Susan B. Anthony would never have joined the Women’s March on Washington

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By Carol Crossed and Eric Anthony, Special to The Washington Post

On Feb. 24, 1883, Rosalie Gardiner Jones, a Long Island Suffragist who graduated from Adelphi College, was born. In this photo, suffragists led by Jones, known as General Jones, march from New York on their way to the Woman Suffrage Procession in Washington D.C., on the eve of Woodrow Wilson’s inaugural in March 1913. (Credit: AP)

Those of us at the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum in Adams, Massachusetts, are saddened that the museum honoring this American iconic heroine and tireless worker for women’s rights will not be among the organizations marching Saturday in Washington, D.C. Some people might perhaps think that Anthony family descendants and museum board members would be leading the Women’s March, especially as the centennial marking the Susan B. Anthony Amendment for women’s suffrage has begun in some states. But they would be wrong: Anthony would never have joined a march in favor of abortion access.

The unifying theme of Susan Brownell Anthony’s life was to speak up for those without a voice. Anthony fought for temperance, the abolition of slavery and especially the enfranchisement of women. She also spoke up for the voiceless child in utero, opposing Restellism, the term that Anthony’s newspaper and others at that time used for abortion. It’s easy to chalk up Anthony’s (and other early feminists’) opposition to abortion as a relic of their day and age. But these women were progressive and independent; they did not oppose abortion because they were conditioned to, but because they believed every human life has inherent and equal value, no matter their age, skin color or sex.

The Women’s March platform does include some issues Anthony would have agreed with: Concerns about racial equality, tolerance and equal pay for equal work are problems Anthony would have marched for in her day and would support in her contemporary surrogates this month. However, major group sponsors, like Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America, have decided that this event is so central to the expansion of abortion rights that they have excluded women who are against abortion from the march’s platform and partnerships.

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Anthony’s newspaper, the Revolution, had a policy of not advertising abortion as other mainstream papers furtively did. Revolution editors like Elizabeth Cady Stanton were explicit in denouncing “child murder,” “infanticide” and “foeticide,” descriptions they used interchangeably for abortion. Indeed, a recent Smithsonian Magazine article discussed news coverage of “infanticide” in the 1860s, a common subject for early investigative reporters of the suffrage era, many of whom were women writing about their concerns under pseudonyms.
It is not hard to imagine that these early feminists and suffragists, Anthony among them, were opposed to the most fundamental human abuse: degrading another human being by claiming to own and destroy it. In her autobiography, Elizabeth Blackwell, a suffragist and the first U.S. female doctor, went into medicine to denounce abortionists: “Women who carried on this shocking trade seemed to me a horror,” she wrote. “It was an utter degradation of what might and should become a noble position for women.” Another suffragist physician, Charlotte Denman Lozier, said, “We are sure most women physicians will lend their influence and their aid to shield their sex from the foulest wrong committed against it,” that is, abortion. In her famous 1875 talk on social purity, Anthony condemned abortion as a consequence of liquor consumption.

History, particularly American history, is not always conveniently in sync with today’s popular views and culture. Neither should the suffragist movement be co-opted into joining a cause that they universally condemned. The Women’s March’s vision and principles, just released this week, speaks to honoring the legacy of the suffragists. But they do not.

Many women and women’s groups who will march next week have good reason to do so, and they should be respected. However, we ask that abortion rights not be misappropriated to Anthony and the critical work of the suffrage movement. Anthony and many of her fellow suffragists were anti-abortion feminists, the contemporary existence of which even Hillary Clinton has acknowledged. If the Women’s March truly wants to honor the suffragist legacy, they will acknowledge their existence, too.

Crossed is the board president of the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum. Anthony is a board member and Anthony family descendant.

http://www.newsday.com/opinion/commentary/susan-b-anthony-would-never-have-joined-the-womens-march-on-washington-1.12978920
Those of us at the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum in Adams, Massachusetts, are saddened that the museum honoring this American icon is the lone voice because there will be a movement among the organizations marching in Washington, D.C. Some people might think that Anthony family descendants and museum board members would be leading the Women’s March, especially as the centennial marking the Susan B. Anthony Amendment for women’s suffrage has begun in some states. But they would be wrong. Anthony would never have joined in a march in favor of abortion access.

The unifying theme of Susan Brownell Anthony’s life was to speak up for those without a voice. Anthony fought for temperance, the abolition of slavery and especially the enfranchisement of women. She also spoke up for the voiceless child in utero, opposing Restitution, the term that Anthony’s newspaper and others at that time used for abortion. It’s easy to chalk up Anthony’s (and other early feminists’) opposition to abortion as a relic of their day and age. But these women were progressive and independent; they did not oppose abortion because they were conditioned to do so, but because they believed every human life has inherent and equal value, no matter their age, skin color or sex.

The Women’s March platform does include some issues Anthony would have agreed with. Concerns about racial equality, tolerance and equal pay for equal work are problems claiming to own and destroy it. In her autobiography, Elizabeth Blackwell, a suffragist and the first U.S. female doctor, went into medicine: “Women who cared on this shocking trade seemed to me a horrid.” Instead, she wrote: “I was an utter degradation of what might and should become a noble profession for women.” Another suffragist physician, Charlotte Dorr, also said: “We are sure our women physicians will lend their influence and their aid to exalt their sex from the deplorable condition against it.”

Abortion. In her famous 1875 talk on social purity, Anthony condemned abortion as a consequence of licentious consumption.

History, particularly American history, is not always conveniently in sync with today’s popular views and culture. Neither should the suffragist movement be co-opted into joining a cause that they universally condemned. The Women’s March is a movement. It is a movement. It is a movement.

Moreover, many women and men who will march next week have good reasons to do so, and they should be respected. However, we ask that abortion rights not be misappropriated to Anthony and the critical work of the suffrage movement. Women and men of any gender who participate in the Anthony festival are anti-abortion feminists, the contemporary existence of which every Hillary Clinton has acknowledged. If the Women’s March truly wants to honor the suffragist legacy, they will acknowledge their existence, too.