Abolition, Abortion, and the Case for Personhood

Kenedi Bennett with the guidance of Dr. Laurie Hines

Abstract
This research explores the similarities between the 19th century abolition movement and the 21st century pro-life movement. In both situations, activists fought against legal decisions and public sentiment that modified discrimination based on bigotry, be it that of the racism of skin-color or the dependency of physical development.

Confronting Public Sentiment
Public sentiment on these issues takes on three different forms. Generally, people either believe that the issue is morally wrong, that it is not wrong, or that it is wrong, but individuals can choose for themselves. Abolitionists and pro-life activists used different tactics to attempt to change public sentiment and, through doing so, change the law.

A. Abolition
Abolitionists and pro-life activists both use songs as media tactics. Abolition songs were mostly sung by slaves, but some were also sung by abolitionists, mainly in the north. Pro-life songs are sung by a variety of bands ranging in genre from contemporary Christian to death metal. These songs tended to have two messages: they either tell of the horrors of the slave trade and abortion process or attempt to show the slave and the fetus as people. These songs included:

Abolition:

Am I Not a Man and Brother

"Am I not a man and brother? / Ought I not . . . to be free? / Sell me not to one another; / Take not thus my liberty; / . . . Christ our Saviour! / Died for me as well as thee" (1848)

Abolition Opinions:

"The Constitution does not define 'person' in so many words… it has an application only post-nataally… [which] per-suades us that the word 'person,' as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn." (Justice Blackmun, Roe v. Wade majority opinion)

B. Christian Morality
The Supreme Court made decisions it had no authority to make. Slavery and abortion are not rights for the federal government to decide on based on the constitution and are therefore the rights of states, and both decisions undermined the states’ authority.

Another similar tactic between these movements is the use of popular media. The most popular form of media that almost all of middle-class America would have seen in the 1820s to 1860s was books. Today, of course, it is social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Books such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin were revolutionary because they showed a piece of the horrors of slavery. Previously, typical middle-class Northern whites did not know how bad slavery really was.

Undercover interviews entitled “Human Capital” conducted and posted on YouTube and social media sites by the Center for Medical Progress, a pro-life organization, have done the same thing in showing Planned Parenthood executives talk about their selling of fetal parts.

Conclusion
In almost every aspect of the abolitionist and pro-life movements, similarities can be found. The same basic legal foundations were laid for the two issues, abolitionists and pro-life advocates use the same arguments, the same tactics are used to convince people, and the same general opinions about the issues are held. Others have also faintly drawn these connecting lines. Jeane Maynihan Mancini, President of the March for Life Education and Defense fund, said, “abortion is the greatest human rights issue of today, and young people know that.” These have both been highly-debated, emotional issues for those on either side of the issues because of their high level of importance and the fact that they have the ability to resonate with everyone.