Anthony!"

It is difficult for us to conceive that the condition of women in America was only 125 years ago. The law said a man had the right to beat his wife with a "reasonable instrument", which a judge defined as "a stick no bigger than my thumb." A married woman would not own any property. Whatever belonged to her became his when they were married, even the clothes on her back. If Only one state had made wife beating illegal at about the time of the Revolution -- the state of Mass.

she earned anything by working, her wages belonged to him. The children she bore belonged to him alone. He could give them away, or leave them by will and when he died they would go to whomever he had specified, who might be a total stranger to her who lived in far-away California, and the mother would never see her babies again. Of course there were some loving husbands who did not exercise their legal rights. There were no public schools for girls, and a woman who spoke in public was "immoral", so much so that Lucy Stone was expelled from her church in 1851 when she began lecturing against slavery.

The first conference for women's rights ever held in the world was at Seneca Falls, N. Y. in 1848. Gradually the most hideous oppressions of women had been done away with but in my lifetime the worst remaining oppression was that women were classed with criminals and the insane as being unfit to vote.-- were governed with no voice in the laws which determined their lives. So all through my years at M. I. T. I did whatever I could to make women free and equal citizens of the United States.

After I graduated I had more spare time. In the summer of 1915, when we had a referendum in Mass. to amend our state constitution to grant women suffrage, I took several months off from my job in an architect's office to be in charge of an automobile group which was campaigning in the rural areas. We would spend a day in each small township, canvassing and distributing leaflets, and in the evening hold open air meetings in several settlements in the township. I did all the speaking, and made 222 speeches in 19 weeks. When I finished talking and answering questions I would announce that we had large, yellow "votes for women" buttons to sell for 1¢, but of course if you wanted to help the cause we would not refuse to take more. In one small town I was going through the audience with a handful of buttons for sale when one man said to me, very earnestly and sincerely, as he gave me double the required amount, "It was worth two cents to hear you speak."

One of the great privileges of the women students at M. I. T. until 1911 was knowing personally Mrs. Ellen Swallow Richards, the first woman to graduate from Tech, and who was an instructor here all her life. She acted as informan dean of women, we consulted her on any of our problems, and she attended our parties in our Margaret Cheney Room.

Ellen Swallow was born in 1842, in Dunstable, a small town near Lowell. Both her parents were school teachers. Vassar College, practically the earliest one for women, was founded in 1865 (the same year as M. I. T.) and three years later Ellen Swallow entered it in the Junior class. Her course in chemistry interested her so deeply that she decided to make it her life work. However, neither Vassar nor any of the female seminaries offered advanced scientific courses, so after graduating ^{from} Vassar in 1870 she applied to numerous men's colleges to study chemistry, but all denied her admission. Finally someone suggested M. I. T. to her, and she applied. The faculty voted to recommend her admission, President Runkle desired the admission of women, and on Dec. 14, 1870 the Corporation voted to admit her. Pres. Runkle wrote her, "You shall have any

wrote her, "You shall have any and all advantages which the Institute has to offer without charge of any kind." In a letter to a friend, Ellen Swallow later wrote, "I thought the President of M. I. T., realizing that I was a poor girl, remitted my fees out of the goodness of his heart, but I learned later that it was because he could say that I was not a student if anyone should raise a fuss about my presence in the laboratories." So concerned were the M. I. T. authorities at the public reaction to the unprecedented acceptance of a woman, that in Oct., 1871, they voted to omit her name from the list of students in the catalogue. Two months later they thought better of it and inserted her name under the heading of special students.

She entered M. I. T. in January, 1871. She had to support herself by tutoring, and for the first year or so could afford nothing to eat but bread and milk.

The M. I. T. authorities considered it improper to have a woman student working in the laboratory with men students. Ellen Swallow wrote, "I was at that time shut up in the professor's private laboratory very much as a dangerous animal might have been."

After the term was well under way a young man came to study mineralogy, and he and she were sent to study that subject together in the mineralogist professor's room. However, the professor was out most of the time, and they actually were left alone together. They got thoroughly acquainted, fell in love, and were married in 1875. He was Robert Hallowell Richards, later ~~prof~~ head of the Dept. of Mining Engineering. They had a devoted married life.

The experiment of admitting a woman was so successful that in 1876 the M. I. T. authorities voted that "hereafter special students in chemistry shall be admitted without regard to sex." A year and a half later they opened every course to women.

After only three years' study, in 1873, Ellen Swallow graduated. She was one of the very first women in America, if not in the whole world, to win a degree in science.

Even before graduation M. I. T. appointed her as student assistant in the chemistry laboratory, and she was on the Institute's staff as a chemist and instructor for 40 years from 1871 till her death in 1911.

Ellen Richards was a world pioneer in the field of the chemistry of nutrition. Today we take it for granted that everyone knows that our diet must contain certain vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, etc., but when Ellen Richards started her work these facts were practically undreamed of. In 1894 she became associated with the Nutrition Research of the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, and wrote their bulletin, "Nutrition Values and Common Foods."

Through the long decades when she was a busy teacher at M. I. T. she also carried on incredible public activities.

The Mass. State Dept. of Public Health asked Prof. Nichols to investigate the pollution of public water supplies and he selected Mrs. Richards as his assistant. She wrote, "I worked 14 hours a day on 5 and sometimes 7 days of the week." In the single year 1887-88 she analyzed over 100,000 samples of water -- the water supply of 83% of the state's inhabitants.

She went on speaking trips throughout the country as far away as Alaska and even into Mexico.

In the last fifteen years of her life she wrote ten books and innumerable scientific papers and magazine articles.

She helped found, direct and was chairman of numerous organizations in the field of health and nutrition.

When one reads of Ellen Richards' activities it is hard to believe she was not twins.

It was written of Ellen Swallow Richards, "More than anyone else she opened scientific education and the scientific profession to women."

She was one of America's truly great women, both as a scientist and a social reformer, but her life and achievements are almost unknown to the American people. But the life of every one of us is better for the life and work of M. I. T.'s first co-ed, Ellen Swallow Richards.

Lg. of Wom. Voters ^{was} mothered by the woman suffrage movement, and born at the
 m convention of the Nat. Am. Wom. Suf. Assn. in St. Louis in 1919.

I was a delegate at that convention, and assisted at the birth.

Ever since 1848 -- for 71 years -- the organized campaign to remove the
 bitter legal injustices and political disbarment of women had gone on.
 During that long struggle incredibly oppressive and cruel laws and social
 customs one after one had been largely abolished, and the one major right
 that remained to be won was the vote -- to be citizens instead of subjects
 of our country. In 1919 we were on the eve ^{of that} of final victory. The Federal
 Amendment to the Const. had passed Congress that year, and a number of
 states had already ratified it.

It is hard for you today to realize how totally ignorant of public affairs
 the great mass of women were ^{at that time,} ~~in the first century and a half of our nation,~~
~~when they were xxxxxxxx~~ since women had no voice in the decision of
 public questions these were never subjects of discussion in women's clubs
 or church societies or women's magazines. Except in the anti-slavery and
 temperance and women's rights crusades only a handful of women took part
 in ~~agitation or discussion of~~ any public questions, The common slogan was,
 "Woman's place is in the home."

Now, when we met in St. L., the Federal Amend. would soon make women Enfranchis
 c citizens.

The great leader of the Nat. Am. W S Assn., Mrs. CCC, a statesman of far
 seeing vision, addressed the suffrage convention.

only a question of a few months or years before 3/4 of states would ratify
 and all the millions of Am. women become voters. She pointed out that
 most of them densely ignorant of govt. and all public problems. "You
 wanted women to vote," she said, "to solve problems of child welfare, of
 working women, health, education, honest govt., peace.

your work has made these millions of uninformed women voters. You are
 responsible for ignorant voters. Up to you to provide them with education
 and leadership to achieve the things we

said we wanted the vote *ser. in order to get.*

Proposed we found a League of Women Voters.

Then and there
constituted ourselves a founding convention.

And so this organization came into being.

In most of the states the suffrage associations disbanded after their state legislatures ratified the Federal Suffrage Amendment, and new conventions were called to set up a L of W V.

In Mass., however, after we had ratified in 1919, the suffrage Assn. merely amended its constitution to adopt the new name and statement of purposes and went on as a continuing body. I had been asst. exec. sec. of the BESAFGG, and continued as the asst. sec. of the B L W V, and later as its exec. sec. until I resigned in 1924 to take up work with the Mass. Civic League.

May I take a few minutes to speak and reminisce about the mother of the L W V -- the crusade for women's rights.

When our nation was founded no public school admitted girls.

In Marblehead when someone in town meeting proposed that the grammar school be opened to girls and outraged citizen exclaimed, "What, spend public money to educate SHES!"

Gloucester was more enlightened, for in 1790 its town meeting voted, "Females form a tender and interesting part of the community, but have been much neglected by ^{the} public schools of this town."

Not one ^{public} high school in all America was open to girls until 1852.

In the middle of the last century a woman who spoke in a public meeting was "immoral", and one whose writings ^{we} had published was "unwomanly." In 1851 Lucy Stone was expelled from church membership because she addressed public meetings against slavery. I could not be speaking to you if we were living a little over 100 years ago;.

Women who had to earn a living in the middle of the last century had only 3 openings, - as a seamstress, at housework at 2¢ an hour, or teaching at 12½¢ an hour.

^{about}
~~Not until 1870 were there any stenographers, and the census of that year reported 7 in the whole U. S.~~

When the women's rights movement started men had a legal right to beat their wives with a "reasonable instrument", which Judge Butler defined as "a stick no larger than my thumb."

As late as 1879 when mass. proposed school suffrage, so that mothers could have a voice in the education of their children, a prominent citizen declared, ~~"if we make this experiment we will destroy the race, which will be blasted by Almighty God."~~

A member of the mass. Legislature argued that women's voting would bring 2 results. First, there would be no more babies born. Second. All the babies born would be girls.

Not until 1890, when Wyoming was admitted, did women vote in any state in the Union.

I began my suffrage career when, as a young girl, I ushered at meetings. Later I sold the weekly suffrage newspaper every Saturday on the corner of Tremont and Winter streets, for which I had to be licensed as a hawker and peddler.

I painted a Votes for women sign to hang on the elephant when the circus parade came to town.

I spent long weeks canvassing from door to door all the way from Boston's most horrible slums to wealthy residential districts with a women's petition to answer the anti's claim that the women didn't want the vote. We got the signatures of 100,000 women in Boston -- a majority of the city's women residents.

I marched in parades, both here and at Wilson's inaugurationⁱⁿ in Washington in 1913, when 8000 women were mobbed, struck and spat on while the police lifted not a finger.

I spoke at innumerable meetings, both indoors and on soap boxes at street corners and at mill gates. In 1915 when we had a state referendum I was in charge of one of two automobiles which covered the state. At that time I made 222 speeches in 14 weeks. We had votes for women buttons for our supporters to wear, and by way of taking up a collection ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ we announced that at the close of our open air meeting we would sell the buttons for a penny apiece, but that anyone who wanted to help our cause would give more for them. Once, when I had finished speaking I was going through the crowd with a handful of buttons, and one man gave me 2 pennies, saying very earnestly and sincerely, "It was worth two cents to hear you speak."

And so, in the closing years of the struggle, two million ^{dedicated} ~~American~~ women were working in myriad ways to gain their freedom as American citizens, under the inspired leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt.

And it was Carrie Chapman Catt who bade us found the League of Women Voters



BLACKLISTING THE CONSTITUTION

FLORENCE H. LUSCOMB

On January 7th, 1955, I refused to answer questions of the Massachusetts Commission To Investigate Communism on the ground of the First Amendment, because I considered it my duty to protect the Bill of Rights from encroachment and subversion by government inquisition. Now I am bringing suit against the Commission, whose widely publicized report names 85 citizens concerning whom it claims to have "credible evidence" that they all are or have been members of the Communist Party.

Five distinguished attorneys, including a former president of the Massachusetts Bar Association and a former Republican Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, were denied the right to test the constitutionality of this blacklist on the ground that, not being on it, they had no right to intervene. It therefore became necessary for someone on that list to make the challenge, and I undertook it because of my many years of active fighting for civil liberties.

Under a Constitution which guarantees every citizen freedom of thought, speech, association, conscience, and the protection of due process of law, what right has a Commission set up by the Legislature to destroy the good names of citizens and wreck their lives without their having had a fair trial before a court and a chance to defend themselves legally? Shielded behind legislative immunity, members of this hit-and-run Commission cannot be sued for libel or forced to prove their unsupported charges.

My suit will challenge on several grounds the Commission's constitutional right to blacklist individuals:

★ That by no stretch of the imagination can the publication of a blacklist be considered law making, and under our constitutional separation of the legislative, judicial and executive powers the Legislature has no right to do anything not connected with making laws:

★ That the blacklist is specifically forbidden by the Constitution as a "bill of attainder", which is the arbitrary pronouncing of an individual guilty by a Legislature instead of by a fair trial and conviction in court:

★ That the Constitution guarantees every person "due process of law", which includes indictment by a grand jury, public trial by a court, the right to confront and cross-examine one's accusers, and to present evidence in defense:

★ To say nothing of the fundamental right in a free country to say what one believes and belong to any law-abiding organization one wants, without being persecuted by the government.

Blacklisting done by a Commission which denies its victims any chance for legal defense violates every principle of fair play and every constitutional guarantee of justice.

To the best of my knowledge, none of the "investigating" committees of the past quarter century has dared go to such lengths in publishing a formal blacklist of individuals. Unless this practice is stopped now, no one in America will be safe. If my suit is won, it will not only end blacklisting in Massachusetts but provide a legal precedent for all other states. The importance of this test case to the rights and freedoms of all Americans can hardly be exaggerated.

"THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE"

In addition to the unsupported charges relative to Communist Party membership, the Commission coupled each individual with numerous organizations, calculated to create a fog of suspicion and prejudice. The public ought to know exactly what these organizations are.

Chief among them are peace organizations. *The program of these peace groups — negotiations with the USSR and with China — has just been adopted as the official policy of the United States Government.* Membership in these peace organizations was in reality a proof of farseeing patriotism, yet the Commission smears citizens for it.

The Commission cross-examined witnesses about organizations which defend civil liberties and the Bill of Rights. Since when is it subversive to uphold the Constitutions of the United States and Massachusetts?

The Commission named organizations which fight racial discrimination. Is it subversive for an American to believe that "all men are created equal"?

Some of the Commission's questions related to organizations which raise money to provide lawyers for persons prosecuted under the Smith Act and similar laws. Is not the very cornerstone of Anglo-Saxon justice the right of every defendant to have legal counsel? Could there be a more shocking, a more un-American, a more truly subversive proceeding than the Commission's own action in blasting legal defense organizations and their members?

In spite of the smears and distortions of the Commission, these are patriotic organizations, doing a magnificent work for the betterment of our country and upholding the finest ideals of America.

Many, but not all, of the smear organizations used by the Commission are on the so-called "subversive" list of the Attorney General. All too few people know that the *U. S. Supreme Court declared this list to be legally null and void*, having been compiled in violation of the Constitution. All too few people know that *not a single organization on the list, including the Communist Party, has ever been legally charged, let alone convicted, with a single act of violence against the Government, or even with advocating such an act.*

Fifteen of the listed groups work for peace; 35 are in the field of civil liberties, legal defense and civil rights; three seek to raise relief for the families of men imprisoned under the Smith Act. Every decent American ought to protest in horror against an Attorney General who brands it subversive to save from starvation the innocent wives and children of

men sent to jail! Every patriotic American ought to protest the branding of organizations working for peace and civil liberties. In fact, every freedom-loving American ought to protest the blacklisting of *any* citizens' organization by the Attorney General.

Blacklisting is un-American! *An organization which plots or carries out violence against the Government, or other crime, should be legally prosecuted: Every legal organization has a right to exist unpersecuted. Every citizen has a constitutional right, under the 1st Amendment, to belong to any legal organization without being smeared and blacklisted for it.*

A nation is on the road to fascism if its citizens allow their right to assemble together in *peaceful* organizations for *peaceful* purposes to depend on the dictum of a single government official — and an official never elected by the people's votes, at that! *The Supreme Court itself has ruled that "no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion."* That means that the Attorney General has absolutely no right to say what organizations are or are not patriotic and for the best good of America.

The menace of the Attorney General's "subversive" list was pointed out on March 28, 1955, by no less an authority than Harry P. Cain, Republican member of the Subversive Activities Control Board and former U. S. Senator, when he declared that that list is "a heinous thing and *represents a trend that will kill this country.*" (emphasis added).

Yet the Massachusetts Commission uses this "heinous" list to crucify citizens. Persons on its blacklist have been fired from their jobs and their wives and children have suffered want; businesses have been undermined, careers jeopardized; anxiety and unhappiness have been visited upon these men and women, against whom nothing has been proved.

It is a shameful business, a filthy business, a subversive business. It is up to the citizens of Massachusetts to condemn and send to political oblivion the members of the Commission which perpetrated this assault upon our freedoms. It is up to the citizens of Massachusetts not to rest until this disgraceful Commission is abolished. For it must be abolished or, in the words of Harry P. Cain, it "WILL KILL THIS COUNTRY."

My suit is on the March calendar of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. The Commission is seeking to have the suit thrown out, on the ground that a Legislative Committee cannot be sued. A delaying tactic, because the Supreme Court has already ruled that this is not a Legislative Committee as it contains two public members appointed by the Governor. So, unless the court reverses itself, we will win this point. We will then probably be sent back to the Superior Court to try the constitutional issues. Since whichever side loses will undoubtedly appeal the decision, we will have the delay and heavy expense of a second Supreme Court trial, and possibly of an appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court.

THE DECLARATION OF RIGHTS OF THE CONSTITUTION OF MASSACHUSETTS

ARTICLE XIX. The people have a right, in an orderly and peaceable manner, to assemble to consult upon the common good

ARTICLE XXX. In the government of this commonwealth, the legislative department shall never exercise the executive and judicial powers, or either of them . . . to the end it may be a government of laws and not of men.

THE BILL OF RIGHTS OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

ARTICLE I. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; *or the right of the people peaceably to assemble*, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

ARTICLE IV. In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the state and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

MISS FLORENCE H. LUSCOMB

Born in Lowell, Mass., 1887

Graduate of M.I.T., SB in architecture.

Was Assistant or Executive Secretary of the Boston Equal Suffrage Assn., the Boston League of Women Voters, the Mass. Civic League, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

For many years Vice Chairman of the Civil Liberties Union of Mass.; was Secretary of the Boston Scottsboro Committee; all her life an active fighter for civil liberties.

Former Vice President, National Assn. for Advancement of Colored People, Boston Chapter.

Was President of the AFL and then of the CIO union locals of office workers.

Was a member of Interracial Committee, Boston Area Council of Churches. State Chairman, Progressive Party of Massachusetts.

Please distribute this leaflet widely. Copies of it, and of her statement before the Commission, may be obtained free from Miss Florence H. Luscomb, 140 Huron Ave., Cambridge 38. Contributions toward the expense of leaflets and for the expense of the suit are welcome. Just printing the brief cost over \$800.

—: PLEASE PASS THIS LEAFLET ON :—

Congress Shall Make No Law -

Miss Florence H. Luscomb of Cambridge was summoned to appear on January 7 before the Massachusetts Commission to Investigate Communism and Subversion, and questioned regarding her membership in numerous organizations. She refused to answer, but did not invoke the Fifth Amendment of the Federal Constitution or the corresponding Article 12 of the Massachusetts Constitution, which protect an individual from being forced to give evidence against himself. Instead, Miss Luscomb denied the right of the Commission to question citizens, not about acts, but about matters of conscience and beliefs, speech, writings, associations and political opinions. These, she maintained, are protected from compulsory disclosure by Article 1 of the Bill of Rights of the Federal Constitution and Articles 16 and 19 of the Declaration of Rights of the Constitution of Massachusetts. She declared it her conviction that citizens have the duty to protect the Bill of Rights from encroachment and subversion by government inquisitions.

The Supreme Court has never passed upon the issue of whether the First Amendment forbids government investigation into the matters enumerated therein as being outside the legislative authority of Congress. Should the Court decide, in the pending case of Julius Emspak, that it was not forbidden, Miss Luscomb has laid herself open to punishment for contempt.

We believe Miss Luscomb's statement to the Commission in defense of her position is of interest to all who are concerned for the maintenance of civil liberties. We neither endorse nor oppose whatever personal opinions she may hold or express or the associations in which she may engage. Our sole concern is that freedom of conscience and thought, speech, press and assembly shall be preserved in this Commonwealth.

*Frances G. Curtis
Gardiner M. Day
Bernard DeVoto
George L. Paine
Agnes G. Sanborn*

STATEMENT BY MISS FLORENCE H. LUSCOMB
to the Commission to Investigate Communism
in Massachusetts - January 7, 1955

Let me say at the outset, I have never taken part in any movement or agitation looking to violence or subversion against our government, state or national. I have never known of anyone among my personal acquaintances or contacts seeking violence or subversion against our government, state or national.

If, as Dr. Henry Van Dyke suggested, every human life is dominated by some ruling passion, mine has been ruled by love of my country. To me, patriotism demanded not the closing of one's eyes to the faults and misdeeds of one's country, but rather the fighting and ending of them, so making America better. It was intolerable that America should violate by racial and religious discrimination its principle that "all men are created equal." Intolerable that poverty in the midst of potential plenty should make a mockery of the pursuit of happiness for the ill fed, ill clothed, ill housed third of Americans. That injustices and inequalities should poison the very roots of democracy. When the officers of government who, in the words of the Massachusetts Constitution, are the people's "agents and are at all times accountable to them," embarked on wrongful policies, it was not only my right as a free citizen but my duty as a good citizen to use my constitutional freedoms of conscience, speech, press, assembly and ballot to oppose them. This I have done, regardless of what smears and epithets and lies were used to defeat the policies which I believed good for my country.

Woman suffrage was denounced as "subversive" when I was campaigning for it. The American League Against War and Fascism, of which I was secretary, was branded "red" by government agencies because it "prematurely" fought the fascism of Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito, long before it slaughtered a third of a million American youth. When militant labor leaders were framed and jailed for violence, like Tom Mooney and Angelo Herndon, and Negroes were framed on criminal charges as in the Scottsboro case, I took part in the defense of these alleged bomb throwers, seditionists and rapists, who were later completely cleared.

Above all, I have tried to fight every attack on civil liberties. My forefathers fought to establish this nation as a free country. My grandfather served as a member of Congress during the Civil War to maintain it free. One of my great-uncles as Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts strove to maintain its legal freedom. These things do not make me one whit better or worse than the poorest immigrant who landed yesterday, but they do make me feel an obligation to do my part in keeping American freedom inviolate today.

I will speak anywhere, on any platform, with anyone, in defense of the Bill of Rights of the American Constitution and the Declaration of Rights of the Constitution of Massachusetts. I defend the constitutional right of any American to advocate any political and economic views his conscience dictates, however unorthodox. To deny this is to defy the Supreme Court of the United States, which declared that "no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion." (Barnette case).

I have fought McCarthy and McCarthyism when he was triumphantly riding roughshod over American freedoms and anyone who opposed him was a "red." Today McCarthy is on the skids and recognized for the crook and mountebank he is, who uses anti-Communism to destroy labor and as a racket for his own political advancement. I predict that other little McCarthys who aspire to climb to higher office will be sent to oblivion by an aroused public.

I stated in the beginning that I knew of no one among my personal acquaintances who was subversive. I do know of subversion abroad in our land. It is subversion of the Bill of Rights when Congressmen and Legislators pass Smith Acts and McCarran Acts and Brownell Bills and their counterparts on the state level. It is subversive to set up inquisitions like this, state or national, into the thoughts and consciences of Americans, into their speeches, their writings, their associations one with another, their political activities. It is subversive to starve Americans and their wives and little children by throwing them out of jobs because of their opinions. It is subversive to blast careers and lives of scientists and professors, writers and artists, doctors and medical researchers, and rob America of the priceless contributions

they could have made to our national welfare. It is subversive for commissions like this, some of whose members claim to be pro-labor, to conspire with big corporations to attack labor just when negotiations are pending, to divide and wreck the union.* It is subversive for commissions like this to spread such hysteria and intimidation throughout the land that Americans are afraid to sign petitions, afraid to read progressive magazines, afraid to make out checks for liberal causes, afraid to join organizations, afraid to speak their minds on public issues. Americans dare not be free citizens! **This is the destruction of democracy.**

You summoned me to come here and tell what I know about subversion. Gentlemen, this is the only subversion of which I have the slightest knowledge.

I will not be an accessory to your subversion. I will not answer compulsory questions by government inquisitors into matters of my conscience and opinions, speech, writings, associations and political views in violation of the constitutional provisions of Article 1 of the United States Bill of Rights and Articles 16 and 19 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights. I have nothing to hide. I have spent my entire life publicly advocating ideas. Outside the walls of this compulsory inquisition I am eager to tell you and all my fellow-Americans my ideas and activities. But I cannot and will not tear up the Constitution and its guaranteed liberties, won with blood and tears. I cannot and will not be a party with you in destroying American democracy.

*"Everett H. Lane, president of Mutual [Boston Mutual Life Insurance Co.] . . . suggested that the commission investigate Local 1282. On Feb. 15 the negotiating committee set a strike deadline for March 1. The next day the commission subpoenaed the local leaders . . . on Feb. 25 a public hearing was held . . . Siegel [union president and business agent] invoked the Fifth Amendment when asked 'Do you think you were being honest with your membership when in your capacity as business agent you took orders from the Communist Party?' Though the strike had been authorized by a vote of seven to one, it was now canceled, and the company withdrew recognition . . . threw out the contract and forced the agents to accept individual agreements. The change in working conditions and commission practices was equivalent, the union claims, to an average weekly pay cut of \$15 . . . the timely intervention of the commission had given the company the weapon it needed to confuse and divide its employees, break their militant union, destroy their contract, and cut their pay." *The Nation*, Jan. 8, p. 33. See the entire article, ANTI-RED OR ANTI-UNION?, for the complete record of the Commission against labor unions.

**THE BILL OF RIGHTS
OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE
UNITED STATES**

ARTICLE I. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

**THE DECLARATION OF RIGHTS
OF THE CONSTITUTION OF
MASSACHUSETTS**

ARTICLE XVI. The Liberty of the press is essential to the security of freedom in a state: it ought not, therefore, to be restrained in this Commonwealth. The right of free speech shall not be abridged.

ARTICLE XIX. The people have a right, in an orderly and peaceable manner, to assemble to consult upon the common good; give instructions to their representatives, and to request of the legislative body, by the way of addresses, petitions, or remonstrances, redress of the wrongs done them, and of the grievances they suffer.

PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENTS, AND WHAT THEY DID TO ME

A Mental Autobiography

Florence H. Luscomb

Talk given at Goddard College, Vt., 1967

"You have worked in most of the progressive movements of our times," he said to me. "Will you come and tell the students of our college what you have learned from your activities, and what conclusions they have brought you to which might be a guide to our thinking?"

How, I asked myself, did I come to be connected with these many progressive movements? What started me down that long trail, more than a half century ago? Trying to answer that question, I decided that my guidepost at the beginning of the road bore the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. I was naive enough to believe that they meant what they said, and that they were the foundation upon which American democratic institutions rest.

"All men are created equal." "Freedom of speech...of the press... to assemble...due process of law."

All men are created equal. And in the words of the Constitution of one of our southwestern states, "Wherever in the law the word 'man' shall occur it is understood that male shall embrace female." So as a young girl I looked around, and I saw that for one-half of the human race — my half — there was no equality. Women were discriminated against in laws; in education; in professional, business and work opportunities; in pay; in all the relationships of life. I read the history of the struggle which women had long been carrying on.

I read that when in Marblehead town meeting it had first been proposed to admit girls to the public schools an indignant man had protested, "What, spend public money to educate SHES!" That when Lucy Stone, the first Massachusetts girl to seek college education, went to the only institution that would then admit women, Oberlin College, Ohio, she had to support herself by teaching and doing housework for 3¢ an hour. That when it was proposed to let women vote for the school boards that directed their children's education, one prominent man cried out, "If we make this experiment, we will destroy the race, which will be blasted by Almighty God."

After 70 years of organized, heartbreaking struggle, a good many of the injustices had been modified, but when I came upon the arena of adult life the dominant inequality, the sign and symbol and instrument of all other

inequalities, was the denial of the vote. Criminals, the insane and women were disfranchised, were taxed and governed without voice, were subjects and not citizens.

I burned with indignation at this insult to my human dignity; I blazed with devotion to the democratic ideals of my country. Therefore, upon my graduation from college I inevitably took an active part in the fight for women suffrage. I stood speaking upon soapboxes on street corners; I marched in parades; walked up and down on Boston Common as a sandwichwoman to advertise a rally; I handed out leaflets at mill gates; I sold the Women's Journal on the streets as a newsboy; I took part in pageants; I helped to defeat anti-suffrage politicians running for Congress and the Legislature; I wrote leaflets; I painted a sign to hang on the elephant when the circus parade came to town; I helped to organize meetings and conventions. I organized local suffrage clubs; I distributed fliers at county fairs and talked and argued with thousands of people. I interviewed editors; I canvassed tenement districts with petitions; I took part in campaigns for suffrage in New York, Maine, Ohio, Rhode Island, Virginia and in Great Britain. I spoke in three-quarters of the cities and towns of Massachusetts, at one time making 222 speeches in 19 weeks.

A vivid example of the status of women at that time is an incident in 1920, in the first election after women won the vote nation-wide. I was in charge of an information bureau to assist the women who had problems of registration. In those days a woman's nationality was that of her husband. One woman came to us - an American born, she had married a foreigner. And so she had become an alien. Then he was naturalized, and so she became an American again. In short, she was carried around from nationality to nationality like her husband's baggage. In order to register to vote this American born woman was required to produce her husband's naturalization paper, but as he disapproved of woman suffrage he refused to allow her to have it. However, while away on a business trip he needed some papers, and sent her an order upon his bank to open his safe deposit box for her. There she found his naturalization paper, dashed down to the registration office, and by this lucky accident, and only by accident, was she able to exercise her legal rights as a citizen.

What did I get out of this ten years activity for woman suffrage? Well, for one thing I got my American citizenship equality. In the Presidential election of 1920, when even one of the leading Boston newspapers quipped that the voters' choice seemed to be between Debs and dubs, I cast my first Presidential vote at the age of 33 for Eugene V. Debs.

I got, moreover, an education more basic than anything taught in college. I met, swapped ideas, came to know every kind and condition of man and woman, a cross-section of American humanity. One of the truly great tragedies of the lives of most of us is that our existence is a high-walled lane, down which we travel with people of our own kind - of the same education, economic status, national background, religious classification - while beyond the walls on left and right lie all humanity, unknown, unseen, untouched by our restricted, impoverished lives. Campaigning for votes for women let my life mingle with the whole human race, and never again could I lose touch with humanity.

One of these contacts, especially, became a lifelong part of my interest and activity, and widened my mental and spiritual horizon. I was frequently the one chosen to fill a request for a suffrage speaker before a Negro church group or cultural club. I made a momentous discovery. For the first five minutes after I stood up, looking down into the sea of Negro faces, I was self-conscious of my pale skin and their dark ones; but in an amazingly short time I became utterly unaware that the faces around me differed in any way from my own - the only thing that remained was that I was exchanging ideas with fellow human beings. Literally, the audience I was addressing looked exactly the same to me as any other audience - hostile, sympathetic, puzzled, bored, enthusiastic or what have you. I completely forgot that there was any difference between us, and so learned the truth that there is none. As a result of my own experience I hold the firm conviction that the way to eliminate racial prejudice is to bring people together and get them to know each other. I think the greatest compliment I ever received was when some years later a Negro friend said to me, "You know, you are one of us."

At these meetings, where often I listened to other speakers before or after my turn, I learned to know and feel the facts that most Americans are utterly ignorant of - the all-pervading, million-faceted, 24-hour a day injustices inflicted on our Negro fellow-Americans. Because I was crusading against the subjection of women I was sensitive to the subjection of other groups. For was I not proclaiming that all men are created equal? It was at one of these meetings that a woman solicited my membership in a newly formed organization, the first ever created to work for the rights of the Negro people. I gladly joined the National Association for Advancement of Colored People - NAACP - and later became vice president of the Boston chapter.

Out of that membership and lifelong activities and contacts it brought me opened up a whole new area of life. I read the NAACP magazine, the Crisis, edited then by one of America's greatest scholars and greatest citizens, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, whom it has later been one of the privileges of my life to know personally. From the Crisis I learned the full, detailed story of the Negro's struggle; I read Dr. Dubois' history of Africa and learned what as an ignorant white American I had never dreamed - that Africa has a history of great civilizations and cultures lasting for centuries, of artistic achievements, of a university at Timbuctoo centuries ago to which Europeans sent their sons to be educated. I learned to respect profoundly Africa and Africans.

Out of my foundation belief in the Bill of Rights plus my personal knowledge of the bitterness of the bread of injustice, almost inevitably came my ardent association with the work of the Civil Liberties Union and with the struggles of organized labor. Indeed, one could not fight for civil liberties without being thrown into the very midst of the labor movement, for aside from the oppression of the Negro the most hideous violations of human rights were against labor and pro-labor radical groups. Tom Mooney; the Ludlow Massacre; Centralia; Harlan County, Kentucky; Gastonia, North Carolina; Lawrence, Massachusetts; these and countless other outrages against liberty were the great battlefields of labor. And so I was educated, in the American Labor movement.

It was inevitable that I should join it, so I became a member of the Boston local of the Stenographers, Typewriters (sic), Bookkeepers and Accountants Union, AFL, of which at one time I was president and delegate to

the Boston Central Labor Union. After the CIO was founded I was a charter member of the Boston local of the United Office and Professional Workers, and president of that in turn.

A job which I held at that time also brought me close to labor. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union won a provision in its union contract for the setting up of a Joint Board of Sanitary Control, with equal representation of the Union, the employers and the public, to supervise health and safety conditions in the shops manufacturing women's garments. For two years as director of this Joint Board I inspected factories, and learned at first hand many of the working conditions which imperilled life and health, in violation of our factory laws whose state enforcement, was a mere travesty.

During this period of close association with labor I participated in numberless strikes in many industries. On one occasion I walked a picket line for ten months in summer heat and winter cold against an employer who was violating the National Labor Relations Law. I have been ridden down by mounted cops who were illegally breaking up a lawful picket line. I have seen a cop arrest a picket and in court heard him perjure himself blue in the face to get a conviction. I have walked a picket line in a gas mask because the previous day the police had broken the picket line by tear gas, and it was later unearthed that the policemen were not only public servants of the law but were simultaneously taking pay from the employers with the approval of the chief of police. Yes, I learned first hand much that you can't learn in colleges.

I also learned from the First World War, which broke out during my young womanhood. Except for my keen interest in the worldwide rising of women then taking place I, like the vast majority of Americans in those days, had little interest in or knowledge of international affairs. America lived to itself then. After the holocaust I knew that all the nations of earth were members one of another, that it was of supreme importance to establish permanent peace, and that therefore everything that happens in any country is of concern to us. In short, I became a citizen of the world. That meant intense interest in and whenever possible active help to every struggle for freedom and human advancement in every corner of the earth. It meant active participation in the peace movement, and struggle against the militarization of America. It meant to me a great desire to see for myself what was developing in the USSR, and consequently a trip of a month and a half through that country, from the Finnish border in the north to the far southern Armenia, under the shadow of Mt. Ararat and within 25 miles of Iran and Turkey. That trip has shed for me a great light of understanding on many international problems, and on many developments in the socialist world.

Whether I was striving for just laws for women and Negroes, or to maintain the civil liberties guaranteed Americans under the Constitution, or for the betterment of the conditions of working men and women, or for the international policies that would bring lasting peace to this bloodsoaked earth, I found that I was dealing with the making and administration of laws - in other words, with the political institutions that govern America. And I found these political institutions in the grip of a political monopoly. It operated with two hands, controlled by a single body and brain, and those two hands had a strangle-hold on politics for the benefit of the controlling monopoly, not for the mass of the common people.

The Republican hand operated more especially for the northern capitalists, and the Democratic hand more for the southern bourbons, but they traded favors, and whenever any real threat arose to the vested interests north or south, they cooperated like hands operating a machine gun. The basic needs of the American people - for peace (which would destroy the super-profits of the steel trust, the airplane industry, General Motors, the oil empire and the munitions barons); for homes (which would threaten the real estate interests); for a half dozen great TVA's (but that would smash the stranglehold of the power trust); for an end to Negro segregation (but then you would have to pay them more, which would be bad for profits) - the fundamental and bitter needs of the American people for these and a host of similar things are sidetracked. By the tacit agreement of the bi-partisan dictators of the political parties, these are suppressed as clearcut election issues between the parties, so that the voters cannot express a choice and all they are permitted to decide is whether they feel madly for Adlai or like Ike.

Do you think I exaggerate the facts? Listen to the words of Roosevelt in 1944, as reported in the Ladies Home Journal. He said, "We ought to have in the United States two real parties - one representing the liberal and the other the conservative point of view...The Southern reactionaries have no right to call themselves Democrats and stay in our party with its liberal platforms. In the same way Wilkie and the Republican progressives don't belong in the party of Hoover and Martin and Bricker...From the liberals of both parties Wilkie and I together can form a new, really liberal party in America."

Because the whole democratic process is frustrated by the fact that the people have no political vehicle through which they can shape government policies to their wishes, I have taken an active part in various efforts to bring about a realignment of political parties by the creation of a party which would be the instrument of labor, farmers and the common people generally. The most recent of these efforts was, of course, the Progressive Party in its 1949 campaign and subsequently.

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Out of these experiences I want to explore with you some of the major convictions, insights and conclusions to which they have brought me. Some of the things I say may seem to you startling and extreme, but every statement I make can be documented with facts.

First, I know that one of the most crucial things which is happening inside the United States today is the uprising of the Negro people against America's "internal colonialism". For we have held one tenth of our population set apart in subjection and exploitation as surely as though they lived in a foreign conquered colony. Herded into ghettos from which they cannot break out; earning but little more than half as much as white workers when employed, and unemployed twice as much; with a death rate of 50% higher and a life span 8 years shorter; and segregated and insulted as untouchables, even in the North to a large degree. In the areas where the majority of them live they are defrauded of education and doomed to ignorance; they are almost entirely denied the right to vote and governed as a subject population; and they are not infrequently murdered and raped with impunity.

Not only is this a supreme moral issue, challenging all our pretensions to human decency and democracy, but these conditions poison and pervert all our national life, just as slavery did in its day. The disfranchisement of the Negro in the South - coupled with the disfranchisement of the mass of poor white workers through the poll tax - leaves political power in the southern states in the hands of the rich and reactionary and of the political machines.

And so we see our U. S. Senators and Congressmen from the South a solid block of reactionary votes, not only on racial issues but on labor and all questions of social progress. Moreover, as the heads of dominant political machines in their respective states, they get re-elected term after term, which under the pernicious custom of seniority in committee positions means that they capture the chairmanships of most important committees. As you doubtless know, the chairman of a Congressional committee holds almost life and death power over legislation; so the power of this reactionary bloc of votes is immeasurably multiplied. The whole nation, North as well as South, pays the price in the suppression of social progress. The cornerstone of power of Southern political reaction is Negro disfranchisement.

A second catastrophic effect upon our national life of imposing a colonial status on American Negroes is the economic results. As long as the Southern Negro can be held down as ignorant unskilled labor, as long as the poor southern white worker can be fooled into scorning and holding himself aloof from his Negro fellow-worker, just so long will it be impossible to build a powerful labor movement in the South, and southern labor will continue to be cheap and exploited. The law of divide and conquer still holds good, and great southern organizing campaigns of the CIO and AFL have been wrecked on the rock of racial division. The effect is felt on labor throughout the nation. Factory after factory in the North has closed its doors, thrown its countless hundreds of workers out on the street, and moved south to wring fatter profits from unorganized cheap labor. Whole cities in my state of Massachusetts have been left as ghost towns. The workers left jobless competed with other labor for jobs and depressed working standards for all. In other cities the unions have not dared put up a fight for better wages or conditions, so long as the employers held this threat of runaway over their heads.

Why do you suppose Senator Eastland and his fellow owners of vast plantations, the steel barons of Birmingham, the textile lords of Carolina, other great southern industrialists and all the vested interests of the South are battling integration in schools, in buses, and elsewhere with the most monstrous campaign of law defiance since the Civil War? It is because if the common people of the two races are permitted to know each other by daily contact as children in school together, by riding side by side to work and other human contacts, they will make the same discovery I made when I campaigned for woman suffrage - that they are all human together. Once the mass of southern common men, black and white, learn that truth, the exploitation of southern labor and the shackling of the whole American labor movement are doomed. And with them the fabulous profits based thereon.

The Negroes who with a new and superb determination, cohesions and courage, in the face of economic ruin, bombings and murders, are struggling to win first class citizenship, are fighting a major battle to save all America.

It behooves every one of us to give them every possible help.

Secondly, understanding of democracy has deepened and broadened. Like most Americans, from what I was taught at school, I thought that if citizens can cast votes once in four years for the President the country is a democracy; if they can't, it isn't. It's as simple as that. Voting is the litmas paper that decides it automatically. So I never questioned America's 100% democracy. Then I discovered that though Americans (provided, of course, they aren't Negroes or poor whites) can vote as they choose, the candidates they must choose between are selected by political processes financed by wealthy campaign contributors. 'Tis they who hire the piper and he plays the nominating tunes they specify, and the voters have the magnificent choice of whether their elected officials shall be Charlie McCarthy or Charles McCarthy for the Big Boys. As a result, the oil barons make our Suez policy, the munitions profiteers keep the Cold War on the brink, the China Lobby keeps one fourth of the human race out of the UN, tax laws are rigged with loopholes for the rich, etc., etc. ad infinitum. No, just having the vote does not make America a democracy, even in the narrowest political sense.

Further, I discovered the vast extent to which our democratic rights are mere paper rights, written in documents but unrealizable in practice.

We have freedom of the press, which in actuality means the right of the man with millions of dollars to own a paper and get his uncensored ideas before the public, but does not give me or labor or peace advocates or Russian sympathizers that opportunity. In strike situations papers frequently refuse even to take paid ads telling the public the Union's side of the dispute. Papers sometimes refuse ads for radical books, so that the public cannot learn of their existence and read them.

For free speech, you can talk on the air provided you have the wealth to buy radio time, and provided further that what you want to say meets the approval of the wealthy owners of radio stations. I know - I have been refused the purchase of radio time.

The Constitution guaratees your right of assembly, but only the wealthy own halls, and you will find it almost impossible to hire a hall for a concert by Paul Robeson, to hold a rally for the Progressive Party, or for dozens of other lawful purposes.

You have a right to express your convictions, but if they happen to be against the capitalist system you lose your job, your family goes hungry, cold and ill clad, and your kids go to the factory instead of to college. As Prof. Albert Guerard has pointed out, "To take away a man's chances of earning a living is to threaten him with torture and death." Or as Congressman Thomas Eliot phrased it, "Freedom to starve is not a part of the Bill of Rights. There is not much liberty of action when you are walking a tightrope across a bottomless pit."

It is high time the American people made free speech, press and assembly more of a reality and less of a theory.

I am not discussing whether we have attained nearer to democracy than other countries. I am only combating the common assumption that we have already arrived at the goal.

Gradually I have evolved a conception of democracy which goes far deeper than political affairs. Democracy is a whole way of life; it signifies the dignity and worth and well-being of every man and woman. The nearest I have so far come to a definition of democracy is: a society in which all the laws and all social institutions are responsive to and promote the welfare of the whole body of the people; and in which each individual has equality of opportunity to develop his or her utmost abilities and to achieve happiness.

As I have looked back over history it has seemed to me an amazing thing that in all the civilizations we find the great mass of men submitting to be ruled by a handful. All the work that kept the race existing was done by the common people, they were the race, but they accepted lives of toil, privation and contempt. With all the power in their hands, they remained powerless. A Catholic priest, Tommaso Campanella, who lived around 1600, voiced this paradox.

The people is a beast of muddy brain,
That knows not its own force, and therefore stands
Loaded with wood and stone; the powerless hands
Of a mere child guide it with bit and rein;
One kick would be enough to break the chain;
But the beast fears, and what the child demands,
It does; nor its own terror understands,
Confused and stupefied by bugbears rain.
Most wonderful! With its own hand it ties
And gags itself -- gives itself death and war
For pence doled out by Kings from its own store.
Its own are all things between earth and heaven;
But this it knows not; and if one arise
To tell this truth, it kills him unforgiven.

The meaning, the essence of democracy, is that the people shall at last come to know that "its own are all things between earth and heaven" and build a social order where this is a reality. This is the long march of mankind, and our job is to see that in our time we steadily advance.

Thirdly, I have learned some things about civil liberties. I have unlearned the thing I was taught in school, that American liberty was set up in 1775 and so we have it. Liberties are not dead things, like Plymouth Rock under a canopy for all time. Liberties are living things, which therefore can grow, and also can be murdered. Therefore liberty is never won for keeps.

Civil liberties do not exist in a vacuum. Men want freedom of opinion on concrete issues; freedom of speech and press to communicate ideas about something; freedom to assemble for some purpose. By the same token violations of civil liberties do not occur in a vacuum. The sheriff does not say, "Ho, hum. What a grand sunny morning! Guess I'll go out and violate the Bill of Rights." NO, civil liberties get violated only when the things people are thinking or writing or talking or meeting about are dangerous to the vested interests of certain other people who are sufficiently powerful to turn the Constitution into a scrap of paper. Therefore civil liberties are forever being destroyed, and forever have to be won by each generation. They cannot be inherited. The only security for liberty is the passionate devotion in the

hearts of each generation of man. As the noted civil liberties lawyer, Osmond K. Frankel, said, "It must not be assumed that it is easy to be free." But Americans have been taking their freedom for granted - which is madness.

We generally think of civil liberties as the right of the individual, indispensable for his human dignity. But that is not the only, nor the greatest aspect of civil liberties. For they are the very lifeblood of the democratic process. Without the free interchange of ideas, dissent, a hearing for new proposals, the clash of opinions and desires, democracy cannot function. Without civil liberties the people have no way of learning new thoughts, of thrashing out their problems, of crystalizing and unifying their purposes, of voicing their desires.

Furthermore, civil liberties are the one sure guarantee against violent revolution. No government which retains its responsiveness to the desires of the people, its service to their needs, its flexibility for change, need have the slightest fear of revolution. H-bombs could not force its satisfied citizens to revolt. But destroy the avenue by which social and economic changes can be brought about peacefully, and you make certain that a time will come when the people will be driven to revolution. As Pres. John F. Kennedy stated it, "If we make peaceful revolution impossible we make violent revolution inevitable."

For change will come, make no mistake about that. Change will come in our institutions in the future as it did in the past. If it had not, America would still be a land of chattel slavery, we would have no public schools, only property owners would be allowed to vote and in some states only members of a particular church, not one woman would cast a ballot, it would be illegal to belong to a labor union, social security laws would be unknown. Change in institutions is inevitable. The mighty geologic forces of history irresistibly change the institutional continents and thrust up mountain ranges of economic change. Where the hard crust of institutions will not reshape itself to the forces of history, the earthquake shatters the land. We should have learned this from our own history. Solidified vested interests of slavery would not permit peaceful evolutionary change, and the change nevertheless came about at the hideous price of the convulsion of civil war.

It is not the radicals who bring the menace of revolution; it is those who destroy the channels of freedom through which changes can flow peacefully.

Two presidents have explicitly warned of the extent to which American democracy is being subverted by the power of the capitalists and the military. Woodrow Wilson wrote in 1913, "The masters of the government of the United States are the combined capitalists and manufacturers of the United States." Then Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his farewell address, warned against the "conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry...Our military organization today bears little relation to that known to any of my predecessors in peacetime.../its/ total influence - economic, political, even spiritual - is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the Federal Government..We must not fail to understand its grave implications...in the councils of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes."

No one would accuse Wilson or Eisenhower of being Communists.

What are the stakes for which the capitalists of America have been playing with hot and cold wars abroad, and the crushing of dissent at home? They have been taken up on a high mountain and shown a vision of world empire such as never existed in all history. Do not be fooled by the fact that the United States is not seeking the actual governmental possession of territory. The day of that kind of imperialism is over. It is dead in Asia; it is mortally sick in Africa. But imperialism is not dead. The New Imperialism holds peoples in subjection by economic might, by the power to bring ruin and starvation, which is quite as mighty as the power of guns. And, in addition, by richly rewarding puppetrulers of small nations who are obedient to us.

American capitalism has dreamed of worldwide economic empire paying a fabulous stream of tribute to its coffers - from the oil of Iran and Saudi-Arabia and the Sahara; the tin of Bolivia; the rubber of Indochina and Malaya; the gold of North Korea; the bananas of Guatamala; the rice and silk of China; the gold and diamonds of South Africa; the cocoa of Nigeria; the copper of the Congo. To achieve this they must crush the aspirations of all humanity for freedom and human dignity and lives of well-being. Above all they must crush communism, or their dream of global empire crashes in ruins. Instead, they would face the slow or speedy shrinking of their empire and their profits as nation after nation, continent after continent, asserts its independence and takes its economy into its own hands, to be administered for the welfare of its own people.

For you and I are living in one of the great transition ages of all history. We are participants, either willing or unwilling, in the transition of human society from capitalism to communism. Before 1917 there was not a single human being living under a communist system. Today 950 millions live in communist countries, while great political parties committed to communism in one form or another exist in all the major nations of Europe and Asia - Great Britain, West Germany, France, Italy, Scandinavia and other European lands, and India and elsewhere in Asia. Probably it is a conservative estimate that more than half the human race has now committed itself to communism. From zero to half the human race in a scant 40 years! That means that the world has now crossed the divide. The final issue is no longer in doubt. For a few years the might of American capitalism, its stranglehold on the economy of the world, and the poverty and dependence of many of the underdeveloped nations, may build a road block to delay the march. But only for a time. Only the blowing of the whole human race to smithereens by H-bombs can prevent the eventual communist world.

One of the more transparently dishonest slogans of the American brainwashing is that ours is a system of free enterprise. Free for whom? In a country with the greatest concentration of wealth and monopoly control in the world, where prices are monopoly rigged and genuine competition is as dead as the dodo, where the little fellow hasn't a dog's chance of breaking into the Big Boys' game and the small business man is lucky to keep his head above water?

Ours has become an economy not of individual entrepreneurs but of vast corporate monopolies. There is no turning back the clock, but it is well to

understand the actual present in order better to chart the future. Two thirds of our production is carried on by 250 corporations, aggregates of tens and hundreds of thousands of workers, all integrated into systematic collective work. Each mammoth corporation - Standard Oil, General Motors, U. S. Steel, American Tel. & Tel., duPont, General Electric, American Power and Light, Anaconda Copper, and the rest - operates as a collective unit. Often you hear the man in the street expressing a fear of communism because the lives of the individuals would be regimented, and regimented by politicians. Does it never occur to him that under capitalism the lives of the millions who, if they would not starve, must work for one of these gigantic corporations is as regimented as it is possible to be? Decisions are made today - have to be made - and these decisions must be carried out. Obey, or be fired. If the decision is to close a factory upon which the entire community depends for daily bread and to move south for cheap labor, the lives of thousands are ruined. The only difference between decisions under capitalism and communism is that under capitalism they are made by men over whom the people have absolutely no power, who are not responsible and accountable to the voters or to society. The decisions are made by men who have no concern to provide the goods and services needed to feed, house and clothe humanity. Made by men whose one and only goal, by the innate, avowed and foundation law of capitalism, is the production of maximum profits.

For capitalism, by definition, sets up profits as the sole motive power which keeps it running. Profits - in other words, greed. Profit for myself, by ruining and killing off competitors - every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost - in other words, total selfishness.

In passing may I say that I have always been mystified how people who call themselves religious or ethical can think that a system which avowedly bases its operation and existence on greed and selfishness can succeed. I do not believe it can. I have the firm conviction that the only possible basis for a successful society is a cooperative economy of production for human needs, which is the underlying principle of communism.

We have seen that America's productive system today is not individual work but collective. But the ownership, the control and the profit of this collective system is in the grip of a handful of men, in no way accountable to society. The lives of 165,000,000 Americans hang upon them. Communism proposes that, even as we have in principle taken the political life of the nations out of the hands of kings and oligarchies and vested it in the people, we should take this economic life of the nations out of the hands of economic oligarchies and vest it in the hands of the people. Only when isms of democratic control are so perfected that the control really rests in the people, then and then only will mankind really achieve a free society and a peaceful world.

These, then, are the great problems and tasks which will be the major concerns of the coming years of your lives: the restoration of civil liberties and the establishment of freedom and equality for all Americans. The ending of the Cold War with its concomitant militarization of American life, and the achievement of a world of peaceful coexistence. The transformation of our economy from capitalism to communism. The creation of political machinery by which the control of our government will be in fact, as in theory, in the hands

of the people - which is of major importance now, is of growing importance as our complex society compels government to take on ever growing functions, and is absolutely imperative in a communist order. And finally, the achievement of that Greater Democracy which, in the final analysis, is the embodiment of the brotherhood of man. For the only basis on which a nation or the world can be successfully run - without wars, without subjection, without exploitation, without tyrannies, without hunger - is the brotherhood of man. The inescapable moral law of humanity is human brotherhood.

INSTITUTE OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
The University of Michigan - Wayne State University

PROJECT ON "The Twentieth Century Trade
Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change"

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M. Bruce Harell
WITNESS

Florence H. Luscomb
(Signature of Interviewee)

June 21, 1976
Date

City Rites

By Ed Zuckerman

A Thoroughly Radical Life

From the very beginning of her birthday celebration last Sunday, Florence Luscomb's appearance evoked the past. When she was introduced to speak and the audience applauded her, she applauded back. It was a practice, she explained, that she had learned during a visit to the People's Republic of China in 1962 — when she was only 75. During her speech, she temporarily digressed to explain that she was totally calm. "I've never been afraid to face an audience," she said, at least not since the time she made 222 speeches during a 19-week

League of Women Voters, and Luscomb became its assistant executive director. In 1922, she ran for Boston City Council as the League's candidate and lost by only a few hundred votes.

Luscomb's activities in the years that followed read like a catalogue of progressive and radical Americana. She worked for temperance, for the 1924 Presidential campaign of Progressive candidate Robert La Follette and for the defense of the "Scottsboro Boys." She served as vice-president of the Boston NAACP, as vice-chairman of the Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, and as rummage sale chairman of the Boston chapter of the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. She became a member and later president of the

Award and make a speech.

"They didn't tell me there was going to be a party," she said. "They asked me to preach a sermon." And preach she did. At 90, Luscomb is gray-haired and slightly stooped but totally vigorous. She lives in an 11-bedroom commune in Cambridge, where she is 55 years older than the next oldest resident, and still spends her summers in a New Hampshire cabin, where she raises her own vegetables and chops her own firewood. She celebrated her eightieth birthday by climbing Mt. Chocorua.

Luscomb's speech for her ninetieth birthday was titled "For a Second American Revolution." She began by quoting the principles of the American Constitution. Then she recited dismal facts about high unemployment and death rates among American blacks, and about the poverty and exploitation of American Indians and Chicano farmworkers. "Would you say that in America today all men are created equal?" she asked, her voice rising.

She proceeded to quote Woodrow Wilson: "The masters of the government of the United States are the combined capitalists and manufacturers of the United States." And concluded, in her own words, "Therefore, every citizen who is loyal to the foundation principles of the American republic must take an active part in a second American Revolution, hopefully nonviolent, which will create a society in which all laws and all social and economic institutions promote the welfare of the whole body of the people, in which every individual has equal opportunity to develop his or her utmost abilities and to achieve happiness."

What followed was a sort of radical version of *This Is Your Life*. As Community Church minister Philip Zwierling called their names, people who had worked with Luscomb in the Civil Liberties Union, the NAACP, several unions, the Progressive party, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and other organizations took the stage. Most of the people were old, though none were as old as Luscomb, and some, like the NAACP's Melnea Cass, warmly embraced the guest of honor as they reached her.

"Florence Luscomb to me is one of the greatest women who ever lived," said Mrs. Cass, when it was her turn to speak. (Mrs. Cass worked with Luscomb in the 1940s. "In those days," she said later, "when we sent people out to speak for us, we sometimes needed a white person as well as a black person. If you didn't have one, they wouldn't listen to you. Florence opened a lot of doors for us.")

Benedict Alper noted, "I've only known Florence for less than half her life," and described his work with her on aid for the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War. ("She was very courageous and unpopular," he said later. "Catholic Boston was a strong supporter of Franco.")

Otis Hood, of the Communist party, recalled his work with Luscomb during the 1930s in the effort to institute unemployment insurance in Massachusetts. (In 1940, Hood wrote a pamphlet denouncing Luscomb as one who "has aided the war-mongers" for her criticism of the Russian invasion of Finland, but he has apparently forgiven her.)

Anne Prosten, who worked with Luscomb in the CIO office workers' union and flew in from Chicago to be present at the celebration, recalled a union incident in the late 1930s. "Several hundred seamen from oil tankers had responded to the CIO drive in the maritime industry and had been forced out on strike. Company police tossed tear gas bombs into the picket lines, company goons and city police beat the strikers, and the mayor of Everett issued a ban on further picketing. The next day, two lone pickets appeared, wearing gas masks and marching grimly in defiance of the ban. They were Florence Luscomb and her 75-year-old friend Zara DuPont. Their picture was in every paper in the country and helped

mobilize sentiment in favor of the strike."

Other friends followed, with more praise, and then the meeting was adjourned to the basement for coffee, sandwiches and birthday cake. But before the crowd could leave the auditorium, Luscomb was at the microphone one more time.

"I just want to say," she said, "that none of these things that I have done have been a sacrifice to me. They are the only things that made my life interesting, that made me feel I was a part of my times. . . . They were part of a real human life that I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been doing these things." She was finished, the crowd applauded, and then it was time for coffee and cake.



Florence Luscomb on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday February 6

speaking tour. That was in 1915.

Even by 1915, Florence Luscomb was an old hand at political activism. In 1892, when she was five, her mother took her to a women's suffrage convention where she heard a speech by Susan B. Anthony. After graduating from MIT, as an architect, in 1909, she became deeply involved in the women's suffrage movement. "Criminals, the insane and women were disfranchised," she recalled in a recent speech, "were taxed and governed without voice, were subjects and not citizens. I burned with indignation at this insult to my human dignity; I blazed with devotion to the democratic ideals of my country. Thereupon . . . I stood speaking upon soapboxes on street corners; I marched in parades; walked up and down on Boston Common as a sandwichwoman to advertise a rally; I handed out leaflets at mill gates; I sold the *Woman's Journal* on the streets as a newsboy; I took part in pageants; I helped to defeat anti-suffrage politicians running for Congress and the Legislature; I wrote leaflets; I painted a sign to hang on the elephant when the circus parade came to town; I helped to organize meetings and conventions. I organized local suffrage clubs; I distributed fliers at county fairs and talked and argued with thousands of people. I interviewed editors; I canvassed tenement districts with petitions; I took part in campaigns for suffrage in New York, Maine, Ohio, Rhode Island, Virginia and in Great Britain. I spoke in three-quarters of the cities and towns of Massachusetts. . . ."

When women's suffrage was finally achieved in 1920, Luscomb, then 33, cast the first vote of her life for the Socialist Eugene V. Debs for President. The Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government, of which Luscomb was an officer, had meanwhile become the new

Boston local of the Stenographers, Typewriters, Bookkeepers and Accountants Union of the AFL and, when the CIO was founded, joined and became president of the Boston local of its United Office and Professional Workers. In 1935, she visited the Soviet Union, of which she was a great admirer. Twice she ran for Congress on radical party tickets and in 1952 she ran for Governor as the candidate of the Progressive party, of which she was state chairman.

In 1955, she was summoned to appear before the Massachusetts Commission to Investigate Communism and Subversion and asked about her organizational activities. Citing the First Amendment, she declined to answer. "I stated in the beginning that I knew of no one among my personal acquaintances who was subversive," she testified. "I do know of subversion abroad in our land. . . . It is subversive for commissions like this to spread such hysteria and intimidation throughout the land that Americans are afraid to sign petitions, afraid to read progressive magazines, afraid to make out checks for liberal causes, afraid to join organizations, afraid to speak their minds on public issues. . . . This is the destruction of democracy." The Commission threatened to cite her for contempt but it never did.

Six years later, Luscomb went to visit Cuba. In 1965, she marched against the war in Vietnam; in 1975, she lobbied for the state Equal Rights Amendment. And last Sunday, on her ninetieth birthday, she turned up at the weekly meeting of the nonsectarian Community Church of Boston in Morse Auditorium at Boston University to receive the Church's Sacco and Vanzetti



Stumping for Suffrage in 1909

In the last two weeks of August 1909, Florence Luscomb was one of a party of four women's suffragists who made a speaking tour of Massachusetts by inter-urban trolley. The following is an excerpt from a speech made by Luscomb later that year, in which she reported on the success of the touring expedition:

The paraphernalia of the trip consisted of one large yellow banner six feet long inscribed in black, "Votes for Women," a jointed flagstaff for the same made to fold in to three pieces, and a heavy, heavy suitcase of literature and buttons. Besides this, each member had her individual suitcase, and there was a bundle of umbrellas.

Picture our party unloading from a street-car in the central square of some little country town. This in itself is a lengthy operation: Then we make for the nearest drug store, deposit all our luggage in one corner, and to compensate for its storage all of us are in duty bound to buy sodas. We have consumed innumerable soft drinks for the sake of the cause, and have become authorities upon the drug stores of Massachusetts. While we drink, the drug clerk is cross-examined as to where the best audience can be collected, time of trolley, hotel for the night, factories and mills in town, number of

employees, men or women, union or non-union, what they manufacture, and a few dozen other similar things. Meanwhile, if the town is large enough for us to require a permit to speak, Mrs. Fitzgerald has interviewed the police. Then our leaflets are unpacked, our flag erected, we borrow a Moxie box from the obliging drug clerk and proceed to the busiest corner of the town square. Our chief mounts the box, the banner over her shoulder, and starts talking to the air, three assorted dogs, six kids, and the two loafers in front of the grocery store just over the way. The rest of us give handbills to all the passersby and to all the nearby stores. Within ten minutes our audience has increased to from twenty-five to five hundred, according to the time and place. We speak in turn for an hour or more, answer questions, sell buttons, and circulate the petition. . . .

We were an inexhaustible source of wonder and interest to the small boy. He dogged our footsteps clamouring for literature; he audibly surmised whether we were Salvation Army or Anti-tuberculosis, and the climax of his joy was attained when we allowed him to carry our banner.

Our other constant admirers were the dogs. I feel hardly at home now at a meeting at which there is not at least one dog present, preferably yellow; and when there are a dozen dogs of assorted sizes, colors and howls, Oh that is bliss! We even reveled in dog-fights; for as our chief remarked while we were enjoying one such experience, "After all, there is nothing to draw a crowd like a dog-fight."