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Georgia Women and Their Struggle for the Vote

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in *History*

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ABSTRACT

Women in the United States gained the right through the 19th Amendment in 1920. Even though women constitutionally had this right, Georgia and Mississippi did not allow women to cast a ballot in the 1920 election. By looking into the most prominent religion in these states, the Southern Baptist church, I explore connections between the beliefs and culture of the South, specifically Georgia, and how these played an important role in the obstacles women faced.

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For over 60 years, women across the United States faced obstacle after obstacle in their fight for the vote. Valiant women began the journey to the polls through their use of public speakers, peaceful protests, marches and postings in newspapers. Although it took many years, these women were able to win the ability to vote after Tennessee ratified the 19th amendment to the Constitution. Although the 19th Amendment wrote women's suffrage into law, two states that did not allow all their women citizens to participate in the 1920 election. These two states were also the states who gave the greatest opposition to the amendment's creation. Georgia and Mississippi were the two states that were able to deny their women the vote. The social position of women in the South, specifically Georgia, was extremely inferior to that of men. Religion shaped the status quo during this time period, and the most dominant church in the South was Southern Baptist. This denomination set very specific standards for women, and its male followers respected those expectations. In this paper, I will examine the role Southern Baptists played in the opposition women faced in their struggle for the vote, specifically, after the 19th Amendment was passed.

In the 1840s and 1850s, many men and women throughout the country felt that slavery should be put to an end. Most of the men and women with these beliefs were found in the North, where having slaves was not as much of a necessity for the types of work that were done. The goal to end slavery became a nation-wide campaign, resulting in groups coming together to fight for their cause. Abolitionists revolutionized the way of thinking in the nineteenth century, eventually leading to the questioning of many other issues throughout the country. In fact, the beginnings of women's fight for the vote started in a convention where the abolition of slavery was the main topic.

Chapter 1

History of the Women's Suffrage Movement

Their journey began in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the convention's leader. She was married to an abolitionist who was running for a seat in the New York legislature.¹ The two represented a couple immersed in the new wave of thinking that was beginning to spread throughout the country. As the leader, Stanton took quickly to the idea that women should have the same rights and privileges as men did. Members of the Seneca Falls Convention's discussion about abolition quickly turned to calling for women's rights. The people involved at the convention were there because they saw the injustices that slaves were facing, as well as the social issues that plagued slavery. After examining this, it became apparent to many that women were also facing discrimination and unfair treatment. Topics discussed included: education, legal discriminations, profession discrimination, religious oppression, and marriage oppression.² In these realms, women faced hardships that men did not have to. These injustices became the roots for the women's rights movement and led Stanton to calling for a movement.

Stanton drafted the Declaration of Sentiments in which she outlined resolutions that she felt would benefit women in life.³ She modeled her declaration after the Declaration of Independence including the phrase "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." Stanton went on to write: "that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are

¹ Jean H. Baker, *Sisters: the Lives of America's Suffragists* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 115.

² *Ibid*, 114-115.

³ *Ibid*, 114.

life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." ⁴ By making this connection to the Declaration of Independence, Stanton showed just how crucial this issue was to her as well as the other attendees. The biggest concern that Stanton had was equality. She ended her sentiment with a conclusion stating:

Resolved, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause, by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth, growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as self-evident falsehood, and at war with the interests of mankind."

These points would stand as goals throughout the fight for the vote.

After the Seneca Falls Convention, the woman's rights movement took flight. In 1850, the first National Women's Rights Convention was held in Worcester, Massachusetts. The convention had over 1,000 attendees, including men and women such as Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucy Stone, and Sojourner Truth.⁵ These conventions, which featured men and women delivering speeches supporting the fight for women's rights became an annual occurrence up until 1861.⁶

The Civil War put a hold on the efforts to advance women's position. From 1861 up until 1865, the movement dwindled in importance. This was not to the liking of one

⁴ "The Fight for Women's Suffrage," History, October 2, 2013, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.history.com/topics/the-fight-for-womens-suffrage>.

⁵ "Timeline from a History of the American Suffragist Movement," A History of the American Suffragists Movement, October 2, 2013, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.suffragist.com/timeline.htm>.

⁶ Ann-Marie Imbornoni, "Women's Rights Movement in the U.s.," InfoPlease, October 2, 2013, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/womenstimeline1.html>.

of the most important figures in the effort: Susan B. Anthony. Anthony met Stanton in 1851 at an anti-slavery conference, and the two began the Women's New York State Temperance Society in 1852.⁷ This society fought to prohibit alcohol sales and production due to the bad effects alcohol had on the treatment husbands gave to their wives and their children. After she was denied the right to speak at a temperance convention because she was a woman, Anthony geared her efforts toward gaining political status for women. This included women gaining the right to vote.⁸ In order for her to be taken seriously, she needed this right, and she became one of the more radical supporters of the cause. She felt that women's rights were of top priority, and the fight should not end until women gained the status that they were looking for.

Most suffragists allowed the years of the Civil War to be the "Time of the Negro," in which many of the supporters of women's rights redirected their efforts to the push for the end of slavery.⁹ Anthony was in completely opposed pausing the campaign, and instead felt women should continue on. Many of the women who supported the opposition to allowing for the "Time of the Negro" felt it was not only an opportunity for women to also gain the vote, but that it was also unfair that African-American men were gaining the right even though many were illiterate, making their knowledge on the topics they would be voting for insufficient. A campaign for women to gain the vote, hit on the point of literacy:

Without expressing any opinion on the proper qualifications for voting, we call attention to the significant facts that every state there are more women who can read and write than the whole number of illiterate male voters; more white women

⁷ "Susan B. Anthony," Bio, October 2, 2013, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.biography.com/people/susan-b-anthony-194905>.

⁸ Ibid 1.

⁹ Baker,68.

who can read and write than all negro voters; more American women who can read and write than all foreign voters; so that the enfranchisement of such women would settle the vexed question of rule by illiteracy, whether or home grown or foreign-born production.¹⁰

Since those who vote should make educated decisions on their candidate choice, it makes sense that a qualified voter would be able to read and write, and since many women were now attending schools, women fit this qualification. Anthony and her supporters did not see how it was fair that both African-American and white men who were illiterate possessed a privilege that those literate women did not have. In addition, at the time when African-American men were given the right to vote, the only way to hear about candidates was word of mouth or to read about them in the paper or other published pieces. This means that those who were illiterate were only able to make their decisions based on what they had heard about the candidates, whether it be opinion or fact.

¹⁰ Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), 155.

Chapter 2

The African-American Question

In 1866, after the Civil War's end, Stanton and Anthony created the American Equal Rights Association. This association called for the same rights to be granted to all men and women, regardless of race.¹¹ By adding equality regardless of race to their agenda, a division between the North's and the South's support was inevitable. Southerners did not want African-American men and women to have any rights, specifically the right to vote. Northerners were more liberal on the idea, since the North had fought for an end to slavery during the Civil War.

From 1867 to 1868, the 14th and 15th Amendments were passed through Congress.¹² The 14th Amendment defined citizens as "male," while the 15th Amendment gave African-American men the right to vote. Anthony and Stanton were outraged that Negro men now had the vote, yet white women did not. This caused two new suffrage associations to develop. The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) was led by Stanton and Anthony, and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was led by Lucy Stone.¹³ The NWSA was thought to be the more radical of the two, due in part to its support for solely for women's rights. The group's radical reputation also was enhanced after Stanton and Anthony were perceived as racists following Anthony's statement: "When you propose to elevate the lowest and most degraded classes of men to an even platform of that with white men.... It is certainly time for you to begin to think at

¹¹ "Susan B. Anthony," 1.

¹² "Timeline of Women's Suffrage in the United States," 1.

¹³ "Ibid, 2.

least whether it might not be proper to lift the wives, daughters, and mothers of your State to an even pedestal.”¹⁴

After the NWSA began to lose support due to its radical reputation and aspects of racism, the NWSA and the AWSA joined efforts and formed the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). With this unification, efforts for all women’s right to vote, including African-American women became their mission. Southerners were not in favor of African-American men having the right to vote, and their support for African-American women to gain this right would be little to none. The NAWSA made it its plan to gain women’s right to vote by reaching out to each individual state and having each one pass laws allowing women to vote. This plan seemed to be a good one since Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado and Utah women all gained the right to vote through their state legislators by 1896.¹⁵ The NAWSA knew their greatest opponents would be southern states, specifically those in the Bible Belt, where inequality of the sexes was seen right by the predominant religious group there: the Southern Baptists.¹⁶ Here, Southerners had been able to prevent many African-American men from voting through the use of poll taxes and literacy requirements since a great number of African-American men did not have enough money to pay to vote and their literacy rate was relatively low. These restrictions would be a precedent for what women would have to face come 1920.

It became apparent it would take too long to have each state allow women to vote, so the NAWSA changed their approach to work for an amendment to the United States

¹⁴ Baker, 71.

¹⁵ “Timeline of Women’s Suffrage in the United States,” 1.

¹⁶ Sumners, “Southern Baptists and Women’s Right to Vote, 1910-1920”, *Baptist History and Heritage* (January, 1977): 45-51.

Constitution. In 1914, the Susan B. Anthony Amendment was introduced to Congress, but did not pass.¹⁷ There were previous attempts to pass an amendment in the 1870s and 1880s which also did not gain approval, but the 1914 rejection was especially aggravating. Women continued to push for the amendment, and in 1919, after three times in Congress, the 19th Amendment passed, giving women the right to vote. The next step for these women was to attain support of three-fourths of the states- 36 of the 48 on the Union at the time.

Since many woman suffragists supported abolishing slavery and eventually equality for African-Americans, Southern Baptists had more reasons to oppose their cause. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Southern Baptists supported the ownership of slaves, segregation, and white supremacy.¹⁸ As stated by the Southern Baptist Convention:

Many of our Southern Baptist forbears defended the right to own slaves, and either participated in, supported, or acquiesced in the particularly inhumane nature of American slavery; and... in later years Southern Baptists failed, in many cases, to support, and in some cases opposed, legitimate initiatives to secure the civil rights of African-Americans; and... Racism has led to discrimination, oppression, injustice, and violence, both in the Civil War and throughout the history of our nation; and... Racism has divided the body of Christ and Southern Baptists in particular, and separated us from our African-American brothers and sisters; and... many of our congregations have intentionally and/or unintentionally excluded African-Americans from worship, membership, and leadership; and... racism profoundly distorts our understanding of Christian morality, leading some Southern Baptists to believe that racial prejudice and discrimination are compatible with the Gospel..¹⁹

¹⁷ "Timeline from a History of the American Suffragist Movement", 5

¹⁸ "Resolution On Racial Reconciliation On the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention," Southern Baptist Convention, October 17, 2013, accessed October 17, 2013, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amresolution.asp?id=899>.

¹⁹ "Ibid, 1.

The Southern Baptists did not take action in eliminating the segregation and racism in their bylaws until June of 1995.²⁰ This means that all through the fight for women's suffrage, the Southern Baptists were able to find at least one point of controversy and therefore an explanation for their lack of support. The idea that women suffrage groups were in support of African-American rights was an extremely controversial topic in the South. These were the same women fighting for women's suffrage, and therefore the opposition and challenges they faced were not surprising ones. The African-American question of rights had been an issue in the United States since before the Civil War. Again, the greatest opposition to African-American rights was seen in the southern states, a place where tradition was preserved and change was often unwelcomed.

In the state of Georgia, pro-suffrage groups became active early on in the women's suffrage movement. Helen Augusta Howard began a group in Columbus, Georgia called the Georgia Woman Suffrage Association (GWSA).²¹ The GWSA was a branch of the NAWSA, which emerged only one year after the unification of Lucy Stone's and Susan B. Anthony's leading suffrage groups. The GWSA became the most prominent pro-suffrage group in Georgia, but did not include African-American women.²² Because of this, African American women created their own group that was based out of Savannah, Georgia called the National Association of Colored Women

²⁰ "Resolution On Racial Reconciliation On the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention," 1.

²¹ E. Eltzroth, ed., *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), s.v. "Woman Suffrage."

²² "Woman Suffrage".

(NACW).²³ In this group, African-American focused on what they needed to do in order to see each other at the polls.

The GWSA was led by its president Mary Latimer McLendon during the height of the group's influence.²⁴ She was the leader of the group's first convention in 1899 where it passed two major resolutions: women should not have to pay taxes if they are not allowed to vote and The University of Georgia should open its admissions to women.

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Eventually, the GWSA changed its name to the League of Women Voters after the passage of the 19th Amendment.²⁶ This was before they knew they would face any obstacles while attempting to cast their ballots. The Georgia legislature was able to deferr passing an "enabling act" which meant women were to have been registered six months prior to the 1920 election. This was all but impossible since the 19th Amendment was not passed by the federal government weeks away from voting day. Without this legislation, women in Georgia were unable to participate in any elections until 1922.²⁷

²³ Lorraine Gates Schuyler. *The Weight of Their Votes: Southern Women and Political Leverage in the 1920s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 131.

²⁴ "Woman Suffrage".

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Schuyler, 169.

²⁷ "Woman Suffrage".

Chapter 3

Georgia and Mississippi's Refusal to Abide by the Amendment

By the summer of 1920, 35 of the 48 states had ratified the amendment. The suffragists only needed one more state for the amendment to apply nation-wide. Tennessee became that 36th state, after a young man by the name of Harry Burn cast his vote in favor of the amendment.²⁸ Originally, it was thought he would vote in opposition, but after his mother asked him to vote with the support, he did, and the 19th Amendment officially was ratified into the United States Constitution.

Even after the 19th Amendment was ratified on August 26th, women who wanted to vote still faced opposition in the southern states, specifically those in the Bible Belt.²⁹ The 1920 election took place that November and 46 out of 48 states saw women head to the polls. The other two, Mississippi and Georgia did not allow women to vote because of requirements stating a person must have been eligible to vote for at least six months before casting a ballot.³⁰ This requirement meant that women in Georgia and Mississippi were not able to vote until the 1922 election. The opposition that these women faced is a reflection on the Southern Baptists and their values and perceptions of what southern ladies were expected to be during that time.

In addition to the social obstacles that women suffragist faced, there were laws put into place in Georgia that prevented women from gaining political rights. Georgia's

²⁸ Jane Marcellus, "Southern Myths and the Nineteenth Amendment: The Participation of Nashville Newspaper Publishers in the Final State's Ratification", *JandMC Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 241-60.

²⁹ "Woman Suffrage," 1.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

Constitution stated: “Females are not entitled to the privilege of the elective franchise; nor can they hold any civil office or perform any civil functions.”³¹ During this time, Georgia was the only state to explicitly deny women political rights, therefore entrusting all the decisions to men. This constitutional provision was in stark contrast to Wyoming’s, the first territory/state to allow women to vote in all elections. The constitution of Wyoming, stated: “Since equality in the enjoyment of natural and civil rights is made sure only through political equality, the laws of this state affecting the political rights and privileges of its citizens shall be without distinction of race, color or sex.”³² The difference between the two constitutions is unmistakable. As one constitution gives rights to only one race and gender, the other accepts all of its citizens. Contrasting the two constitutions, it is easy to see that Georgia needed much more time to accept or recognize women as contributing citizens. Women in Georgia were exempt from duties that voters were required to do, such as jury status, but they also were prohibited from holding any office except State Librarian. Even to be eligible for that position, there were requirements the woman had to fit. The law stated:

Females are not entitled to the privilege of the elective franchise; nor can they hold any civil office or perform any civil functions, unless specially authorized by law; nor are they required to discharge any military, jury, police, patrol or road duty. Provided nothing contained herein shall prevent a woman, a resident of the state for four years and who has attained the age of twenty-one years, from being eligible to the position or office of state librarian by appointment by the governor under the provisions of force regulating appointments by the governor.³³

One aspect of the requirements that hindered the one opportunity women had was the fact that the governor had to appoint the woman to office. Not only were governors

³¹ Bertha Rembaugh, *Political Status of Women in the United States: A Digest of the Laws Concerning Women in the Various States and Territories* (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1911), xxiii.

³² *Ibid*, xxiii.

³³ *Ibid*, 27.

male, but they would more than likely share the same views and values as the majority of men in Georgia at the time. The first woman to hold the position of librarian was Helen Dortsch Longstreet.³⁴ Her road to gaining the position was not an easy one. She originally was only appointed as Assistant State Librarian, but she rallied for the position as State Librarian. This achievement was not made until 1896, well into women's fight for suffrage.³⁵ In other states, women were being elected to the House of Representatives, while in Georgia, the biggest achievement for women, was being able to become the State Librarian, quite a difference in importance.

These were just some of the difficulties women living in Georgia faced. Not only did state laws belittle their importance to society as well as hinder the opportunities they may have desired, but the societal pressures from influential men continuously obstructed any type of advancement. Although women who sought to expand their rights in Georgia, as well as most of the South, faced opposition in the form of laws and from influential men, their greatest opponent would be that of the most prominent religious group in the South: The Southern Baptist Church.

Many people who came to the United States during the early 17th and 18th centuries moved in order to pursue religious freedom. This meant that religion was a very important factor in many peoples' lives. Religious beliefs shaped many different factors of everyday life throughout the country in early America. This held especially true for those in the South. For different reasons, the importance put on religion remained especially crucial to the southern states into the twentieth century, specifically

³⁴ "Helen Dortsch Longstreet," Georgia Women of Achievement, last modified October 20, 2005, accessed October 10, 2013, http://www.georgiawomen.org/_honorees/longstreeth/longstreet.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

those in the Bible Belt. The states considered in the Bible Belt are those in the Southeast corner of the United States. As a whole, the country's religious statistics for 1926 were very varied. The largest religious group was the Roman Catholic Church with 18,605,003 followers, which equaled out to be about 17.5 percent of the population.³⁶ A percent of only 17.5 is not very high when speaking about a country as a whole. This shows just how diverse religion was throughout the United States. Southern Baptists were the fourth largest religious group in the country. As a whole, the Southern Baptist Church had 3,324,378 followers, which equated to 3.1 percent of the population.³⁷ In 1926, the Baptist church was segregated, and therefore the 3.1 percent only accounts for the white followers of the Baptist faith. What truly shows the power the Baptist church had is the fact that the religious group with the fifth most followers was the Negro Baptist Church. Their church body was composed of 3,195,623 members, accounting for three percent of the population.³⁸ Altogether, six percent of Americans identified themselves as Baptists, making the Baptist denomination second only to Roman Catholicism in popularity among Americans.

While the United States as a whole was very diverse religiously, the story was very different in the southeastern part of the United States. The Baptist Church was untouched in terms of followers. The Negro Baptist Church had the most followers in Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi, while the Southern Baptists had the most followers in Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, and North Carolina.³⁹ In all of these states the Southern Baptist Church or the Negro Baptist Church ranked first or second in number of

³⁶ "Census of Religious Bodies: Summary and Detailed Tables," *1926 Census* (1926): 15.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 15.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 44.

followers. In each of these states the Negro Baptist Church's membership was ranked first among all African-American churches, and likewise, the Southern Baptist Church ranked first or second among all whites. The fact that the Baptist denomination rises in rank from fifth and sixth in the nation, to first or second in the south shows the prominence and power of the denomination.

In the state of Georgia, there were a total of 1,350,184 members of all churches found in the state.⁴⁰ Of these, 400,560 were members of the Southern Baptist Church. The second most highly followed church was the Negro Baptists with a following of 381,312 members.⁴¹ This equates to about 58 percent of all church members in the state of Georgia being followers of the Baptist church. Because whites controlled Georgia politics and government, and because Southern Baptists made up 29% of all Georgia church goers, the Southern Baptist church exercised a great deal of influence. The Southern Baptist church alone was followed by over 29 percent of all church followers in Georgia. Compared to the most highly followed religion in the United States, Roman Catholicism with 11 percent of all church-goers in Georgia, the fact that the Southern Baptist church claimed about one-third of all members shows its immense power and influence on Georgia Society.

⁴⁰ "Census of Religious Bodies: Summary and Detailed Tables," 44.

⁴¹ Ibid, 44.

Chapter 4

Southern Baptist Beliefs and Power

With its immense power, the Southern Baptist church has had a great deal of influence on society and culture throughout the South and Georgia in particular. Their views on women and their views on race were quite extreme, and there was not much leeway in any opinion or belief of the church. Southern Baptists beliefs on women stem from the Bible verse in Ephesians. It states:

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.⁴²

Southern Baptists took this verse very literally. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Southern Baptist women were to submit in all things including social, occupational, and educational realms of life. In addition Southern Baptists expected all women to conform to this view, not just women in their own churches.

Life for women in the southern part of the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was very dependent on the religious affiliation. Since the predominant religious group in Georgia during this time was the Southern Baptists, women followed the expectations set forth by the Southern Baptist church. This meant that women were “to be discreet, chaste, keepers of the home.”⁴³ The Southern Baptist church also held that “a wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership as

⁴² Eric Sturgus, “Carter: Baptists Group Diminishes Roles of Women,” Polifact, June 23, 2013, accessed September 06, 2014, <http://www.politifact.com/georgia/statements/2013/jun/28/jimmy-carter/carter-baptist-group-diminishes-roles-women/>.

⁴³ Sumners, 48.

her husband even as their church willingly submits to the headship of Christ...”⁴⁴ These values set forth very specific expectations for women followers. Women who stepped out of these expectations were looked down upon and criticized sharply. Dr. J.W. Porter, a prominent pastor of the Southern Baptist church during the early 1900s, stated “civilization may change, but sex remains a final act. Any attempt to break down this barrier between the sexes would violate God’s natural law.”⁴⁵ Because of this view point of the Southern Baptist Church, Southern women faced more barriers in their social lives than most Northern women. These barriers stretched from their realm of employment, to their ability to be involved in politics, as well as their positions in different social groups and gatherings.

During this time, women stayed in the home, raising their children and taking care of the daily housekeeping duties. Men were responsible for working and bringing in the money for the family. As set forth by the Southern Baptist Church, women were to submit themselves to their husbands, and therefore a “good wife” would be in opposition of the suffrage movement along with any other movement that was to put women in the same political or social arena as their husbands. Although women throughout the United States were seeing more opportunity to attain professions such as lawyers, doctors, nurses or other jobs that took them out of the house, a majority of women in the South still stayed in their homes throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴⁶ It was

⁴⁴ “Basic Beliefs,” Southern Baptist Convention, October 2, 2013, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>.

⁴⁵ Sumners, 47.

⁴⁶ Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges: Feminist Values and Social Activism, 1875-1915* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), page 110.

looked down upon for women, especially for mothers, to work outside their homes in the South.⁴⁷

A Georgian Senator by the name of Joseph E. Brown showed how the views of the Southern Baptist church stretched into the political arena. In his argument against women's suffrage he claimed that God had made the sexes different and that women had their husbands to speak for them: therefore, he concluded, women did not need political rights. Brown, like many opponents of women's suffrage, believed that the man represented the woman. In a speech he made to the Senate, Brown stated:

The male sex is infinitely suited better than the female. In the family she is queen. She alone is fitted for the discharge of the sacred trust of wife and the endearing relation of mother. While the man is contending with the sterner duties of life, the whole time of the noble, affectionate and true woman is required in the discharge of the delicate and difficult duties assigned her in the family circle, in her church relations and in the society where her lot is cast.⁴⁸

This speech was made in a political arena, where no woman had any type of say. There were no women in the room, and even if there had been, they would not have been allowed to address this large group of men in a public place. The members of the Senate were and still are some of the most respected and influential people in society. By just having a seat in the Senate, the senator is speaking for the people who voted him into that position. This means that the views and beliefs of Joseph E. Brown were representative of voters—that is, white men-- in the state of Georgia. Since Southern Baptists were the largest religious group in the state of Georgia, it would make sense that Georgia's senator be a member of the Baptist church. Sure enough, Joseph E Brown was a Southern

⁴⁷ Johnson, 111.

⁴⁸ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: from Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*, Expanded ed. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 46-47.

Baptist and he was even married to the daughter of a Southern Baptist preacher.⁴⁹

Therefore the speech he made to the Senate is easily seen to be rooted in beliefs that were fostered and supported by the Southern Baptist church. Although Brown was a member of the Senate in the latter part of the 1800s, his viewpoint on women had great impact. He was a highly respected, well-educated, and accomplished individual who was a public figure in many different sectors of life. Brown was on the University of Georgia's Board of Trustees and he served as the President of Atlanta's Board of Education.⁵⁰ His involvement in such high places, shows how Brown and his values were so influential.

Due to the obstacles many Southern women faced while attempting to get into the professional world outside the home, many Southern women turned to different sorts of public work.⁵¹ They became volunteers in charitable and civic organizations. Through this work, women began to involve themselves in campaigns to better their communities and their nation. These activities enabled them to step out of the woman's sphere, in which they were supposed to be contained.

In all, Southern Baptist women were not to be involved in any activity outside of their home. It was understood that these women should stay in their homes and take care of their children while serving their husbands. Because the woman's suffrage campaign broke almost all of the rules for Southern women to live by, it makes sense that the campaign was not favored by Southern men and some traditional Southern Baptist women opposed women suffrage.

⁴⁹ Bruce Gourley, "Baptists and the American Civil War: February 7, 1863," Baptists and the American Civil War, December 8, 2014, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.civilwarbaptists.com/thisdayinhistory/1863-february-07/>.

⁵⁰ Carole Scott, "Joseph E. Brown," About North Georgia, December 8, 2014, accessed December 8, 2014, http://www.aboutnorthgeorgia.com/ang/Joseph_E._Brown.

⁵¹ Johnson, 111.

Chapter 5

Major Arguments For and Against

As the role of women in Georgia and the rest of the Southern states continued to be a point of controversy, four major arguments arose in favor of keeping women away from the polls and out of the public social and political arena. These arguments were linked to the beliefs of the Southern Baptist church on the social place and moral status of women. These three arguments against women gaining the right to vote seem quite extreme, and even a bit bizarre, but they accurately reflected the thoughts on women in the south, and therefore were very hard to argue against, no matter how logical the arguments were.

The first claim that was widely used in opposition to the women's suffrage movement was that "the majority of women do not wish to vote, and ought not to be compelled to do so against their will."⁵² This argument had many flaws, since the people who began the movement for the vote, were women, and the majority of supporters of the movement were also women. There were men supporters, but nowhere near the numbers of women fighting for the cause.

Another flawed argument groups against women's suffrage used said that not all women wanted the right to vote, and therefore women should not be granted the right. Simply because women have the right to vote, does not mean they have to exercise it, and this was a great counter-argument. To this day, many people who are registered to vote do not vote, and some people never register. In addition, the idea of women gaining the

⁵² , Dr. James Freeman Clark, "Woman Suffrage, Reasons for and Against." *Woman Suffrage Leaflet* 1, no. 2 (August 15, 1888): 3.

right to vote ran parallel to the abolition of slavery in the United States. Although not all African-American asked for citizenship, the idea was “for our good as well as their [African-American’s] own,” and therefore citizenship was given to all African-American men.⁵³ Many women supporters of the anti-suffragist movement believed in these arguments, and they were some of the biggest advocates that they did not want to be pressured or forced to vote. They felt that they “didn’t need the ballot... to protect any of [their] just rights or privileges... [because] every Southern woman has a protector and a champion in a Southern man.”⁵⁴

In the state of Georgia, the National Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, had over 2,000 members.⁵⁵ The president of the association was a woman, and very involved woman at that. Mildred Rutherford was the head of the Lucy Cobb Institute and the president of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.⁵⁶ It is ironic that the head of the association was a woman, and yet the group was fighting so hard to keep women out of public affairs. In all, the group did not do well supporting the ideals they held, and therefore their arguments were easily disproven.

Another argument made in opposition to women’s suffrage was that “it would be an injury to the womanly nature; it would injure her feminine character to take part in politics.”⁵⁷ This was the argument most tightly related to the southern states. This stance directly connects to the idea of women in the South, and their role in the home and the community. For the Southern Baptists, the idea of a woman gaining suffrage not only

⁵³ Clark, 3.

⁵⁴ Scott, 169.

⁵⁵ *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Woman Suffrage.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Clark, 3.

injured her feminine character, it jeopardized her relationship with God. Supporters of this argument said that since God clearly stated in the Bible that women were to be subordinate to men, women reaching out of her sphere could anger God and endanger her place as a Christian.⁵⁸ A Tennessee senator by the name of J.C. McQuiddy said, “Eve wanted to eat the apple and for that disobedience God placed woman in the home to bring up children with the ‘understanding’ that thy desire shall be thy husband and he shall rule over thee.”⁵⁹ The statement was intended to make women feel that if they were Christians, and followers of God’s word, they would obviously follow what the Bible stated their position in life should be. This means they would not press for any more rights and privileges.

The counter argument to this position was that women interacted with men in their daily life. Whether it was at the post office, grocery store, a ball, or on the street, any interaction did not mean that a woman was losing her femininity. Therefore, the question was asked: “Why should it make her less womanly to deposit a vote in the ballot-box than to put a letter into the post-office box?”⁶⁰ This idea is very logical, but it was not easy to sway the opinion of the devout Southern Baptists or other Southern Christian organizations. Religion was, and still is, of utmost importance to many people, and at the time, Southern Baptists took religion into all spheres of life. Their more literal interpretation of the Bible allowed for their views to be unshaken or argued against since it was written in ink.

⁵⁸ Evelyn A. Kirkley (1990). ‘This Work is God’s Cause’: Religion in the Southern Woman Suffrage Movement, 1880–1920. *Church History*, 59, 511.

⁵⁹ Kirkley, 511.

⁶⁰ Clark, 3.

A third major argument for anti-suffragists was that women should not have the right to vote since so many of them had never and would never be in the same positions as men in terms of jobs, politics, and war.⁶¹ The opportunities that would allow women to gain experience in these positions were unavailable due to the restrictions and biases held against women in the workforce. Although most women were unable to hold positions similar to men, different situations left women to deal with all that a man would have to. For example, after the Civil War, many widows were left to take care of all that a “man should”. Without their husbands, they had to pay taxes, run the household, attend to legal matters, and secure jobs that could sustain themselves and their families’ well-being.⁶² This occurred again when the United States became involved in World War I. Although women may not have served directly on the battle lines of war, women were still nurses and taking on jobs that men used to fulfill.⁶³ Without women, it is unlikely that either war could have ended successfully.

These counterarguments were sometimes not enough. Since women were not in the exact positions of men, allowing them the right to vote would create a privileged class of citizens who possessed rights without responsibilities. Mary Elliot Seawell , an anti-suffragist, stated:

The feminine electorate proposed to be created by the Woman’s Suffrage Amendment would necessarily constitute a privileged class, helpless and irresponsible, enacting laws which they could not enforce, legislating upon naval and military affairs, shipping, navigation, and other subjects in which no woman has any practical experience, and exempt from naval, military, police, firemen’s and all lifesaving duty, and all dangerous employments, unable to assist in the enforcement of law or the maintenance of order. This division would be strictly

⁶¹Seawell, 368.

⁶²Scott, 90.

⁶³Clark, 5.

one of sex, as every man in some period of his life, can perform these duties, while no woman at any period of her life can perform them.”⁶⁴

This point made quite an impact on the argument for and against suffrage. By law, women were not able to serve as policemen, firemen, or in any military type of occupation. What the argument left out was that in many cases, women paid taxes. This idea spoke volumes. A Revolutionary War slogan still remembered today was “No taxation without representation.” Widows and unmarried women who paid taxes had any no representation, yet they were contributing to the government and the economy. Southern Baptists argued that women were represented by not only their husbands, but fathers, brother, and other male family members. This idea was faulty as well, since in many situations, women and men did not have the same views on topics. Also, some women were unmarried or had no living male relatives to represent them.

This leads to the fourth and last major argument against Women’s suffrage. Women having the right to vote would cause discord and unnecessary arguments in the home, and could result in the breakup of families.⁶⁵ In the case of Southern Baptists, this was of huge concern. Marriage was and is sacred, and divorces were and are not taken lightly. Also Baptists believed that, a woman should not question her husband since he was the head of the house and the spiritual leader of the family. The Southern Baptist Church still describes family as the “foundational institution of human society”.⁶⁶ To jeopardize family stability and happiness was seen as getting further away from God. A

⁶⁴ Seawell, 368.

⁶⁵ Clark, 3.

⁶⁶“Basic Beliefs.”

point that many supporters of this idea left out was that husband and wife could actually flourish and improve their relationship through common thoughts and interests.⁶⁷

There were dozens of arguments for and against the 19th Amendment, but those are some of the most closely linked to the South's opposition and role in the long standing disagreements. Women's stepping outside of their confined sphere due to having the right to vote was one of the top two arguments that opponents made. The next argument went back to the original arena that brought men and women together to fight for women's suffrage: the abolition of slavery and giving rights to all men and women, no matter what race. Many of the opponents to woman suffrage did not support the idea of African- American women having the right to vote. White women possessing the right to vote was controversial enough. The validity of the argument was not enough due to the passage of the 13th and 14th amendments which gave African-American men the same legal rights of white men.

There were more arguments against women's suffrage, but those four encompassed the major debates and issues people saw with the movement. Today, most, if not all of these arguments are seen as ignorant and unconstitutional, but during the time, these were major concerns of a major part of the population.

⁶⁷Clark, 3

Even after women gained the right to vote, and the Civil Right Act of 1964 gave all races and sexes equality, Georgia still struggled to advance the position of women and accept that equality had in many ways been won. The Equal Right Amendment was introduced into Congress multiple times, and it asked that an amendment be added to the Constitution stating that women and men were equal in all realms of life. The state legislature did not officially ratify the 19th Amendment to the United States' Constitution until 1970, and Georgia never ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment.⁶⁸

The path to equality was a long one. Even today there are many stigmas that women cannot break, but the situation overall has improved greatly. The obstacles that women faced, specifically in the South, were made worse by the expectations and beliefs put on women by the intense religious scene in the South. The Southern Baptist church was instrumental in the division of thoughts about women and their place, and eventually in not allowing women to vote even after they won the vote. Without the encompassing religious areas in most Southerners' lives, the obstacles and opponents of the Suffrage movement would not have been as great.

⁶⁸Eltzroth.

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