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New Women in the Old Dominion: Race and Gender in Progressive-Era Virginia

Rachel Scott

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NEW WOMEN OF THE OLD DOMINION: RACE AND GENDER IN PROGRESSIVE-ERA
VIRGINIA

by

RACHEL SCOTT

(Under the direction of Michelle Haberland)

ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of Black and white Southern women's pursuit of political power between the end of the Civil War and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Emancipation and the downfall of the antebellum planter aristocracy upset traditional Southern gender norms and opened new doors for women of both races in the political upheaval of Reconstruction. Though both Black and white women participated in the women's club movement and joined women's advocacy and charity groups following the Civil War, their work was distinctive both from each other and from other regional Progressive movements. The context of the South, Emancipation, the reestablishment of white Democratic rule in state governments, and burgeoning segregation meant that female activists were constantly renegotiating racial boundaries. By examining the experiences of Black and white female advocacy leaders in Virginia, I analyze how Black and white women came to be involved in political movements in the southern states, as well as how their rhetoric and how their personal backgrounds of race, class, and education influenced their political goals and interactions with each other.

INDEX WORDS: Virginia, Progressivism, Lila Meade Valentine, Ora Brown Stokes, Janie Porter Barrett, Mary Cooke Branch Munford, Maggie Lena Walker, Women's suffrage, Racial uplift, Women's rights movement, Southern history

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VIRGINIA

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RACHEL SCOTT

B.A., Agnes Scott College, 2021

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

*The word of God is despised, and the laws of nature are trampled underfoot, the spirit of infidelity grows rank and rabid, even among women, as it has always grown among female reformers.*¹

Such were the bitter complaints of Albert Bledsoe, a bastion of Old Southern conservatism in the New South. A West Point graduate, erstwhile lawyer, former Episcopal clergyman, and a professor of mathematics at the University of Virginia, Bledsoe published sophisticated tracts defending slavery as a positive good in the 1850s. Once the South seceded, he accepted an appointment as a Confederate colonel and assistant Secretary of War. Bledsoe became one of the primary architects of the Lost Cause in the wake of Lee's surrender at Appomattox, publishing *Is Davis a Traitor? Or was Secession a Constitutional Right Previous to the War of 1861?* in 1866 before founding the *Southern Review* in Baltimore.²

It was in the *Southern Review* that Bledsoe published "The Mission of Woman" in 1871, in which he deplored both the burgeoning women's rights movement in the Northern states and the new rights and governmental positions of African Americans. In response to a Northern suffragist's remark that women should be able to vote and hold office, "because she is as good as a negro," Bledsoe wrote:

We think, for our part, that a woman, especially if she is not a strong-minded one, is far better than a negro; and that, therefore, she had far better eschew the dust and dirt, the fray and fury, of a contest with negroes for a seat in Congress, or in the places of political power and profit. We think she is better than a negro, or a white man either; and

¹ Albert Bledsoe, "The Mission of Woman," *The Southern Review* (1871; Reprint, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913): 26.

² For a complete biography of Bledsoe, see Terry A. Barnhart, *Albert Taylor Bledsoe: Defender of the Old South and Architect of the Lost Cause* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

had, therefore, better keep within the high and holy sphere for which both nature and the God of nature intended her.³

Despite the venom and condescension in Bledsoe's strictures on race and women's place, his writings reflected the dominant views among Southerners: neither white women nor Black men and women belonged in politics.

Separate spheres ideology, the idea that the world was divided into gendered "spheres" of influence, was central to American political thought. Men dominated politics and the economy in the public sphere, and women governed domesticity and the family within the private sphere, as articulated by Supreme Justice of Illinois Joseph Bradley in 1872:

The civil law, as well as nature herself, has always recognized a wide difference in the respective spheres and destinies of man and woman. Man is, or should be, woman's protector and defender. The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life. The constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinance, as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood.⁴

Mary Ryan, author of "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America" (1992) explains that women were excluded from the political ideal of public and "open, inclusive, and effective deliberation about matters of common and critical concern." Instead, women were the moral guardians of the home, disinterested in the wider world of politics and civic concerns.⁵

³ Bledsoe, *The Mission of Woman*, 16.

⁴ Quoted in Eileen Boris, "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political'" in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and Origins of the Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koen and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1993): 233-4.

⁵ Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992): 260, 272-3.

Or, at least, that was the societal ideal. The reality of most women's lives failed to live up to this ideal, for a variety of reasons. The more one explores the daily activities of women, white and Black, rich or poor, the more the line between public and private blurs. The categories were not mutually exclusive, and the boundaries were not static, especially as industrialization relocated production from the home to the factory. For this reason, historians, sociologists, and feminist scholars have debated the exact dimensions of the private and public domains for decades. Some simply equated gender with sphere: whatever a woman does is private, and whatever a man does is public. This conception, however, fails to serve antebellum society in the South, in which enslaved Black men, as the dependents of white slaveholders, counted as members of the private domain. Race and class had an indelible impact on the private and public spheres; only elite white women who could afford to stay at home could really embody the separate spheres ideal. Even then, they were still involved in their communities and the local economy as they gossiped with friends and managed the household finances. In "Feminist Conceptions of the Public and Private: A Critical Analysis" (1987), Karen Hansen ponders the inadequacy of separate spheres to articulate the lived experiences of American women:

How does one address those community building activities such as caring for sick neighbors, organizing church activities, and establishing networks that disseminated information about community events and wayward individuals? These activities are typically labeled "private" because they are associated with home and the family; they are relational in part, and because women traditionally do them. Yet is this label accurate? Are they truly private? If they take place outside the geographically defined domestic space—the household—does that make them public?⁶

⁶ Karen V. Hansen, "Feminist Conceptions of Public and Private: A Critical Analysis," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1987): 106.

Ryan agrees, noting in *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (1992) that historians such as Paula Baker focused on “a truncated definition of the public,” one that saw only the vote as the sole marker of citizenship. Ryan establishes that for feminist theorists, “the public” as a term serves as a description for cultural values and social behaviors, “as a space denoting especially blatant gender asymmetry,” and as the focal point of state power.⁷

However, women across America used separate spheres ideology and the special place of women as caregivers to stretch the boundaries of the home and empower themselves as mothers and moral guardians. Paula Baker calls this the “domestication of politics” in her 1984 article “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1790-1920.” Women reformers in the Progressive Era grounded their political rhetoric in the domestic sphere, working within the context of the home and motherhood and translating their “moral authority into political influence.” Conservative men and women would use the same ideas to argue against the enfranchisement of women, claiming that political involvement would only corrupt women’s position as the moral authorities of American society. Politicians, too, would rely on separate spheres to draw boundaries within the body politic in the political debates over disenfranchisement and segregation during the Post-Reconstruction years. The public/private boundary did not truly exist, not as the divine law of nature the denizens of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conceived of it as.⁸

Historiographical Context

Anne Firor Scott was one of the first historians to make a dedicated study of white women in the South in 1970 in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*. She scrutinizes the

⁷ Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992): 8-9.

⁸ Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1790-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 624-5. .

gender norms that dominated the lives of elite white women in the antebellum South, as well as their experiences as wives and mothers that shaped white women's emergence onto the political stage decades later.⁹ Though Scott makes claims that aristocratic white women felt solidarity with enslaved African American women and ignored how white women profited off the enslavement of others, Glenda Gilmore credits her with trying to "demolish the myth of the southern lady" by highlighting their discontent with the slaveholding patriarchy. Despite or perhaps due to "criticism that [Scott] had overemphasized white women's discomfort with slavery, . . . neglected race and class, and overlooked racially repressive aspects of women's Progressive Era work and the suffrage campaign," *From Pedestal to Politics* inspired many southern women's historians.¹⁰

Years later, Elsa Barkley Brown bemoans in "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke" (1989) how African American women's experiences are often excluded from dominant feminist narratives:

. . .many of the recent explorations of black women's history have attempted to place black women inside feminist perspectives which, by design, have omitted their experiences. Nowhere is this exclusion more apparent than in the process of defining women's issues and women's struggle. Because they have been created outside of the experiences of black women, the definitions used in women's history and women's studies assume the separability of women's struggle and race struggle.¹¹

Since Brown's article, the study of Black women's politics has made leaps and bounds. In the early nineties there was a veritable explosion of works considering race and women's activism in

⁹ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Glenda Gilmore, "On Anne Firor Scott's Turf," *Journal of Southern History* 86, no. 1 (February 2020): 125-6.

¹¹ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke," *Signs* 14, no. 3 (1989): 611.

the South after the Civil War. Catherine Jones, author of “Women, Gender, and the Boundaries of Reconstruction” (2018) attributes the flood of scholarship to historians’ embrace of intersectional analysis following the publication of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 1989 article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.” Crenshaw’s new theory of oppression hypothesized that one’s life experiences is shaped by more than one “axis” of discrimination. She highlighted how the experiences of Black women were fundamentally different from those of both white women and Black men. During much of the nineteenth-century Progressive reforms and twentieth-century civil rights movements, Black women were forced to choose between white feminist groups that rejected the opinions of its Black members and racial advocacy work that ignored women’s rights issues as well as their contributions to the movement. Intersectional theory breathed new life into gender history: historians began to uncover new sources and perspectives. They debated the ways “the postwar revolution in citizenship,” begun by emancipation, affected political agency for women and how white supremacy played a role in women’s rights movements.¹²

Brown herself was particularly prolific, publishing several articles considering the unique position middle-class Black female activists had in southern society between 1989 and 1997. Mary Martha Thomas was quick on her heels, writing *The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1890-1920* in 1992. Thomas describes the reform efforts of both white and Black middle-class women in the state of Alabama, beginning with the women’s club movement in the late nineteenth century. She argues that by adhering to their role as society’s

¹² Catherine Jones, “Women, Gender, and the Boundaries of Reconstruction,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 11 (March 2018), 111-2; Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Margin Between Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and and Antiracist Politics,” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139 (1989), 140.

moral guardians, female reformers presented a social justice alternative to Progressive men concerned more with social control and compensated for their lack of traditional political power.¹³ Just a year later, Marjorie Spruill Wheeler considered the viewpoints of different white women's suffrage leaders across the South in *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (1993). Through the writings and letters of these leaders, Spruill describes the varied viewpoints of prominent suffragists, their interpersonal dynamics, and their relationships with national suffrage organizations like the National American Women's Suffrage Association and the more militant National Women's Party.¹⁴

1993 was a prolific year for southern women's history. Like Spruill, Sara Hunter Graham studied how the national suffrage organizations influenced suffrage leagues at the state level in "Woman Suffrage in Virginia: The Equal Suffrage League and Pressure-Group Politics, 1909-1920." Graham argues that by following NAWSA's recommendation for lobbying politicians and applying northern standards to a southern state government, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia crippled its own campaign.¹⁵ Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock published a collection of essays considering southern women's Progressive activism and suffrage advocacy in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (1993). With contributions from noted southern historians like Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Deborah Gray White, and Mary Frederickson, *Visible Women* presents a multifaceted history of southern women's activism, considering the role of race, gender, and class in different types of Progressive reforms.¹⁶

¹³ Mary Martha Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Marjorie Spruill, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Sara Hunter Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia: The Equal Suffrage League and Pressure-Group Politics, 1909-1920," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101 (1993).

¹⁶ Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, ed., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993).

Three years later, Glenda Gilmore published *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (1996). Gilmore tracks the political progress of African Americans after Emancipation in North Carolina, the origins of Jim Crow, and how women racial uplift workers worked to combat white supremacy during the nadir of the African American experience in the United States.¹⁷ Laura Edwards, too, tackled postbellum politics in *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (1997). She investigates how the Confederacy's defeat impacted the dynamics of the plantation household and their notions of public and private, providing valuable insight into how slavery impacted southern concepts of gender and race in the late nineteenth century.¹⁸

In *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (1997), Elna Green dives into the southern suffrage movement as a whole, analyzing the various rhetorical arguments they used to refute antisuffragists' arguments and the roles of race, class, and education in determining a woman's stance on suffrage.¹⁹

Karen Cox studies the role of women's clubs after the Civil War in the creation of southern Confederate culture in *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (2003). Like Edwards, Cox situates the southern women's club movement within the context of the Confederacy's defeat and the destruction of southern antebellum society, as well as the national Progressive movement. While the UDC promulgated white supremacy and the Lost Cause, members embodied a paradoxical position within southern society: as the guardians of Confederate culture and memory, they represented

¹⁷ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Elna Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

southern tradition. But at the same time, as female activists, they were defying the traditional role of women within southern society.²⁰

In “Gendering the City, Gendering the Welfare State: The Nurses’ Settlement of Richmond, 1900-1930” (2005), Green goes on to examine Virginian women in the Progressive movement and public health reform. Green argues that female reformers used separate sphere logic in the guise of maternalism, the idea that women as mothers had a special sense to the needs of women and children. As mothers, women had a duty to work for the public welfare and to impart their special maternal sense onto government proceedings. African American women felt this need as well, using their position as maternal figures within Black communities to build private institutions providing for the needs of their communities.²¹

Clayton McClure Brooks studied the racial dynamics between Black and white reformers in Virginia in *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation Across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia* (2017). Through the writings of prominent Virginia activists, she investigates how the context of Black disenfranchisement and white feelings of paternalism impacted interracial reforms and the relationship dynamics of female reformers.²²

Statement of Thesis

The fall of the Confederate States of America and the Emancipation of enslaved African Americans pulled the rug out from under the white patriarchal order that had an iron grip on politics, culture, and the economy within the South. As conservative white patriarchs worked to reestablish their control of state politics through the disenfranchisement of African American

²⁰ Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003).

²¹ Elna Green, “Gendering the City, Gendering the Welfare State: The Nurses’ Settlement of Richmond, 1900-1930,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 113, no. 3 (2005).

²² Clayton McClure Brooks, *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation Across the Color Line in Twentieth-Century Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2017).

men, African American women took up leadership roles within the Black communities of Virginia and strove to preserve the new Black middle class and the political rights that Emancipation and the Reconstruction Amendments had awarded them. At the same time, a subset of middle- and upper-class white women, inspired by Northern Progressives, struggled to push through Progressive reforms and establish organizations for the welfare of impoverished Virginia citizens. Eventually, both white and Black Virginia women would come to see women's suffrage as a crucial step towards the achievement of their Progressive goals and their political empowerment.

Building on the work of southern women historians like Brown, Wheeler, and Green, this thesis analyzes how race and gender shaped middle-class Virginia women's development from women at home, to clubwomen, to Progressive reformers and suffrage advocates, to fully fledged members of the body politic, within the special context of the post Civil War South and the changing racial dynamics of Reconstruction. Gendered separate spheres ideology dictated the position of women and the labor they performed within American society, but race and the southern racial hierarchy meant that southern political dynamics were fundamentally different from northern political ideas and that African American women experienced gender, labor, and public/private dichotomy differently than white women. White and Black women's rights advocates in Virginia had complicated relationships, shaped by racism, paternalism, and the fact that, as Elsa Barkley Brown writes in "To Catch a Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880" (1997), white and Black communities had "two different conceptions of freedom and public participation process." Over time, different white and Black female activists would cooperate, be indifferent to, or at odds with each other in their

quests for political empowerment.²³ Some white activists sought to maintain antebellum racial hierarchies by denying services to African Americans; others believed that, as the descendents of slaveholders, they should guide emancipated African Americans on the long road to true civilization. The heightened racial tensions sometimes put white southern women at odds with Northern activists, who were caught between including women of color in their national organizations or having the support of white southern women.

Virginia and Richmond, despite the city's position as the former capital of the Confederacy, has a long history of interracial cooperation, not just in Progressive advocacy but also in government. The bi-racial Readjuster Party of early 1880s Virginia was the most successful interracial political coalition in the South during the Reconstruction Era, a model of community empowerment. Even after the coalition fell, white Virginians continued to promote friendship and cooperation between the races as a means of social control, rather than complete reliance on violence and intimidation tactics.²⁴ Elite Virginians still believed in white supremacy, but they were more inclined to feel paternalistic and condescending towards Black Richmonders than completely hostile.

Liberalism and separate spheres ideology was prominent in Virginia political thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, guiding the rhetoric of the Readjusters, reformers, and entrenched conservative politicians. Guided by maternalist principles and inspired by northern Progressives, southern women began their own Progressive movement. Richmond was home to many Progressive organizations, founded by both white and Black reformers: the Women's Club, the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association, the Richmond Education Association,

²³ Elsa Barkley Brown, "To Catch a Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880" in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*, ed. Ann D. Gordon (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997): 75.

²⁴ Julian Maxwell Hayter, *The Dream is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017): 25.

the Richmond Neighborhood Association, the Independent Order of St. Luke, just to name a few. As both Black and white women reformers built their institutions and lobbied the Virginia General Assembly for reforms, their conceptions of the public, the private, and women's role evolved, providing the ideological backing for their own political empowerment.

Methodology

Over the course of this thesis, I used a variety of source material, relying especially on the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia Records, made available online by the Library of Virginia, and the Library of Congress Chronicling America Historical Newspaper Database.

While historians often have difficulty finding primary sources from an African American perspective, the Black middle-class women reformers of Virginia, like many middle-class African Americans of the time, prided themselves on their education and were actively involved in national reform organizations. Through the organizations, like the National Association of Colored Women or the Hampton Institute, many women like Ora Brown Stokes and Janie Porter Barrett published articles and speeches on their work. Most of these, like Hampton Institute's publication *The Southern Workman* and the reports of Barrett's Industrial Home School for Colored Girls, are available on HathiTrust. Adèle Clark's interview with the Southern Oral History Program is available via University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Documenting the American South database. Maggie Lena Walker's papers and speeches are digitized by the National Park Service.

From the antebellum era in Virginia in Chapter One, I proceed chronologically to the Civil War and Reconstruction in Chapter Two. The Progressive Era is split into two chapters: Chapter Three discusses the Progressive Movement at large, as well as Progressive-era politics in Virginia and the legal disenfranchisement of African American men, and Chapter Four is

dedicated to women in the Progressive Movement. I finish with the women's suffrage campaign in Virginia in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER ONE: ANTEBELLUM VIRGINIA

The American South is distinctive from the other American regions, not because its culture is so entirely alien to the majority of Americans, but because the problems of racism, sexism, and classism that are rife within the United States are so prominently visible and impossible to ignore in the southern region. The southern states are not unique from the rest of the nation; they are a microcosm of American society at large. The Confederate States of America, whose shadow still lingers over a hundred and fifty years later, explicitly codified a political system based on the exclusion of white women and African Americans. But, as the Vice President of the Confederacy Alexander H. Stephens said himself, the Confederate Constitution was, essentially, the same as the original United States Constitution.

The Union soldiers who marched south were not noble heroes, gone to war to free the slaves. After the Emancipation Proclamation, many Union soldiers rebelled, protesting the idea that they were putting their lives on the line to help enslaved African Americans.²⁵ They believed in the inherent inferiority of Black Americans almost as much as the Southerners they fought; but, unlike white Southerners, the Union soldiers did not base their very identities on being not-Black. The idea of racial equality repelled Northerners, but it did not represent the complete breakdown of society as they knew it. White Southerners were so viscerally racist that they gave it form, basing their society, economy, legal system, and later the cornerstone of the Confederacy, “on the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” As Stephens goes on to say, the Confederacy was the first government in the world to base the entirety of its society on this “great truth.”²⁶

²⁵ For more on race and the New York City Draft Riots of 1863, see Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²⁶ Alexander H. Stephens, “Cornerstone Speech,” (Savannah, Georgia, March 21, 1861).

Slavery, and the construction of the elite white household, were central to the formulation of the southern social hierarchy. Laura Edwards in *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (1997) describes how southern citizens derived their own identities through their relationships to other household members, including family and hired servants or enslaved workers. These identities and their positions in the household dictated a Southerner's social and political position within wider society: white male heads of household were responsible for the financial, legal, and moral well being of their dependents, and in theory represented the interests of women, children, and enslaved African Americans in government.²⁷ Years after the fall of the Confederacy, Orra Gray Langhorne, born to a slaveholding family in 1841, recounts this arrangement with a rather rosy view:

The Virginia landholder of honorable lineage occupied the most prominent position among us. Justly proud of his ancestry, he felt deeply his responsibilities as head of a household which comprised many retainers - his own family, any of his blood who needed shelter, many slaves, and the poor whites who hovered on the borders of his estate, living by charity or plunder. Outside of these personal interests, he was usually a member of the bench of magistrates or held some official position in county, State, or nation, sworn to enforce the laws and preserve the peace.²⁸

Langhorne's recollections, myopic though they be on the subject of race and class relations, highlights how the male slaveholder's responsibility for and authority over the private domain of the household gave him public rights and power in Southern society and politics.

Like race and perhaps because of racial slavery, white Southerners took gender to new extremes as well. Most states up and down the East Coast based the legal status of women on

²⁷ Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 6-7.

²⁸ Orra Gray Langhorne, "Changes in a Half-Century of Virginia," *Journal of Social Science* 38 (1900): 168.

coverture and English common law; legally speaking, the state of Virginia was rather typical when it required newly married women to turn over their property to their husbands. Married women went through what Suzanne Lebsock in *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1884-1860* (1984) refers to as a “civil death,” their independent economic standing erased, their services and wages the property of their husband.²⁹ They were now represented in the government as members of their husbands’ household. Coverture, however, did not apply equally to all elite white women in the antebellum South. Wealthier women could take steps to avoid turning over their financial assets, including property and enslaved workers, to their husbands. Some women had to go to court in order to protect their proprietary rights when male family members made claims to their property. A new husband could still benefit from his wife’s wealth, however, by borrowing money from her in order to secure farmland and using the enslaved laborers she inherited in order to cultivate it.³⁰

Many at the time, in the North and the South and across the globe, believed that gender automatically defined a person’s values and characteristics, but Karen Harper in her 2000 study of Southern Appalachian women explains that gender is in reality a social construction that defines expectations of one’s behavior. Socially-constructed definitions of gender shape our ideas of what is male or female, creating abstract markers of behavior.³¹ In 1837, Sarah Grimke criticized American gender roles:

But the influence of woman. . . is to be private and unobtrusive; her light is not to shine before man like that of her brethren; but she is passively to let the lords of the creation, as

²⁹ Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Northam and Company, Inc., 1984): 23.

³⁰ Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019): xiv, xvi-xvii.

³¹ Karen Harper, “Appalachian Women’s Ways of Living: Within and Beyond Their Cultural Heritage,” in *Constructing Gender: Multicultural Perspectives in Working with Women*, ed. Maria Julia (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000): 76.

they call themselves, put the bushel over it, lest peradventure it might appear that the world has been benefited by the rays of her candle. Then her quenched light is of more use than if it were set upon a candlestick. . . How monstrous is the doctrine that woman is to be dependent on man!³²

These social constructions were so pervasive that for many southern women, they had no concept of how to be anything but traditionally feminine; growing up, most elite southern women knew only the home and domesticity. Mary Ryan echoes the sentiments of Michelle Rosaldo, author of *Woman, Culture, and Society* (1974): women were not subordinate to men because of biology or reproduction, but because of their exclusion from the public domain.³³

The exclusion of white women and slaves from the body politic made them touchstones for white men's power and status as political citizens, validating their whiteness and masculinity.³⁴ White men derived power from the subordination of both white women and enslaved African Americans. According to proslavery writer George Fitzhugh in *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (1854), white women, bondspeople, and children were all "subjects of the family government," who "do not come directly in contact with the institutions and rulers of the State."³⁵ Anne Firor Scott, author of *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (1970), argues that because women's domestic subservience was so closely linked to African American enslavement in southern domestic ideology, any woman who challenged the gender roles they were assigned was challenging the distribution of power.

³² Sarah Moore Grimke, "Two Essays (1837 and 1838)" in *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism*, ed. Aileen Kraditor (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968).

³³ Ryan, "Gender and Public Access," 260.

³⁴ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012): 30.

³⁵ George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (New York: Burt Franklin Publishers, 1854).

This explains why white women in the South were held to more rigid standards than their Northern counterparts.³⁶

Southern social hierarchy fits right in with what historians call “separate spheres ideology,” the use of socially constructed “spheres” and a “public/private dichotomy” to address women’s history. Women lived within a “circle of domestic life,” as described by Alexis de Tocqueville in his recollections of his American explorations. Female family members worked within the home, providing support to their male relatives who went out into the public world in order to further the family’s political and economic interests. Writing in 1895, Letitia Burwell recalled her childhood as the daughter of a slaveholding family:

[The] mistress of a Virginia plantation was more conspicuous, although not more important, than the master. . . . for doubtless his mind was burdened with financial matters too weighty to be grasped and comprehended by our sex.³⁷

Society expected married white women to be concerned only with what was happening within the home; public matters like finances and politics were beyond their scope both morally and intellectually. In turn, politicians distanced themselves from vital civic concerns like education and public health, dismissing them as private issues to be handled at home.³⁸

The women’s sphere served as the foundation of female culture and community in antebellum America, and while domesticity and motherhood would give women no small amount of influence as society’s moral authorities, historians also associate the metaphor of separate spheres with political subordination and victimization of women by men. In her article “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” (1988),

³⁶ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 16-7.

³⁷ Letitia Burwell and William A. McCullough, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1895): 89-90.

³⁸ Ryan, “Gender and Public Access,” 272-3.

Linda Kerber bemoans the “sloppy usage” of the term: “When they used the metaphor of separate spheres, historians referred, often interchangeably, to an ideology *imposed* on women, a culture *created* by women, a set of boundaries *expected to be observed* by women.”³⁹

Gender roles and separate spheres ideology, however, were not constants in antebellum southern society; the rules applied to women differently based on their race, class, and marital status, as well as what they were doing in the public sphere. For women to be able to stay at home and do domestic chores, families needed the money to support them; therefore, the only truly domestic women were members of the white planter elite. Wilma Dunaway in *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South* (2008), a study of female work within mountain communities, argues that the separate spheres ideal assumes that the housewife spends her time managing enslaved laborers. In reality, most antebellum women, white and nonwhite, could not afford either to hire laborers, purchase slaves, or even stay at home.⁴⁰ Barbara Ellen Smith agrees, explaining that the concept of separate gender spheres obfuscates the important roles race and class play in shaping women’s lives.⁴¹ While poor white and free Black women took up work in the fields or in paid positions in order to support their families, enslaved Black women had to carve out their own private domestic spheres outside of the slaveholder’s household that only valued women as laborers and the producers of child laborers.⁴²

³⁹ Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 14, 17; Nancy A. Hewitt, “Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women’s History in the 1980s,” *Social History* 10, no. 3 (October 1985): 300-1.

⁴⁰ Wilma Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 5.

⁴¹ Barbara Ellen Smith, “Walk-Ons in the Third Act: The Role of Women in Appalachian Historiography,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1998): 9.

⁴² Jacqueline Jones, “‘My Mother was Much of a Woman’: Black Women, Work, and the Family Under Slavery” in *The Intersection of Work and Family Life*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Munich: De Gruyter Saur, 1992): 83.

Gender in Enslaved Communities

While plantation owners and overseers considered gender when assigning work to female field hands, the boundaries between male and female labor were considerably more blurred than in white society. In “‘My Mother was Much of a Woman’: Black Women, Work, and the Family Under Slavery” (1992) Jacqueline Jones writes that slaveholders discarded white notions of gendered labor in order to extort the most product out of their workers, male and female, as possible. Because neither enslaved men nor women had any control over the fruits of their labor, neither could wield economic power over the other; therefore, enslaved society remained relatively egalitarian. All were subordinate to their enslaver, who dictated what kind of labor they performed.⁴³

In general, the smaller the farm, the more varied and physically demanding work an enslaved woman performed: plowing as well as hoeing, tending to farm animals, cutting down trees, chopping wood, and hauling lumber. In “Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South” (1983), Deborah Gray White hypothesizes that most women on larger plantations and farms only began the heavier labor after they had passed their childbearing years; pregnant and women with infants were given half or three-quarters of the labor done by a full worker, or hand. Women were usually not permitted to learn the traditionally masculine skills such as carpentry, smithing, tanning leather, or how to cobble shoes; pregnancy and childcare would take them away from work too often, and trades such as these were considered too vital to allow long absences.⁴⁴

Within the slaveholders’ household, however, domestic duties fell almost exclusively to enslaved African American women. White argues that enslaved women’s participation in the

⁴³ Jones, “‘My Mother was Much of a Woman,’” 61.

⁴⁴ Jones, “‘My Mother was Much of a Woman,’” 64-6; Deborah Gray White, “Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South,” *Journal of Family History* 8, no. 3 (1983): 251.

domestic sphere, unlike white women's, was not an indication of gender hierarchy and women's subordination to men. Certain domestic skills such as cooking, sewing and weaving, and midwifery could garner enslaved Black women significant status within their communities, as well as earning them a little money, if their enslaver permitted it. Enslaved women frequently performed field work and more monotonous labors in groups, sharing household chores. Female work gangs would typically hoe while men plowed, or enslaved women would gather to do laundry on weekend afternoons. They often sewed in groups, participating in "quiltins" where they would spin thread and sew quilts together. By working in groups, enslaved Black women could form communities where they could rank and order themselves, independent of both Black men and white enslavers; they relied on each other, especially for childcare. Through her research on Black enslaved women's interpersonal relationships with each other, and the significance of gossip and the female social network, White emphasizes the importance of the collective within their lives. Enslaved African American women covertly created a female world where a woman could gain a sense of self separate from her male relatives.⁴⁵

But while enslaved women functioned within a community created by white enslavers, they also lived and worked within a community and sphere created by the enslaved themselves. Enslaved women's labor defined both worlds; when they were not working for the slave master, they were looking after the wellbeing of their families and kin.⁴⁶ Activist Angela Davis, writing from prison in 1970 after authorities accused her of aiding a Black Panther escape attempt, said:

But with the Black slave woman, there is a strange twist of affairs: in the infinite anguish of ministering to the needs of the men and children around her (who were not necessarily

⁴⁵ White, "Female Slaves," 252-5.

⁴⁶ Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood," 304-5.

members of her immediate family), she was performing the only labor of the slave community which could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor.⁴⁷

By working for the wellbeing of her family, a Black enslaved woman was creating a sense of self separate from her identity as a slave, as well as defying the dehumanization of enslavement.

American enslavement, Davis says, destroyed Black social structures that might foster a Black collective consciousness, especially the family.⁴⁸ Jones, in a direct response to Davis, agrees; in the face of slavery, maintaining a family was a political protest. Adherence to the gender roles that their enslavers had ignored served to defy the dehumanization of African Americans.

Though, she adds, by embracing the role of mother, enslaved women were still serving the enslavers by nurturing other slaves and thus increasing their value as both workers and commodities.⁴⁹

Within the enslaved family, women had a high degree of independence from their husbands. According to White, many enslaved families were matrifocal. In a matrifocal family, the father is not necessarily absent or subordinate to his wife; rather, the mother is the nucleus of the family. Unlike free white men, enslaved Black men had no access to patriarchal power. They could not provide property or the essentials of living like food, clothing, and shelter. Enslaved men could not exert control over their wives, particularly when their husbands lived “abroad” on another plantation, and they only saw each other a few times a week.⁵⁰ Fathers, husbands, and brothers still labored for their families when they could, doing traditionally masculine work like collecting firewood, building furniture, and hunting for food. They endeavored to fulfill the male role of the protector, often intervening on behalf of their wives and children when they became

⁴⁷ Angela Davis, ed., “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” in *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (New York: Third Press, 1971), quoted in *The Intersection of Work and Family Life*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Munich: De Gruyter Saur, 1992): 49.

⁴⁸ Davis, “Reflections,” 46.

⁴⁹ Jones, ““My Mother was Much of a Woman,”” 60-1.

⁵⁰ White, “Female Slaves,” 255-6.

the target of white violence.⁵¹ The realities of chattel slavery rendered enslaved Black men unable to subordinate enslaved Black women, and made gender dynamics within the enslaved Black community fundamentally different from those of white families. Within her own household, an enslaved Black woman might find solace and recover a sense of control by laboring out of love for her own family.

Gendered Lives of Slaveholders

Elite white women were not idle, however. They still worked with the domestic spheres of their homes, devoted themselves especially to the tasks of child rearing and the production of textiles, including spinning, weaving, sewing, and quilting. Domestic slaves did the most physically taxing work, but their white mistresses still participated in cleaning and cooking.⁵² This does not mean that there was any solidarity between white mistresses and the women they had enslaved. Anne Firor Scott argued in 1970 that the close proximity between white female enslavers and Black enslaved women gave rise to feelings of sympathy and cooperation, but as research into antebellum women in the South expanded in the 1980s and 90s, historians turned away from this idea. Stephanie Jones-Rogers in *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (2019) criticizes the idea that white women were not as involved with their non-domestic enslaved as their male relatives.⁵³ She relies on the testimony of slaves taken during the 1930s by the Work Progress Administration rather than the writings of the slave-owning class, like Letitia Burwell's *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (1895). Burwell insists that as a girl growing up on a plantation, their enslaved workers were their

⁵¹ Jones, "'My Mother was Much of a Woman,'" 76, 79.

⁵² Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood," 310

⁵³ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 48; Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*, xv.

“dusky admirers” who showered her and her sister with gifts and “[quarreled] as to who should be his or her mistress, some claiming me, and others my sister.”⁵⁴

Though Burwell’s recollections of her childhood are doubtless myopic at best, as a child she might not have been exposed to the more tawdry side of the relationships between white mistresses and the women they enslaved. Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) relayed how she had to avoid not only the sexual advances of her master, but also the jealous rages of her mistress. In an 1848 divorce petition in Virginia, a slaveowning woman complained that her husband was openly conducting an affair with an enslaved girl she owned. A witness described a scene between the couple:

. . .when Mrs. N and myself had finished breakfast, [Mr. N] directed the said servant girl to seat herself at the table from which I had just risen—to which Mrs. N objected, saying to the girl, if she seated herself at the table, then she (Mrs. N) would have her severely punished. To this Mr. N declared that in that event he would visit on her (Mrs. N) with a like punishment. Mrs. N then burst into tears and asked if it was not too much for her to stand.⁵⁵

Testimony such as this indicates that the only thing slaveholding white women and enslaved Black women had remotely in common was their subjugation to an “arrogant husband-master,” according to Jones. Dunaway concurs; white women’s access to political, economic, and cultural power meant that they could both benefit from and be exploited by the southern patriarchal system. White women who profited off of chattel slavery were empowering themselves at the

⁵⁴ Burwell, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia Before the War*, 3.

⁵⁵ Harriet Jacobs and L. Maria Child, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861); Quoted in James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970): 247.

cost of enslaved labor; ownership of African American workers bought elite white women room to maneuver within antebellum common law.⁵⁶

Women in the Public Eye

Despite their relegation to the home, women of both races applied to the courts for aid fairly often. Over twenty years after the publication of *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, Laura Edwards repudiated her earlier ideas on hard distinctions between the public and private arenas in “The Legal World of Elizabeth Bagby’s Commonplace Book: Federalism, Women, and Governance” (2019). Edwards concludes that the decentralized nature of antebellum government, in which local, state, and federal authority overlapped to create separate legal systems within one area, gave elite white women more access to governance than she previously thought. While they could not vote, they could involve themselves in criminal legal matters because contemporary legal philosophy saw criminal cases as threats to the community at large. Court officials saw it as their duty to maintain the public order, including the rigid antebellum social hierarchy, and supplicants included elite white women seeking to maintain control of their property as well as poor whites, Black freedpeople, and enslaved African Americans. The courts could interfere in the household on their behalf, if they believed the patriarch was abusing his power or failing to fulfill his duties as head of the household.⁵⁷

Edwards emphasizes that these rulings did not defy antebellum patriarchal order and worked to maintain the status quo. In order to be taken seriously by the courts, the plaintiffs had to be of upright legal and moral standing in the community; elite white women were credible because of the social identity they derived from their husbands and families. Poor whites and

⁵⁶ Jones, ““My Mother was Much of a Woman,”” 71; Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 4; Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*, xvii.

⁵⁷ Laura Edwards, “The Legal World of Elizabeth Bagby’s Commonplace Book,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 9, no. 4 (December 2019): 510-3.

African Americans needed sterling reputations and connections to powerful people in order for the courts to hear them, which means that they had to conform to the antebellum social hierarchies. When the courts favored elite white women in property disputes, it meant that the government did not have to award women the property rights that would make such cases unnecessary. When the courts punished white male slaveowners for violent behavior toward their family members or enslaved laborers, it was because they were jeopardizing the public order, not because their actions were beyond the pale of southern antebellum society.⁵⁸

The courts were just one method through which southern society before the Civil War maintained the status quo of the white patriarchal hierarchy. The Revolution gave most citizens, including women, a crash course in politics and independence; political theorists could no longer take women's domesticity for granted. Their exclusion from the rhetoric of the American Revolution required a "defensive" ideology referred to as republican motherhood. Good American women were mothers, practical women educated just enough to teach their sons the importance of civic virtue. Though the republican mother had political responsibilities, she could not act politically by voting or running for elected office. Following the Revolution, the new female ideal integrated older notions of gender roles and separation of spheres with the new political values of autonomy and individualism. The republican mother solidified women's moral superiority to men and gave new significance to maternity; the ideal itself recognized the importance of women's choices and their work to society and politics at large.⁵⁹

Through republican motherhood, elite white Southern women could serve a political purpose. Our friend Bledsoe was heartily in favor:

⁵⁸ Edwards, "The Legal World of Elizabeth Bagby's Commonplace Book," 517.

⁵⁹ Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place," 20; Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment –An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1976): 202.

Be this your glory, the, O ye blessed and beautiful women of the South! – not that you can vote, or beat a negro for Congress, but that you can point to your sons as your jewels, and as the ornaments of the human race. . . . not that you can imitate a Washington, or a Lee, or a [Stonewall] Jackson, but that you can rear, and train, and educate, or mold the future Washingtons, and Lees, and Jacksons of the South, to protect and preserve the sacred rights of woman as well as man.⁶⁰

Though the good southern mother was not a citizen, able to participate directly in politics, she still had a part to play in the new republic of the United States, couched in the language of femininity and domesticity.⁶¹

Almost a hundred years after the Revolution, southern secessionists would take advantage of republican motherhood rhetoric, turning the elite white woman into a symbol of what was at stake if the southern slave states did not secede from the Union. Secessionists scared male citizens into supporting their cause by using images of the state as the mother in their propaganda, taking advantage of filial piety and equating protection of the state with protection of the mother.⁶² Henry Wise, a delegate of Virginia's secession convention, proclaimed that if Black Republicans rode roughshod over Virginia, even those against secession would "rush to some Sister Commonwealth and beg her to come and help me save my mother."⁶³

Secessionist rhetoric turned white women into symbols of protection, at first insinuating and then outright insisting that secession was necessary to protect women from rape and dishonor at the hands of Black Republicans or enslaved men. When Henry Benning, a commissioner chosen by the Georgia Secession Convention, arrived in Virginia to preach

⁶⁰ Bledsoe, *The Mission of Woman*, 28.

⁶¹ Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place," 20; Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 188, 202-3.

⁶² McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 26

⁶³ Quoted in George H. Reese, *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861* (Richmond, 1965), 1:36.

secession to a sister state of Georgia, he predicted that if Virginia remained a part of the United States, African Americans would take charge, and conquer their former masters with help from the Northern army. “We will be overpowered,” he proclaimed, “Our men. . . compelled to wander like vagabonds all over the earth; as for our women, the horrors of their state we cannot contemplate in imagination.”⁶⁴

The research of Edwards and Dunaway shows that separate spheres ideology was rather permeable, and many white women did venture out of the home into more public activities. But while public versus private might have been a false dichotomy, politicians and arbitrators of state believed it to be true, and used gendered imagery in their political propaganda, before and after the Civil War. The image of women as guardians of the home would linger for decades in Virginia, and would have a profound effect on politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁶⁴ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 29; Henry L. Benning, “Speech to the Virginia State Convention of 1861,” (Richmond, Virginia, February 18, 1861).

CHAPTER TWO: THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

Weep! Yes, we will weep; but not from coward fears.

Poor woman! What has she to give her country save her tears?

Were we men, we would remember the lessons we were taught.

*How our fathers fought for freedom. Was the boon too dearly bought?*⁶⁵

Published in the *Richmond Dispatch* in April of 1861, this poem by an unnamed Virginia lady was one of many lamentations from upper-class white women that they felt useless in the face of war. Genteel southern ladies were relegated to the homefront, the guardians of domesticity and moral order. And while the homefront would have a crucial role to play in the Civil War, moral guardianship was a cold comfort to them as they watched their husbands, brothers, and sons march away to war.⁶⁶

While some wrote poetry, others turned to more tangible pursuits to stave off feelings of idleness, sewing flags and organizing drives to raise funds and supplies for the troops. Some joined Soldiers' Aid Societies, or organized soldiers' hospitals. When a Virginia lady contributed money to the family of a dead soldier, the *Richmond Enquirer* commented that "she exhibits, in this act of generosity, that admiration of heroism, and that love of country ever characteristic of her sex, and which have shone with conspicuous lustre in the present crisis of our country." A few women were frustrated that they could not join the fight themselves; just a week after the *Enquirer* praised Virginia ladies' patriotic noblesse oblige, it disclosed that soldier's wife Mrs. Mary Ann Keith from Memphis had been arrested in Lynchburg, Virginia. When apprehended, she was dressed in soldier's clothes and "determined to fight the battles of the country." The

⁶⁵ *Richmond Dispatch*, April 18, 1861.

⁶⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and Narratives of War," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (1990): 1204.

paper reported that she was en route to Richmond for further questioning without commenting on either Mrs. Keith's defiance of gender norms or her loyalty to the Confederacy.⁶⁷

Rural lower-class women, the wives and relatives of yeoman farmers, did not have time for poetry, and could not afford to leave their homesteads and farms for long. Before the war began, their work within the home had been subordinate and unimportant compared to the staple crop economy. White antebellum patriarchs built their identities as heads of households on the production of staple crops like cotton and rice; it was what had imbued slavery with such significance in southern society in the first place. But the Confederate Armies' production demands subverted staple crop dominance and came to depend on the domestic labor of women. Without male relatives to support the family, white women of the lower classes became the sole providers for their families, going out into the fields to produce food, finding work in munitions or textile factories, or managing stores or mills without their male family members. As the war progressed, and more and more men were called up following the Confederate Conscription Acts that began in April of 1862, lower-class women seriously struggled to provide for their families. Impressment and theft by both Union and Confederate soldiers, high taxes, as well as the threat presented by nearby armies only exacerbated the problem.⁶⁸

In *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (2012), Stephanie McCurry argues that, unlike the antebellum state and federal governments, the Confederacy was emphatic in its rhetoric that it had an obligation to care for its citizens, in return for their military service. In the absence of its male citizens, the state stepped in to care for their dependents. Or, at least, it did according to the soldiers' wives who wrote en masse to state and government officials across the South, petitioning for aid or asking for their husbands to be permitted to come

⁶⁷ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 4, 1861; *Richmond Enquirer*, September 20, 27, 1861.

⁶⁸ LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995): 46, 72.

home. Their men needed to come home, they said, to support the family and protect them not only from marauding soldiers but also any potential slave insurrection. McCurry contends that, though these women made these claims not as citizens in their own right, but as the wives of citizens, lower-class Confederate women had carved out a political identity for themselves during the war.⁶⁹

Women of the planter elite did not have to worry so much about how they were going to feed their children, and so devoted their time to managing plantations or aiding the war. LeeAnn Whites in *Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (1995) argues that the conflict gave women's traditional duties of new priority, stretching women's domain into a "new public sphere." Now when they spun thread and wove cloth, supervised enslaved laborers in the fields, conducted donation drives, and volunteered at military hospitals, white women were not only caring for their families, but also supporting the war and by extension the state.⁷⁰ Orra Langhorne recalled that "like many women. . . I was deeply interested in hospital work, and from the beginning to the end of the war devoted much of my time to our suffering countrymen."⁷¹ Another Virginia woman recounted that, at a hospital established in Charlottesville, the local ladies were deeply invested in the welfare of the patients, "and did all they could in the way of supplying them with delicacies and home comforts." Most of the volunteer nurses were older or married. When large numbers of wounded soldiers came in, young unmarried women took up the work of gathering and preparing food for soldiers at the hospital:

. . . nobly did they acquit themselves of their self-denying task, accounting their sacrifice as naught for the love they bore the cause in which the soldier suffered. Even in the

⁶⁹ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 134, 141.

⁷⁰ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 59; Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 1211.

⁷¹ Orra Langhorne, "No. 38—Hospital Memories," in *"Our Women in the War": The Lives They Lived; The Deaths They Died* (Charleston: The News and Courier Book Presses, 1885): 248.

retrospect, with tears in their eyes, they say, “We did but please ourselves in what we underwent for those who bled for us. Who could have done differently?”⁷²

The Confederate government encouraged this mindset in women, espousing a narrative of self-sacrifice and suffering that mythologized Confederate women. Poet laureate of the Confederacy Henry Timrod devoted a poem to the toil of Confederate women in his poem “Two Armies,” describing how by nursing wounded soldiers and sewing uniforms, women “by a thousand peaceful deeds, / Supplies a struggling nation’s needs.”⁷³ Female contributions to the war became extensions of their devotion to their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers. For Confederate women’s men, every sacrifice was worth aiding the war effort and their husbands. By portraying women’s participation in the war as an expansion of their domestic duties, Confederate ideology redefined women’s work and labor outside the home as valuable while also maintaining the sanctity of separate spheres, limiting any long-term changes in women’s behavior their participation in the war might bring about.⁷⁴

Despite the Confederacy relying on female labor to support its armies, both Union and Confederate government officials were startled when they discovered the depths of women’s political loyalties. Women on both sides of the war took advantage of gendered assumptions about women’s detachment from the war, smuggling information and papers past unsuspecting officials in their skirts. One of Lincoln’s officials complained of “fashionable women spies” like Belle Boyd and Rose O’Neal Greenhow.⁷⁵ And when officials did apprehend them, they were not sure how to handle them. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* bitterly protested the arrests of Virginia women in 1861, but reported that the “lady prisoners of war” would be confined in a rented

⁷² Mrs. S. S. of Virginia, “No. 59–The Ladies’ Kitchen,” in “*Our Women in the War*”: *The Lives They Lived; The Deaths They Died* (Charleston: The News and Courier Book Presses, 1885): 339.

⁷³ Henry Timrod, “Two Armies,” in *The Poems of Henry Timrod*, ed. Paul H. Hayne (New York: E.J. Hale & Son Publishers, 1872): 136.

⁷⁴ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 1215.

⁷⁵ Quoted in McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 100.

house “with an extensive lawn and flower garden, in which they will be allowed to walk.”⁷⁶

Others found less extreme ways to express their political loyalties, showing such disdain for occupying Union forces that the Union began to insist that women take an oath of allegiance to the United States. Over the course of the war, southern white women came into their own as political citizens, capable of both gentle care and extreme partisanship; they were no longer mere extensions of their husbands.⁷⁷

Confederate officials were just as surprised when the enslaved population, whose labor officials had taken for granted as a great asset to their new country and the war effort, seized their chance to assert their own political sovereignty. Some plantations became scenes of outright rebellion as outnumbered slaveholders struggled to maintain control over the enslaved, unable to rely on the threat of state violence. Bondswomen were at the center of enslaved communication networks, using their access to the household to gain information on politics and troop movements.⁷⁸ They knew the local geography, to guide Union soldiers in the Deep South past Confederates or fellow refugees to safety.

At the approach of the Union Army, enslaved African Americans left plantations en masse, taking advantage of the Union contraband policy to allow escaped slaves to work with federal forces. For Virginia slaves in particular, the presence of Union soldiers in the vicinity represented danger as well as a chance for freedom. After the Emancipation Proclamation, new freedmen returned to plantations, Union soldiers in tow, to retrieve family members. This new empowerment of southern African Americans made planters reluctant to send their slaves to aid the military, and they often petitioned for military protection from their own slaves.

⁷⁶ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 30, 1861.

⁷⁷ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 115-6.

⁷⁸ Thavolia Glymph, “Rose’s War and the Gendered Politics of a Slave Insurgency in the Civil War,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 4 (2013): 502.

Slaveholders' familiarity with the enslaved and their desire for freedom at any means fractured the idea held by slavery proponents that slaves were even remotely passive or loyal, forcing slaveholders and Confederate officials to recognize enslaved African Americans' desire for freedom.⁷⁹

To McCurry, this was the great irony of the Confederacy: by creating and defending a political culture that explicitly excluded white women and enslaved African Americans, they undermined the very same political culture that they were trying to protect by seceding. Secessionists created the Confederacy in order to permanently codify the political exclusion of white women and African American men and women; the realities of war forced the state governments to recognize the autonomy of white women and African Americans, and, through the Reconstruction Amendments, award Black men political personhood.⁸⁰

Crisis of Masculinity

The ex-Confederates who returned home to their wives and daughters after Appomattox found that the patriarchal ideologies that had guided their lives had almost completely disintegrated. Slavery, the bedrock of the southern patriarchy, was gone, stripping white heads of households of the social and economic power they derived from the enslavement of others. Defeat emasculated the former soldiers; Black men's new status as citizens of the United States jeopardized southern white men's understanding of power and masculinity as founded on the expulsion of Black men from public power and responsibility.⁸¹ They had failed to protect their families from the ravages of war, and so lost the social authority that came with the role of the defender of the home. Women now had unprecedented public power for women in the American

⁷⁹ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 241.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸¹ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 3; Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 97.

South, something that many Southerners of both sexes found extremely distressing and hoped was only a temporary aberration leftover from the war. White men's exclusive claims to public power, derived from their superior positions in the household, were now very much in jeopardy.⁸²

But, according to Whites, men were still attached to their families. Their familial relationships became a source of strength, where they found responsibility and a new sense of identity. By turning their attention inward, to their familial relationships, ex-Confederates found a way to salvage their masculinity. "After all," writes Laura Edwards, author of *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, "political and civil rights still hinged on how households were defined, who qualified as household heads, and what rights they and their dependents could exercise." During the period of Reconstruction, the household and the definition of domesticity became an important political issue as white men and women tried to regain their sense of honor and pride of place in southern society, creating a definition of the household that excluded African Americans from political rights.⁸³

Domesticity rapidly became a highly contested matter; elite white women clung to rigid new standards of feminine domestic behavior and public conduct. In her monograph *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (1977), Nancy Cott contends that in times of strife, domesticity encourages people to assimilate to new values and morals by linking it to specific sex roles. The home represented a safe and serene unchanging space, a stark contrast to the chaotic, ever-changing public world. The Cult of True Womanhood "enlisted women in their domestic roles to absorb" the rapid transformation of southern society and held

⁸² Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 8; Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 10; Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 9-10.

⁸³ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 134, 136; Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 8.

elite white women to new standards of female behavior as the bastions of traditional southern values.⁸⁴

Elite families used the ideologies of domesticity and merit to subjugate the Black community, dismissing social inequalities in Reconstruction society as the fault of African Americans. The white elite held up their own aspirations and domestic models as what all natural and civilized people should want, condemning those who disagreed as barbaric, immoral, and irresponsible.⁸⁵ Bledsoe insisted that strict gender roles were a natural part of society:

. . .if woman were required to do the work of man, or man the work of woman, human affairs would be turned out of their natural channels, and thrown into helpless confusion. Let man and woman, then, like twin stars, or like the sun and moon, move in their own appointed spheres or orbits. . . . And woe, woe to the people, or nation, or society, by whom they shall be made to exchange places, or occupy the same sphere.⁸⁶

The strict new ideology, however, obfuscated the new realities of Reconstruction life; the expansion of women's societal role that began during the war quietly continued into the twentieth century. In 1900, Langhorne said, "The Virginia woman of fifty years ago had little connection with the outside world except as a church member. . . . Virginia today is a network of woman's associations, benevolent, literary, patriotic, even political."⁸⁷ Langhorne herself wrote extensively on paternalism and Black political rights and racial progress, and would go on to champion women's rights and suffrage in Virginia.

Women could now take on new public duties and shoulder new burdens of domestic work and even waged labor without censure. When Langhorne married six years after the war, she

⁸⁴ Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977): 67, 70.

⁸⁵ Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 110-1, 130.

⁸⁶ Bledsoe, *The Mission of Woman*, 10-1.

⁸⁷ Langhorne, "Changes in a Half-Century of Virginia," 173-4.

took on an active role in her blind husband's business. She ran the counter at their general store and inspected the properties they rented out. Another prominent Virginia woman and later the treasurer of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, Ellen Gertrude Tompkins Kidd founded and ran the Pin Money Pickle Company, which found success both within Richmond and abroad.⁸⁸ The logic of the new domestic ideal allowed it, as long as women were working out of duty and devotion to their own families, not for their own personal fulfillment or economic independence. The war had brought the worth of women's labors into the light, and by rededicating themselves to their families after the war and restoring their husband's masculinity, white women were recognized as vital members of southern society.⁸⁹ The southern lady was no longer a mere ornament: she was a beacon of religious morality and a champion of old southern values, an inspiration not only to her husband, but to society at large.⁹⁰

White southern women could use the new domestic leeway in a variety of ways. Liberal southern women advocated for reform, using domestic ideology to ground their participation in politics and the public sphere as they campaigned for public health and education reform, among other causes. Other women devoted themselves to championing the Lost Cause by working with organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). The UDC began as a Ladies' Memorial Association during the war, and following the fall of the Confederacy, the UDC dedicated itself to preserving the image of ex-Confederate soldiers. Karen Cox explains in *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (2003):

⁸⁸ Brent Tarter, Marianne E. Julienne, and Barbara C. Batson, *The Campaign for Women Suffrage in Virginia* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2020): 26-7.

⁸⁹ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 159.

⁹⁰ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 4-7.

Even as women's participation in the Lost Cause translated into an expanded public role for women, they continued to define themselves and their work as rooted in tradition. It was the source of their strength as public women in a region that was historically reluctant to accept changes in traditional gender patterns.

A woman's membership in the UDC and other memorial societies was somewhat paradoxical, as the UDC glorified antebellum society and the gender roles that guided it. But the existence of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in and of itself defied antebellum gender norms as its members used their new platform to participate, in a very genteel manner, in southern politics. Before the war, political participation was not in the realm of possibility for even the most well-positioned and educated of southern belles.⁹¹

Freedpeople, Free Labor, and Domestic Roles

Though the white elite tried hard to make domestic respectability the sole possession of white Southerners, the ideals of family and the household were crucial to the establishment of Black communities following Emancipation. Family and notions of mutual responsibility had a large role to play in the creation of Reconstruction-era Black communities, as family members worked hard to support and provide for each other. Even those unrelated by blood took care of others in their community, moving in together, providing support through the church, or contributing to mutual benefit societies. Elsa Barkley Brown emphasizes the significance of the communal nature of post-Emancipated Black communities in "To Catch a Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880" (1997), writing that institutions like churches and mutual benefit societies created extended kinship networks, turning ideas about familial responsibility into the bedrock of Black communities.⁹²

⁹¹ Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 9-10, 26.

⁹² Brown, "To Catch a Vision of Freedom," 66-8.

Now legally able to marry, the formerly enslaved could reestablish their own families and households without the interference of slaveholders or the possibility of separation.⁹³ Marriage served many purposes; like voting and other public political participation, marriage was a signifier of freedom and civic equality. To free African Americans, reconstituting the family represented their new status as citizens, instead of mere property. At the same time, the legalization of Black marriages codified familial relationships and the obligations family members owed to each other. In *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (2009), Hannah Rosen explains that the same southern ideology that deemed white women, enslaved African Americans, and many landless white men “dependent” and incapable of wielding public political power took on a new meaning for freedpeople after Emancipation. The liberal ideology that guided African Americans’ Reconstruction politics prized self-control and “voluntary submission to contractual obligations of both labor and marriage” as a marker of citizenship and freedom.⁹⁴

One Virginia freedwoman, Ann Marie Brown, petitioned the Freedmen’s Bureau to help her locate her husband James in Maryland and order him to support her and fulfill his duty as husband and head of household. Though her husband might have been reluctant, Ann Marie claimed the right to be protected as a wife and her husband’s dependent.⁹⁵ African American men now became the legal heads of their own households; legitimized by domestic ideology, Black men were free to protect their families and make decisions about labor and education in ways they could not before Emancipation.⁹⁶

⁹³ Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 111, 18-9. For more on the African American family, see Tera Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth-Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁹⁴ Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 7.

⁹⁵ Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 52.

⁹⁶ Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 37-8; for more on gender, race, and citizen during the Civil War and

Jacqueline Jones argues that when freed families reproduced patriarchal norms, it was a manifestation not of the oppression of Black women, or a deliberate attempt to replicate the white familial structure. It was the result of choices made by both men and women. Free Black husbands wished to protect their wives and families from racial and sexual violence, and free Black wives often preferred to stay at home with their children when it was economically feasible.⁹⁷ Former slave and Black Republican leader at the Virginia constitutional convention Thomas Bayne argued that African American women had the rights to vote and to be with their children:

In speaking of the right to women to vote, I thought it an inherent right, and that women were wrongfully deprived of it. While I do not say that this is my opinion, yet I would simply say. . .that women's right is a right to stay at home. It is woman's right to raise and bear children, and to train them for their future duties in life. When she does that she is performing high duties which God himself has imposed upon her, in order that those children may carry out and exercise this very God-given right.⁹⁸

Bayne's argument defies the traditional ideology of separate spheres by instilling in freedwomen the right to both be at home and participate directly in state politics. His quarrel, as Brown puts it, is with bourgeois white employers who force Black employees to perform domestic labor in white homes, rather than their own.⁹⁹

Freedmen and women's refusal to work on white terms was much to the consternation of both white Southerners looking for cheap labor and Northern liberals who wished to reshape the South under the Republican "free labor" ideology by transforming the freedmen into a pliable

Reconstruction, see Sharon Romeo, *Gender and the Jubilee: Black Freedom and the Reconstruction of Citizenship in Civil War Missouri* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

⁹⁷ Jones, "My Mother Was Much of a Woman," 82, 84.

⁹⁸ *The Debates and Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia, Assembled at the City of Richmond* (Richmond: Government Printing Office, 1868): 524-7.

⁹⁹ Brown, "To Catch a Vision of Freedom," 78-9.

new working class.¹⁰⁰ Northern men who worked as agents of the Freedmen's Bureau struggled to see freedwomen as women, rather than workers; the bureau's assistant commissioner in Virginia, Colonial Orlando Brown, told freedpeople that emancipation did not give them the freedom to be idle. In order to fulfill Northern liberals' vision of a new free labor society for the South, Brown said, freedpeople must be "industrious and frugal." He proclaimed: "You [freedpeople of the South] have now every inducement to work, as you are to receive the payment for your labor, and you have every inducement to save your wages, as your rights in what you possess will be protected." Brown and other Northerners did not expect freedwomen to cleave to domestic values and a gendered division of labor, and dismissed Black mothers who chose not to pursue waged work as lazy.¹⁰¹

Freedwomen did labor at home, performing both housework and fieldwork. In sharecropping families, parents could work in the fields without white supervision, controlling their own labor and production without the threat of racial violence. For some freedwomen, waged work might not have been worth giving up their independence; according to the Freedmen's Bureau's guidelines, women made less than men.¹⁰² Even when freedwomen were destitute and relying on government rations, they refused to give up access to their children. The Bureau endeavored in vain to persuade or force mothers to hire out their children in apprenticeships so that freedwomen might profit off their children's labor and not need to rely on government welfare. One Richmond agent complained to assistant commissioner Brown that

¹⁰⁰ Thomas C. Holt, "'An Empire of the Mind': Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South" in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 288.

¹⁰¹ Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 25.

¹⁰² Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985): 45-6, 59-60;

Black mothers would rather their children starve than be apprenticed.¹⁰³ Bureau agents did not comprehend why the formerly enslaved might be determined to keep their children close.

Though family and community ties bound together Black communities, many African Americans, by necessity, did not rely on gendered notions of public versus private power, even in the burgeoning Black middle-class. Black women, even married women, had to step into the public sphere in order to help support their families. According to the 1900 census, married Black women in the South were five times more likely to work paid jobs than their white counterparts. Eighty percent of southern African Americans lived in rural communities, and nearly all of them lived in poverty as tenant farmers or sharecroppers. Female family members could work at home, taking care of children and doing housework, could do farm labor, or take up paid work for white farmers and houseworks.¹⁰⁴ In cities, many took up jobs as domestic servants, but on their own terms this time, negotiating pay, hours, duties, and execution of tasks with their white employers. This was much to the annoyance and frustration of upper-class white southerners like Orra Langhorne:

Those who are left to the luckless housekeepers of the South are usually of the lowest class, those who are fresh from the abodes of squalid poverty, utterly untrained and ignorant of all that goes to make a desirable servant. . . . Frequently such domestics give grudging service to the employer, who is at great cost of time and patience trying to train the half-wild, ignorant creature into a cook or a housemaid. . . . So much has been said to the negroes about the unrequited labor of the slaves that few of them realize the compensations of the system.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Boris, "The Power of Motherhood," 216.

¹⁰⁵ Orra Langhorne, "Domestic Service in the South," *Journal of Social Science* 39 (November 1901): 171.

Freedpeople during Reconstruction worked hard to ensure that they were not exploited to the same degree they were under slavery.¹⁰⁶ Just about the only waged work an African American woman could get in the South was domestic servitude, even if they had been field hands before Emancipation. The only other institution that would hire freedwomen were tobacco processing facilities.

Freedpeople and the Vote

In terms of Reconstruction politics, the decades immediately following Emancipation and the fall of the Confederacy represented a time when politics and racial and class barriers were permeable. Reconstruction manifested differently in every state, depending on the state economies and legal systems. In the state of Virginia, according to historians Charles Wyne and Fitzhugh Brundage, white citizens were better able to cope with the sudden political changes brought on by Emancipation compared to other states. Virginia had much lower rates of lynching, to the point that the state of Georgia had more lynchings in 1919 than Virginia did in the entire twentieth century.¹⁰⁷

Virginia was not a cotton state, and had a more diversified economy than the Deep South states. Large plantations with absentee owners were less prevalent and its interracial relationships less physically coercive. Its major cash crop, tobacco, required more skill than cotton, so after Emancipation, the state had a more skilled labor force. Because of the state's proximity to the North and the Border States, the state industrialized faster, distancing Virginia further from the racialized labor relations typical in the Deep South. In the states further south, the sharecropping

¹⁰⁶ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 26-7.

¹⁰⁷ Referenced by J. Douglas Smith, "A Fine Discrimination Indeed: Party Politics and White Supremacy from Emancipation to World War One," in *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002): 27; Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993): 140. See Charles Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1961).

economy relied on coercive labor practices meant to keep African Americans tied to the land. Brundage contends that Virginia's stronger and more diversified economy meant that the landholding elite relied less on sharecropping, preferring to explore day labor, leading to better race relations. White Virginians were not so threatened as the white citizens of the Deep South states when Black men left the agricultural sector and rose to positions of power within local and state governments.¹⁰⁸ That is not to say that Virginia was a haven of racial equality; directly after the war in 1866, the General Assembly passed a law punishing Black workers and limiting their movement so severely that it essentially criminalized the former enslaved African Americans' efforts to rebuild their lives. The commanding Union general in Virginia deemed it slavery in all but name and forbade authorities from enforcing it.¹⁰⁹

Across the South, Black men successfully ran for sheriff and state legislature positions, were appointed as judges and magistrates, and worked as customs officers, census officials, and county clerks.¹¹⁰ When African American men voted, they were not only representing themselves, but also their wives and families' political interests as their representative in electoral politics.¹¹¹ In Richmond, the First African Baptist Church served as a public meeting place in the years directly after the war, where not only Black men, but also women and children gathered to discuss political issues as a community.¹¹²

In "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom" (1994), Elsa Barkley Brown argues that through mass meetings African Americans created their own political culture based on their collective

¹⁰⁸ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 141-3.

¹⁰⁹ Brent Tarter, *The Grandees of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013): 234-5.

¹¹⁰ Smith, "A Fine Discrimination Indeed," 228.

¹¹¹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 18.

¹¹² Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 110.

experiences and identity as Black freedpeople. She contends that Black Richmonders were simultaneously operating within two political spheres: one external where Black women were excluded from the franchise, one internal where their participation was accepted. They assumed that voting rights in public matters came with being a member of the African American community. When another meeting was held at New Nation Hall in October of 1867 to determine who would represent Richmond's Second Ward at the State Constitutional Convention, African American women voted: "All who favored Mr. Washburne were first requested to rise, and forty were found on the floor, including women." Women also accompanied their male relatives to the polls on voting days, hoping to provide group protection from violent white supremacists; some attended to ensure that their husbands voted properly. Their presence only reinforced the collective nature of African American politics during Reconstruction.¹¹³

In the summer of 1865, over three thousand Black Richmonders gathered at First African to hear the results of an investigation into the violation of African Americans's civil liberties by the military police force and civilian officials, and to ratify their Statement of Wrongs and Oppression. First African, in conjunction with five other Black Richmond churches, gathered funds to send a delegate from each church to Washington, D.C., where they presented their findings to President Andrew Johnson.

The Richmond Freedmen, as they were deemed by the *New-York Tribune* to whom they had sent a copy of their declaration, took care to highlight not only the good moral character of Richmond's Black population, but also the success of community support networks:

¹¹³ Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 117, 122-4; *Richmond Dispatch*, October 9, 1867.

We represent a population of more than 20,000 colored people, including Richmond and Manchester, who have ever been distinguished for their good behavior as slaves and as freemen, as well as for their high moral and Christian character. . . None of our people are in the alms-house, and when we were slaves the aged and infirm who were turned away from the homes of hard masters, who had been enriched by their toil, our benevolent societies supported while they lived, and buried when they died, and comparatively few of us have found it necessary to ask for Government rations, which have been so bountifully bestowed upon the unrepentant Rebels of Richmond.

The delegates also emphasized the community's religious devotion, pointing out that six thousand worked within the churches, and almost all were "constantly [in attendance at] divine services." They totaled up how many community members owned property, how many could read and write, and noted that "a large number of us are engaged in useful and profitable employment on our own account." The Richmond Freedmen attempted to foreground their plea for help in the idea that the Black Richmond community was not only industrious, but also responsible for one another.¹¹⁴ The Black collective consciousness and notions of collective responsibility would buttress racial uplift activism and African American communities in the fight for their political rights well into the twentieth century.

In order to rejoin the United States, the former Confederate states were required to adopt new constitutions ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment, and Virginia was placed under military rule until a new state Constitution could be ratified. For Richmond's Black population, it was their first opportunity to participate directly in state politics as they voted on delegates and ratification ballots. In the hundreds, they arrived early to the 1867 Republican State Convention

¹¹⁴ "The Richmond Freedmen," *New-York Tribune*, June 17, 1865; Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 114.

held at First African Baptist Church crowding out even the delegates, much to the disdain of both the county delegates and white newspapers; the *Richmond Dispatch* reported that it was a “very disorderly assembly, being made so large by the presence of an immense multitude of Richmond colored citizens that little could be heard, and great confusion prevailed.” It was one thing for white women to sit quietly in the galleries during such conventions; when “even women and children had a say,” the convention devolved into a mere mass meeting.¹¹⁵

The 1870 Underwood Constitution of Virginia paved the way for African American men’s more populist politics. Named for the federal judge John C. Underwood, who had presided over the Constitutional Convention, it prohibited slavery at the state level, included provisions for the children of enslaved parents who had been forbidden to marry, and created a statewide public school system for both Black and white children.¹¹⁶ Underwood had been appointed as a judge by Lincoln himself in 1863, and in 1867 had been “elected without dissent” as a representative of Richmond’s Second Ward at the Constitutional Convention at a mass meeting in New Nation Hall.¹¹⁷ The same year the new constitution was ratified, he and his wife became co-vice presidents of the short-lived Virginia State Women Suffrage Association.¹¹⁸

Conservative Virginia leaders despised Underwood and his constitution. By the time of the Civil War, the planter elite had all but faded as a major faction in Virginia state politics, superseded by large-scale businessmen and commercial farmers, as well as bankers, railroad executives, and attorneys. After the war, they worked to maintain the old southern hierarchies because the exploitation of African Americans made them money; white supremacy aligned with

¹¹⁵ Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere,” 118-9; *Richmond Dispatch*, August 2, 1867.

¹¹⁶ A.E. Dick Howard, “Who Belongs: The Constitution of Virginia and the Political Community,” *Journal of Law and Politics* 37, no. 2 (July 2022): 107.

¹¹⁷ *Richmond Dispatch*, October 8, 1867.

¹¹⁸ Charlotte Jean Shelton, “Women Suffrage and Virginia Politics, 1909-1920,” M.A. Thesis (University of Virginia, 1969): 6.

their business interests.¹¹⁹ Within five years of its ratification, the General Assembly revised the Underwood Constitution so that voters were required to pay poll taxes, and those convicted of petty crimes were disenfranchised entirely.¹²⁰

The Readjuster Coalition

Many southern states had public debts incurred from antebellum infrastructure projects, usually railroads and canals, leading to postwar controversies about how to handle the debt: pay it off, restructure it, or repudiate the debt entirely. Most states repudiated most if not all of the debt after the war, but the Virginian politicians in favor of payment, or “Funders,” insisted that honoring the debt would boost the economy and attract Northern and European investors. African Americans were against paying the debt in Virginia, arguing that Virginia’s Black citizens should not have to sacrifice the funds earmarked for a new public school system to a debt that they had had no part in creating. They protested when the 1870-1871 Virginia legislature, claiming that full repayment would maintain the state’s honor and credit rating, passed a law that committed the state to paying back in full the forty-six million dollar debt.¹²¹

When conservative Virginia governor James Lawson Kemper vetoed a debt modification bill in 1877 and chose to slash state funding for schools and services instead, African Americans and white Republicans joined forces into the Readjuster Party in 1879. Led by William Mahone, a former Confederate general and member of the Conservative Party, they aimed to refinance the debt to reduce the interest rates and the amount of principal owed.¹²² Jane Dailey, writing in *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (2000), describes how the

¹¹⁹ Brent Tarter, *A Saga of the New South: Race, Law, and Public Debt in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016): 9.

¹²⁰ Tarter, *The Grandees of Government*, 238.

¹²¹ Smith, “A Fine Discrimination Indeed,” 20; Tarter, *The Grandees of Government*, 239.

¹²² Smith, “A Fine Discrimination Indeed,” 21.

Readjusters adhered to a liberal, rights-oriented political philosophy that allowed Black and white Virginians with very different political priorities and opinions to band together under the banner of equality. Though the Readjusters were active for less than a decade, they had serious repercussions on racial politics in Virginia, electing a Readjuster governor, two United States Senators, and six out of ten Congressmen. The Readjusters won support from the GOP through their commitment to suffrage and voting rights, which they connected to issues of tax relief and public education. Their platform was tailored to appeal not only to African American voters, but also rural and working-class whites. Their planks included a protective tariff, lien laws that favored workers over creditors, corporate taxation, free vaccinations during epidemics, food distribution programs in case of crop failures, and more state funding to hospitals, asylums, and prisons.¹²³ In June of 1881, the *New York Times* commented:

It becomes more and more evident everyday that the Readjuster Party in Virginia is engaged in a cause that is broader than the State and deeper than the debt question. . . The fact is that the prejudices and pretensions which have so long passed for principles with the Virginia Bourbons are directly attacked, and there is danger that the power that rests upon them will be overthrown.¹²⁴

The Readjusters leaned into liberalism in order to achieve their goals of equal suffrage and civil rights, as well as refinancing the debt. Instead of the Northern brand of liberalism that aimed to expand and justify the new bourgeois economic order engendered by industrial capitalism, Readjuster liberalism allowed African Americans in Virginia politics to push back against Conservative racist rhetoric.¹²⁵

¹²³ Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000): 79-82.

¹²⁴ "Parties in the South," *New York Times*, June 17, 1881.

¹²⁵ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 82.

Dailey explains that the white Readjusters relied on nineteenth-century liberalism's public versus private dichotomy in order to separate sex from politics and diminish the threat that Black men posed to white women in the eyes of white Conservatives. Because women were excluded from formal politics, nineteenth-century political theorists equated masculinity and virility with citizenship. After Emancipation, African American men defined themselves as the masculine protectors of the household, from which they derived their civic rights and autonomy, just as white men had done for generations.¹²⁶ In her 1993 study of congressional testimony against the Ku Klux Klan "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War," Martha Hodes writes that when Black men used the metaphor of political manhood that until the twentieth century had been implicit in American political philosophy, white politicians interpreted it as an assertion of Black male sexual agency and a threat to white womanhood.¹²⁷ White Southerners emphasized elite white women's purity, policing white women's sexuality in an effort to avoid miscegenation and "racial amalgamation" that would damage white supremacy in the South.¹²⁸ They exerted social pressure on upper-class women and condoned violence against white women of the working class who socialized with Black men. The Klan used the language of sexualized politics to justify horrific violence against African Americans who defied the racial hierarchy, either by exercising their civil liberties or through intimacy with white women. White Conservative Virginia politicians likewise prayed on these fears in order to disenfranchise African Americans.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 85, 90.

¹²⁷ Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 no. 3 (January 1993): 404.

¹²⁸ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 72.

¹²⁹ Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics," 406, 410. For more on interracial sexual politics during Reconstruction, see Laura Edwards, "The Disappearance of Susan Daniel and Henderson Copper: Gender and Narratives of Political Conflict in the Reconstruction-Era U.S. South," *Feminist Studies* 22 no. 2 (1996): 363-86.

Virginia Readjusters led by Mahone tried to alleviate the concerns of the white electorate by reinforcing the barrier between the private world of women and the public domain of men, relying on Virginia laws outlawing miscegenation and differentiating between civil rights and what the Readjusters called social rights. The *Richmond Whig*, the Readjuster newspaper, wrote, “Our party . . . encourages each race to develop its own sociology separately and apart from unlawful contamination with each other, but under a government which recognizes and protects the civil rights of all.” The Republican *Valley Virginian* similarly dismissed concerns of mixed schooling leading to miscegenation:

. . . a few of the Bourbons—the real moss-backs—are making an effort to get up a scare about mixed schools and mixed marriages. . . We had this cry of mixed schools and mixed marriages two years ago. We have had it, indeed, for the past ten years, and yet the schools were never further removed from such a condition, nor do we think the white people are any nearer mixed marriages.¹³⁰

African American men could have civil rights and participate in an integrated public arena without threatening the sanctity of the white home, and by extension white womanhood.¹³¹ This line of logic simultaneously advocated for the political and legal rights of African Americans and promoted white supremacy and segregation within the home.¹³²

Readjuster liberalism worked well for a time. Lower-class white Virginians understood that it was more in their interests to vote Readjuster, despite Conservatives’ dire predictions:

Will the honest masses go with them into the fold of that enemy who has persecuted Virginia, who with fiendish pleasure has maligned her sons and daughters, who a few years ago tried to consign her to the tender mercies of ignorant negroes and their thievish

¹³⁰ *Valley Virginian*, September 13, 1883.

¹³¹ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 85-6; *Richmond Whig* quoted in Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 88.

¹³² Smith, “A Fine Discrimination Indeed,” 22.

white allies? . . . Give them time, and they will return to the bosom of that party which saved Virginia from the horrors of negro domination.¹³³

But the 1883 appointment of two Black men to the Richmond school board by Readjuster Governor William E. Cameron was a bridge too far; their positions on the board gave them power over white children as well as the white women who worked as teachers. Public schools are where the barrier between public and private is thinnest; children's education, which heretofore had been the responsibility of the mother, was under state control. Cameron's appointment of two African American men to the school board dissolved the fiction that civil and social rights were separate from each other.¹³⁴ The *Richmond Dispatch* complained of the "unspeakable outrage of having negroes appointed to visit white schools. . . . We want white officials without exception—especially school trustees. This last admits of no compromise."¹³⁵

This was the beginning of the end for the Readjusters. Virginia Conservatives and Funders joined together in the new Virginia Democratic Party. Later that year, just before the November election, a riot broke out in Danville, Virginia over the lack of respect African Americans showed for "the oppressed white citizens of that town." It was more of a street fight than a riot, but armed white men shot at and killed four African Americans; one white man died in the crossfire. The *Alexandria Gazette*, falsely reporting that two white men died in the altercation, blamed Mahone and the Readjusters, "who are morally responsible for the drawing of the color line" and rallied its readers to vote against the Readjusters in the upcoming election. White Democrats threatened violence, intimidating the African American male voters away from the polls, allowing the Democrats to sweep two-thirds of the General Assembly.¹³⁶

¹³³ "Give Them Time," *Staunton Spectator*, April 26, 1881.

¹³⁴ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 83, 97-8; Smith, "A Fine Discrimination Indeed," 22.

¹³⁵ "Disgraced," *Richmond Dispatch*, May 26, 1883.

¹³⁶ Smith, "A Fine Discrimination Indeed," 22; *Alexandria Gazette*, November 4, 1883.

Despite the Readjusters' short time in control, they wielded unprecedented power as an interracial coalition with an equal rights platform. Dailey writes that they legitimized African American citizenship and political power by endorsing Black suffrage, appointing Black politicians to office, and calling on African Americans for jury service. They proved that the Black vote and Black participation in politics was not meaningless, to the degree that their success contributed to their political exclusion at the hands of white Democrats. She bemoans the lack of Readjusters in Virginia historiography, commenting that historians have minimized their importance by focusing only on their failure, which best fits the narrative of white supremacy in post-war southern history.¹³⁷ The Readjusters and their platform was much more complicated than that:

These explanations of the failure of interracial democracy in Virginia rely on the explanatory power of white racism, which is conceived of as timeless and unchanging—and simplify what was a complex nexus of partisan rivalry, political and economic domination, white and Black male concerns over manhood rights and sexual access to women, racial identity, and everyday contests for dignity and respect.¹³⁸

The Readjusters existed at a crossroads between race and class, a culmination of Black men's political empowerment after Emancipation. They operated within an explicitly gendered notion of politics that equated citizenship with masculinity with sexual power. They used separate spheres doctrine to their advantage, trying to reaffirm women's place as in the home after the Civil War destabilized southern gender conventions. But as women slowly impugned on the public sphere by joining ladies' clubs and societies and taking up jobs as teachers, the public/private ideological dichotomy that the Readjusters relied on crumbled under their feet.

¹³⁷ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 1-2.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

CHAPTER THREE: SOUTHERN PROGRESSIVISM

After the end of Reconstruction, the landscape of Virginia and the other southern states began to change rapidly as industrialization crept steadily southward. Northern capitalists were eager to invest in southern industry, and the construction of factories attracted European immigrants, poor rural whites, and African Americans to cities. With urbanization and migration came the Progressives, advocates of reforms that had begun in the Northern states.

The Progressives had their work cut out for them; even outside of the South, local and state governments valued individual autonomy over collective responsibility. In *Who Were the Progressives?* (2002), Glenda Gilmore explains that Progressive reformers recognized that the citizens had a vested interest in measures that would increase the public good. They petitioned local governments to step in to address problems like housing, education, and public health that had previously been solved privately in households or local community and kinship networks. In an ideological response to Social Darwinism and “survival of the fittest,” liberal Protestants began to promote the Social Gospel, emphasizing one’s relationship with others and with God in terms of good works and working for the collective good, rather than one’s own salvation. Through their efforts to restructure a chaotic industrial system that was badly failing the working class, Progressives redefined what was private and what was public, challenging the widespread American belief that the best government was one that did not intervene with daily life and safeguarded individual rights at the expense of the public good.¹³⁹

Progressivism and the idea that the government at the local, state, and federal level had a responsibility to the community, not just the individual, was slow to catch on in the South. There was very little community participation in government at all levels throughout the South, with

¹³⁹ Glenda Gilmore, ed. “Introduction: Responding to the Challenges of the Progressive Era,” in *Who Were the Progressives?* (Boston: Bedford/St.Martin’s, 2002): 11-3.

almost no administration to make decisions about social policy and local officials practically powerless. This was by design; Southerners were suspicious of a government that crossed the perceived boundaries of public and private.¹⁴⁰ Though religion and evangelicalism was just as if not more prominent in the South as it was in the North, southern Protestants remained focused on their own souls, rather than social improvements. White Southerners distanced themselves from most reforms, associating Progressivism with the antislavery and abolition movements; the only Progressive impulses Southerners really took to were personal crusades, particularly temperance.¹⁴¹ In the early stages of the national temperance movement before the Civil War, teetotalers relied not on government statutes, but on social pressure from temperance societies and churches. Temperance advocates endeavored to create non-alcoholic cultures, emphasizing Victorian self-restraint; to them, a legal Prohibition would have been too much state interference into personal liberty.¹⁴²

Only after the Civil War did Progressivism and the idea that the government should preserve the public welfare really take hold in the South. The role of government began to expand, parallel to Southerners' commitment to developing the economy and industrializing the South.¹⁴³ The call for temperance, always more popular in the South than other reforms, reached a new pitch as Southerners blamed the anxiety they felt about rapid societal change, the rise of the market economy, and the transformation of the traditional ideologies of gender, work, and the household on alcohol. Temperance advocates began to call for public solutions enforced by the

¹⁴⁰ William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992): 15-6.

¹⁴¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Peculiar South Revisited: White Society, Culture, and Politics in the Antebellum Period, 1800-1869," in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, ed. John Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987): 92-3.

¹⁴² Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 32-3.

¹⁴³ Dewey W. Grantham, "The Contours of Southern Progressivism," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (1981): 1049.

government, a significant departure from antebellum temperance initiatives that relied on morality and social pressure. Their concern with the decline of moral and social values and traditional order during the late nineteenth century spread to other reformers in the southern states, who began to apply private evangelical morals to public policy.¹⁴⁴ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the southern state governments, urged on by Progressives, abandoned their laissez-faire approach to social welfare in favor of interventionist policies.¹⁴⁵

At the same time, increasing urbanization not only highlighted the importance of infrastructure and the necessity of preserving public welfare, but brought many different people together in relatively close quarters. Not just lower-class laborers, but also a fledgling urban southern middle-class of lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers, and writers, as well as those working in the newer professions such as industry specialties, service trades, and public administration. In “The Contours of Southern Progressivism” (1981) Dewey Grantham describes how they came together into interest groups: industrialists and businessmen joined chambers of commerce as well as trade and merchant organizations. Others formed communities based on race, ethnicity, or moral and political values. In an effort to secure entrepreneurial and professional boons and control the chaotic social environment of the city, these new middle-class groups turned to reform and collective action.¹⁴⁶

Progressivism as Social Control

Historians in the earlier days of Progressive research in the 1950s, such as Richard Hofstadter and Robert Wiebe, argued that it was exclusively these white, middle-class groups that made up the Progressive movement, using reform to regain the social and cultural authority

¹⁴⁴ Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 39, 51-2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁴⁶ Grantham, “The Contours of Southern Progressivism,” 1037.

they had lost to the Civil War and Reconstruction. And while other historians would take pains to prove that this was not true, highlighting the accomplishments of the Neo-Progressives and working-class labor reformers, Hofstadter and Wiebe were not completely wrong: white middle-class liberals did use Progressive reforms as a method of social control, especially as southern Progressivism coincided with the beginnings of segregation and the mass disenfranchisement of African American in the South at the turn of the century.¹⁴⁷ What was a progressive reform to white Democrats, Glenda Gilmore explains, was the “repressive burden” of Black Virginians.¹⁴⁸

In Virginia, this process began in 1883, when the biracial Readjuster Party, the greatest threat to the Democratic Party in the South, lost control of the General Assembly for good.¹⁴⁹ When Democrats gained control of the Virginia government, they passed the Anderson-McCormick Act of 1884, overruling Readjuster Governor William Cameron’s vetoes. The act gave the Democrat-controlled General Assembly the power to oversee elections, including the registration of voters. The *Alexandria Gazette* reported confidently in May of 1885 that the bill takes power away from “Mahoneite county judges,” and that “all future elections . . . will . . . be held honestly, and not with a view to the election of General Mahone’s candidates . . . There has never been any doubt of the defeat of General Mahone next fall, but if there had been, it would be removed by this decision.” The Anderson-McCormick Act was the death warrant of the Readjuster Party, and the first step to the legal disenfranchisement of Black Virginians.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?*, 19; see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955) and Robert Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

¹⁴⁸ Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Perman, *Pursuit of Unity: A Political History of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 156.

¹⁵⁰ Brent Tarter, *A Saga of the New South*, 5, 9; “The Bill to Appoint Registrars,” *Staunton Spectator*, December 3, 1884; *Alexandria Gazette*, May 7, 1885.

Across the South, the 1880s represented a time of heightened political contest as both Democrats and opposition parties had to compete for the Black vote. White Democrats cried fraud, claiming that the enfranchisement of African Americans represented a doomed attempt to topple the white hierarchy through “Negro domination.” Even as they complained of corruption, white Democrats refused to admit that they were limiting the Black electorate through brute force, intimidation, and sneaky tactics.¹⁵¹ Candidates and parties provided their own ballots, printed on different types of paper so that election officials could tell at a glance who was winning and manipulate the count, stuffing ballot boxes, buying votes, or deliberately slowing the proceedings so the polls closed before everyone could vote. In *Grandeers of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia* (2013), Brent Tarter describes the many methods of voter fraud: separate ballot boxes for different political parties, different lines for white and Black voters, harassment of Black voters, just for starters.¹⁵²

The Republican newspaper *Valley Virginian* wrote dispiritedly that the 1885 state elections had proven in many instances to be “a burlesque upon a free and fair ballot and an honest count.” They noted that at one Norfolk polling center, the Democrat officials cross-examined each voter on his qualifications, deliberately wasting time so that the polls closed before the officials could register the ballots of Republicans waiting in line. Richmond officials used the same strategies, and the *Valley Virginian* reported on the elections in Rockbridge County:

Men who had been voting there all of their lives, and were as well known as any in the community, were not permitted to vote because a lead pencil had been drawn across their names on the registration books. The registrar himself testified that he was unable to

¹⁵¹ Morgan J. Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974): 29.

¹⁵² Tarter, *The Grandeers of Government*, 262-3.

explain the erasure and was perfectly satisfied that it had been done unlawfully. . . the Democratic judges refused to receive the ballots, and by this and other means, equally as glaring and illegal, thirty-eight Republican voters were denied the exercise of suffrage.¹⁵³

The only way a non-Democratic political party could come to power was if they could guarantee a fair ballot, and they lost hope of this after the defeat of the Lodge Elections Bill in Congress. Writing in *The Shaping of Southern Politics* (1974), Morgan J. Kousser explains that Northern Republicans oscillated between two southern strategies: expansion of southern industry through protective tariffs and improvement of infrastructure, and appealing to a lower-class white and African American base by promising to provide welfare and safeguard fair elections.¹⁵⁴ Southern Democrats limited Republican influence by gerrymandering electoral districts and meddling in Republican affairs, all but eliminating the Republican Party in the southern states.¹⁵⁵ When Democrats in the federal government succeeded in doing away with laws protecting the ballot in 1894, the National Republicans did not put up a fight and abandoned their fair elections platform. The Grand Old Party did not need the southern Black vote, anyway. To control the federal government, they need not carry even a single southern congressional district, and to continue to advocate for African American rights was to risk alienating Northern racists.¹⁵⁶

Virginia Democrats seized the opportunity. A decade after the Anderson-McCormick Act, the General Assembly passed the Walton Act, stipulating that the government had to provide the ballots and list all candidates. The new ballots had no party names or symbols, but they still allowed for fraud as voters had less than three minutes to mark which candidates they were *not* voting for. If a voter was illiterate, Democratically-selected election officials could assist them. If

¹⁵³ "Methods of Election," *Valley Virginian*, November 12, 1885.

¹⁵⁴ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 149.

¹⁵⁶ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 32.

the voter did not draw the line precisely three-quarters of the way through the name, the ballot did not count.¹⁵⁷ In an article about the results of the 1894 elections, the *Richmond Dispatch* commented:

The Walton law seems to give satisfaction, except to the Republicans. . . . The negroes scratched their ballots all sorts of ways. Some ballots had all the names marked off . . . others had only marked off one name, leaving the other names on the ballot, while a good many negroes voted for McKenney. They are said to have done their own scratching on the ballots without asking the aid of the constable. The election was very quiet and the vote light.¹⁵⁸

Kousser demonstrates that the percentage of African Americans who voted in Virginia fell from 46% in 1893 to 2% in 1897.¹⁵⁹ Despite this, Virginian Republicans still persisted in rural areas and the mountain region, and legally could still overturn election results by contesting obvious voter fraud.¹⁶⁰ Democrats began agitating for a new state constitution in order to disenfranchise African Americans without resorting to illegal activity. Virginia Senator Carter Glass explained:

[Disenfranchisement through] fraud, no; by discrimination, yes. But it will be discrimination within the letter of the law, and not in violation of the law. Discrimination! Why, that is precisely what we propose; that, exactly, is what this Convention was elected for—to discriminate to the very extremity of permissible action under the limitations of the Federal Constitution, with a view to the elimination of every negro voter who can be gotten rid of, legally, without materially impairing the numerical strength of the white electorate. As has been said, we have accomplished our purpose strictly within the

¹⁵⁷ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 173.

¹⁵⁸ *Richmond Dispatch*, November 8, 1894.

¹⁵⁹ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 175.

¹⁶⁰ Tartar, *The Grandees of Government*, 264.

limitations of the Federal Constitution by legislating against the characteristics of the Black race, not against the 'race, color, or previous condition' of the people themselves.

It is a fine distinction. . .¹⁶¹

Southern politicians like Glass transformed the Republican Party and the Black vote into the boogeymen of state politics, preying on lower-class white fears of "Negro domination" to discourage class solidarity.¹⁶² Through racial fear mongering, Democrats persuaded working-class whites to support their own disenfranchisement in the name of eliminating Black Republicans from Virginia.

By 1899, Virginia Democrats felt that their position was stable enough to call for a constitutional convention, scheduling the referendum so it did not coincide with state or national elections, but with local office elections, limiting opposition turn-out. Democrats supplied the ballots, on which they printed only three words: "For the Convention." To approve the convention, voters need only submit the ballot without making any changes to it. To vote against it, voters had to scratch out all three words without making any other marks on the ballot.¹⁶³

The convention met intermittently for over a year between 1901 and 1902, and decided to approve the new constitution without putting it to the voters the delegates were disenfranchising. They established a suffrage plan with extensive residency requirements and required payment of a poll tax six months in advance, which could accumulate over three years. It enfranchised only three groups before 1904: soldiers and their sons, men with more than \$333 worth of property, and men literate enough to reasonably explain at least some part of the Constitution. After 1904, potential voters had to pass a literacy test without help. The new constitution limited the electorate so severely that between 1905 and 1948, state employees and office holders made up

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Smith, "A Fine Discrimination Indeed," 26.

¹⁶² Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 149.

¹⁶³ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 177, 16.

almost one-third of the votes in state elections.¹⁶⁴ The Black newspaper the *Richmond Planet* wrote scathingly of the new constitution, “There is scarcely a sensible man in the state who doesn’t wish that it had been drowned before it was born.” Voter fraud and disenfranchisement was already so rampant, however, that the *Richmond Planet* contends that, despite Glass’ promises, the new voter provisions hurt more white voters than Black:

The result is that the white man has been dancing a jig ever since his unconstitutional “Constitutional” Convention began its sessions and he is hoping and praying that somebody will take the matter into the courts and thus relieve him of the most unfortunate predicament in which he now finds himself. The new instrument is bad enough for colored folks, but from our point of observation from the howls now coming from the white man’s barn-yard, it had done most damage in that quarter.¹⁶⁵

But after the turn of the century and the mass disenfranchisement of Black men, African American participation in state government became an impossibility. They could not even rely on the federal government for aid and recognition, as the new constitution had made disenfranchisement legal and therefore legitimate, even in the eyes of Northern politicians. Republicans in Congress bowed to pressure from racist Southerners and dropped Black rights from their party platform.¹⁶⁶

Mass disenfranchisement and the dominance of white Democrats in Virginia and the other southern states differentiated southern Progressivism from the national reform movement. Progressive politics and reform movements were now (then?) contained within a single political party that actively worked to limit public power and constrain the government’s involvement in

¹⁶⁴ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 180-1.

¹⁶⁵ “Hurts White Folks Most,” *Richmond Planet*, July 5, 1902.

¹⁶⁶ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 228, 263.

citizens' lives.¹⁶⁷ Candidates no longer needed to appeal to a wide range of voters, empowering interest groups like the Anti-Saloon League and other reform organizations. The lower classes, including the white working class and African Americans, had no means to push through reforms and statutes that might empower them or improve their quality of life. Disenfranchisement and the new single-party political system created a stage for white middle-class Progressives.¹⁶⁸

In fact, to southern Democrats and Progressives within the state government, the disenfranchisement and later segregation of African Americans in the twentieth century represented a type of governmental reform and reflected the state's increased participation in public life. Disenfranchisement solved what Southerners called the "negro problem," the political empowerment of several million Black men after the Civil War, who white Southerners considered to be ignorant, corrupt, and ill suited for politics.¹⁶⁹ After the Supreme Court's decision on *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, the state of Virginia passed its first segregation law in 1900, just as the state was officially codifying Black disenfranchisement in its new constitution. Though there had been little to no public demand for segregation statutes, the *Richmond Dispatch* wrote favorably of the proposed bill to segregate railcars in January:

. . .it is said that in the interests of education we ought to be willing to allow the present condition of things to continue, so that the Black man may profit by observing the habits and demeanor of the white man. The answer to that is, we have been doing that very thing for thirty-odd years and we cannot see where it has been productive of much good. . . In hesitating so long about ordering separate cars— "Jim Crow cars," they are popularly

¹⁶⁷ Grantham, "The Contours of Southern Progressivism," 1040; Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 186.

¹⁶⁸ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 228; Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 95.

¹⁶⁹ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 101.

called— our patience has endured long than that of most of our southern brethren. Down South the separate car law is the rule, and not the exception. . .¹⁷⁰

After the General Assembly segregated railroad cars, they moved on to street cars and residential neighborhoods, ignoring protests from the Black communities of Richmond and Norfolk. White southern Democrats relied on disenfranchisement and segregation to deny state services to African American communities; when the state roused itself to look after the welfare of its citizens, resources meant to aid the polity at large went almost entirely to the white middle class. At the same time, the legislature allocated resources to programs that exacerbated and made racial inequality systematic. The 1900s and the 1910s were still the early days of Jim Crow segregation in Virginia, however; the state would pass most of its segregation legislation in the twenties and thirties.¹⁷¹

White middle-class Progressives believed they were creating a more orderly, cohesive community in order to pave the way for new economic development. In her monograph exploring interracial cooperation in Progressive-Era Virginia *The Uplift Generation* (2017), Clayton McClure Brooks comments that white reformers such as these believed in segregation as a Progressive reform and desired to “mold and strengthen” Black society “in a socially responsible manner.” Black segregation and disenfranchisement was necessary to stabilize Virginia society, making it possible for Progressives to focus on other issues. They campaigned against government corruption, machine politics, and business monopolies and advocated for ethical business practices and the preservation of white middle-class moral values.¹⁷² J. Douglas Smith, author of *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (2002), describes this as “business progressivism.” Progressive businessmen and their

¹⁷⁰ “Separate Cars,” *Richmond Dispatch*, January 9, 1900.

¹⁷¹ Smith, “A Fine Discrimination Indeed,” 28, 30; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 148-9.

¹⁷² Brooks, *The Uplift Generation*, 100; Grantham, “The Contours of Southern Progressivism,” 1044-6.

wives promoted better education and prison reform to give their support of segregation a “veneer of civility.”¹⁷³

Progressive Paternalism and Racial Uplift

Some southern reformers working in the private sector argued against segregation, blending white supremacy rhetoric with the language of uplifting African Americans, buying into the idea that racial enslavement had civilized African Americans and fostered their development. Orra Langhorne believed it, saying, “Many fine and beautiful characters were developed among the negroes by intimate association with their owners. While Northern women were organizing associations for setting the negro free, their southern sisters were fitting the slaves for freedom.”¹⁷⁴ They wished to help Black Southerners *without* politically empowering them; late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social science dictated that African Americans were genetically inferior to whites and incapable of the responsibility and ability necessary for citizenship. In a lengthy *Richmond Planet* column protesting the segregation of railway cars, an anonymous Virginian maintained that segregation would upset Virginia’s “cordial” race relations, writing, “They stand with us like children. Looking to the future, and mainly to the comfort, prosperity, and happiness of the master race, it seems to me that this relation of confidence and affection ought to be strengthened and encouraged.” African Americans were their faithful servants, they wrote, and segregation would upset the “harmony and happiness” of Virginia society.¹⁷⁵ Progressives like Langhorne believed that in order for African Americans’ condition to improve, their culture had to fundamentally change in order to match white middle-class

¹⁷³ Smith, “A Fine Discrimination Indeed,” 30.

¹⁷⁴ Langhorne, “Changes in a Half-Century in Virginia,” 4.

¹⁷⁵ “‘Jim Crow’ Segregated Coaches,” *Richmond Planet*, January 27, 1900.

standards and values. One of the best ways to bring about this change, they thought, was through extended exposure to middle-class white Southerners, mostly as domestic servants.¹⁷⁶

This particular brand of reformer was more likely to be from a slaveholding family; they remembered how white families had taken “care” of enslaved African Americans before the war, and wished to emulate that paternalistic relationship.¹⁷⁷ Letitia Burwell believed that southern whites were “peculiarly adapted” to dominion over African Americans, and recalled that her mother had often said before the Civil War that God had bestowed a duty upon slaveholders to take care of African Americans. After Emancipation, she wrote in 1895, southern Blacks “found themselves for the first time in their lives” without a “class of people” invested in their welfare.¹⁷⁸ This was a common enough view among the old white elite that the *Richmond Planet* complained that it was “new issue white folks” who were advocates of segregation: “But, sir, we always find a friend in the offsprings of the old slave-holders.” These paternalistic reformers offered southern African Americans guidance and aid, as well as the resources African American communities sorely needed, as long as Black Virginians submitted to white rule, worked in white homes, and committed to white middle-class values like thrift and usefulness.¹⁷⁹

These paternalistic white reformers worked closely with African American activists who followed Booker T. Washington’s example and believed that if they worked hard enough and committed to white middle-class values, they could prove their worth and achieve racial equality. In his “Atlanta Compromise” speech in 1895, Washington called for African Americans to devote themselves to work and to find satisfaction in working-class professions, before striving for political equality:

¹⁷⁶ Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 65, 69-70.

¹⁷⁷ Brooks, *The Uplift Generation*, 105.

¹⁷⁸ Burwell, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia*, 62, 184.

¹⁷⁹ *Richmond Planet*, January 6 1900; Grantham, “The Contours of Southern Progressivism,” 1048.

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than artificial forcing. . . . It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges.¹⁸⁰

Booker T. Washington and his fellows had the best intentions, founding private institutions and industrial schools like Tuskegee for Black students and working closely with white paternalist reformers.¹⁸¹ They tried to provide for their communities when federal and state institutions refused to aid African Americans. Black organizations and clubs, created over a network of families and churches, established in the last decades of the nineteenth century devoted themselves to temperance advocacy, education projects, social welfare, and suffrage. They embraced collective responsibility and became pillars of their communities.¹⁸²

Gilmore, however, explains that this mindset did more harm than good in the long term. Washington's rhetoric relied on merit, the idea that African Americans had to earn their political equality, which struck a chord with many middle-class African Americans' beliefs. They saw themselves as "the ambassadors to the white power structure." But it meant that middle-class African Americans were constantly having to prove themselves to white Southerners, who might not prioritize class over race and give middle-class African Americans the respect and approval they were seeking (sought?). Even if a Black man's conduct was exemplary, in white Southerners' eyes, he was still accountable for the conduct of all African Americans. In turn, these middle-class Black men and women began to police the behavior of working-class African

¹⁸⁰ Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Exposition Speech," (Atlanta, Georgia, September 18, 1895).

¹⁸¹ Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (September 1991): 560

¹⁸² Thomas, *New Women in Alabama*, 69; Brown, "Womanist Consciousness," 619.

Americans, preaching morality and fracturing the collective consciousness of southern Black communities.¹⁸³

Black industrial schools across the South catered to Washington's ideas of racial uplift. Industrial schools, like Washington's alma mater the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, focused on vocational training over a classical education. They expected their graduates to use their education not just to further their own careers, but to create more opportunities for all African Americans.¹⁸⁴ Graduate of Hampton Institute and President of Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, Janie Porter Barrett recalled how much the school emphasized racial uplift: "At the Institute we were always hearing about our duty to our race, and I got so tired of that! Why, on Sundays I used to wake up and say to myself, 'Today I don't have to do a single thing for my race.'"¹⁸⁵

The prevalence of industrial schools attracted the attention of white philanthropists who believed that vocational training was the best way to "civilize" African Americans, draining funding away from more classical schools that might have better prepared their students for political leadership. Industrial schools often exaggerated their students' lack of skills in order to gain more funding, exacerbating stereotypes on Black behavior.¹⁸⁶ A white member of the Georgia Educational League told the Atlanta Constitution in 1899 that only industrial and religious educations were useful to African Americans, complaining that ". . . To educate [African Americans] in the classics would be and is proving ruinous." The Black colleges in Atlanta had,

¹⁸³ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 62-3.

¹⁸⁴ Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 7, 11-5.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Florence Lattimore, *A Palace of Delight: The Locust Street Settlement for Negroes at Hampton, Virginia* (Hampton, VA: The Press of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1915), 6.

¹⁸⁶ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 138; For more on industrial schools' fundraising efforts among white philanthropists, see Troy A. Smith, "Not Just the Raising of Money: Hampton Institute and Relationship Fundraising, 1893-1917," *History of Education Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (February 2021): 63-93.

by giving their students classical educations, made them “impudent” and unwilling to work.¹⁸⁷

Industrial schools, on the other hand, emphasized the value of labor and imbued their students with more tangible, blue-collar skills; women’s industrial schools especially espoused the benefits of domestic training. Because of its focus on menial labor, industrial education systems appeared less threatening to proponents of Jim Crow.¹⁸⁸

Turn-of-the-century racial uplift ideology stressed domesticity and good homes rhetoric, giving Southern Black women new importance and leadership roles within Black communities. As the Progressive movement accelerated in Virginia, Black Virginia women would devote themselves to Progressive reform and work closely, if not congenially, with Progressive white women.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Mary Jane Smith, “The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity within the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1895-1902,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (2010): 497.

¹⁸⁸ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 26.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROGRESSIVE WOMEN IN VIRGINIA

As they had in the North, women made up a large portion of the southern Progressive movement. Elisabeth Israels Perry argues in her 2002 article “Men Are from the Gilded Age, Women Are from the Progressive Era” that women were a key component of the movement and laments the lack of women’s perspective in the Progressive historiography. She notes that in the 1980s, only a few women such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Frances Willard appeared routinely in Progressive historical works. Until social history changed historiography forever in the 1990s, most Progressive historians failed to “convey the centralities of women’s experiences, ideas, and activities to Progressivism.”¹⁸⁹ Nineties historians like Glenda Gilmore and Mary Martha Thomas were among the first to explore Southern women’s leading role in the Progressive era. In 1992, Thomas published *The New Women of Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1890-1920*; in it, she argues that while Progressive men were more concerned with social control, Progressive women’s efforts focused more on social justice, compensating for their lack of political power.¹⁹⁰

Gilmore concurs with Perry, writing that women did the lion’s share of Progressive work and activism on the national scale and had a fundamental part in creating not only Progressive organizations, but also Progressive ideology. Progressive women of both races named the problems created by urbanization and industrial capitalism and pushed the boundaries of public and private, redefining the state’s duty to its citizens. Progressive women’s organizations became the vehicles for private solutions, aiding the public when governments at the local and state levels were slow to act.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Elisabeth Israels Perry, “Men Are from the Gilded Age, Women are From the Progressive Era,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era* 1, no. 1 (January 2002): 29.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas, *The New Women of Alabama*, 3-4.

¹⁹¹ Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?*, 13-4.

In the southern states, women began taking steps toward the Progressive movement as early as the 1870s. Many received educations that would have been barred to women before the Civil War. Others, like Mary Cooke Branch Munford, born to a wealthy Richmond family just after Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, chafed against their limited educational opportunities. Taught separately from men, many white women were deprived of the classical education that was so crucial to traditional leadership training. Virginia novelist Ellen Glasgow complained that elite white women's education "was founded upon the simple theory that the less a girl knew about life, the better she would be able to contend with it. . . ." ¹⁹² Middle- and upper-class women who wished to further their education after the end of Reconstruction joined women's clubs committed to cultural and intellectual enrichment. One women's club newspaper *The Women's Era* read, "Clubs make women read and think in order that they not sit like idiots when some bright paper is being read." Members attended lectures led by invited speakers or other club members and discussed literature, culture, and current events. ¹⁹³

Gilmore explains that African American women in particular saw education as the "key to class mobility." They joined clubs devoted to literature, music, and art. They believed that enslavement had denied them the intellectual growth necessary for character development, and dedicated themselves to learning and participating in upper-class culture of the late 1800s and early 1900s. ¹⁹⁴ Many Black middle-class women went to college; a diploma was a class marker recognizable to whites. Before vocational training overtook classical learning at Black colleges, Black women earned an education through co-education with Black men that would have been

¹⁹² Quoted by Mary Gathright Newell, "Mary Munford and Higher Education for Women in Virginia" in *Stepping off the Pedestal: Academic Women in the South*, ed. Patricia A. Stringer and Irene Thompson (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1982): 28.

¹⁹³ Theda Skocpol, "Expanding the Separate Sphere: Women's Civic Action and Political Reforms in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): 328.

¹⁹⁴ Deborah Gray White, "The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism" in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993): 261.

rare among white women. Black proponents of liberal arts education, W.E.B. Du Bois chief among them, believed that African Americans should have access to the classical education that middle- and upper-class white men received. Du Bois consistently opposed Booker T. Washington's equality-through-work perspective. He argued that the Talented Tenth, "the best and most capable of [the] youth," must attend liberal arts colleges so they may uplift African Americans through political advocacy work, rather than labor.¹⁹⁵ African American women enthusiastically joined the mission; their time at college armed them with leadership skills, the reformist zeal to solve problems, and the intellect to find solutions.¹⁹⁶

Southern churches and religious organizations were instrumental in the women's club movement. According to Theda Skocpol, author of *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (1992), American gender roles dictated that women were inherently more pious than men, and church congregations usually had more female members than male.¹⁹⁷ Pastors responded by tailoring their sermons for women, speaking less about fire and brimstone and more about God's love and forgiveness. At first female members kept to the church, teaching Sunday school and providing care for sick members of the congregation. But brimming with sisterly compassion for their social lessers, southern churchwomen began to organize into charity groups, joining missionary societies and other reform groups such as the national Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).¹⁹⁸ Both white and Black women turned churches into places of social change and reform and transformed Southern reforms into issues of morality and religion. Ora Brown Stokes, the wife of

¹⁹⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of Today*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott, 1903).

¹⁹⁶ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 14, 45; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 20.

¹⁹⁷ Skocpol, "Expanding the Separate Sphere," 324.

¹⁹⁸ Mary Frederickson, "'Each One is Dependent Upon the Other': Southern Churchwomen, Racial Reform, and the Process of Transformation, 1880-1940," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993): 302-3.

the pastor of one of Richmond's leading Black churches, Ebenezer Baptist, wrote of the importance of women of color's hard work within the church:

In well-organized churches. . . women (for the membership is largely made up of women) contribute monthly in their own meetings. They have visiting, sick, and neighborhood committees to which the pastor reports all needy cases that come under his notice. These committees investigate immediately and render the necessary aid.¹⁹⁹

They energetically tackled problems such as public health, the lack of public education in the South, women's working conditions, and child labor.²⁰⁰ Born in 1882, Stokes was the daughter of a Fredericksburg preacher. After graduating high school, she trained as a teacher at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute; she taught for two years before she married William Herbert Stokes and enthusiastically joined the Ebenezer Baptist community. Through the church, she became a dedicated reformer who spent over three decades serving the residents of Jackson Ward, Richmond's African American neighborhood.²⁰¹

African American churches served as the focal points of the community and racial uplift. In her work studying the role of the Black Baptist church in the women's movement *Righteous Discontent* (1993), Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues that the Black Baptist church served as the bridge between the public and private arenas. The church produced community values and provided structure for organizing peoples' lives and addressing the needs of the community. As the state government disenfranchised African Americans, local churches became the central institutions of "a community under assault."²⁰² Southern Black women used the church to gather resources, establish local schools, and help out other community members by taking care of

¹⁹⁹ Ora Brown Stokes, "The Negro Woman's Religious Activity," *Report of Fifteenth Annual Hampton Negro Conference*, (July 19, 1911): 60.

²⁰⁰ Grantham, "Contours of Southern Progressivism," 1039.

²⁰¹ Ray Bonis, "Ora E. Brown Stokes," online DVB.

²⁰² Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 5, 8-9.

housing, social welfare, and financial issues. Higginbotham explains that the significance of the church rose as college-educated women took on more and more leadership responsibilities within the community. College-educated Baptist women used the church to disseminate middle-class morals among the less-educated community members while also raising funds for the church's social welfare programs.²⁰³ Women in the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church fulfilled much the same role. They believed it was their duty to "Christianize" their people; they taught them to read and write, how to vote and access public resources, as well as to abstain from alcohol and other vices.²⁰⁴

Unlike many white women who advocated for reform from the church, Black churchwomen were not as financially stable, and they raised less money because Black congregations did not have the resources white churches did. Many were employed, usually working as teachers, and they usually had larger families. In "'Each One is Dependent on the Other': Southern Churchwomen, Racial Reform, and the Process of Transformation, 1880-1940" (1993), Mary Frederickson points out that many middle- and upper-class white women could participate so fully in the reform movement only because Black women did their domestic labor for them, including the care of children, and were paid very little for their efforts.²⁰⁵

Municipal Housekeeping

Through education and by working for social change, southern churchwomen developed both as individuals and members of a collective. Munford herself made a direct connection between women's education and the Progressive movement, writing:

²⁰³ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 19-20.

²⁰⁴ Frederickson, "'Each One is Dependent Upon the Other,'" 296, 304.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

The lack of facility for advanced mental training, and the conservative opinion in the South with reference to women's being the public eye, have operated to retard the development among them of the more scientific study of social problems, characteristic of our present age, and to cause such social work as they have undertaken to appear, as a rule, in their less advanced and less highly developed forms.²⁰⁶

Frederickson describes female reformers in the church as empowered by "their belief in women's civic and religious responsibility." So many women joined the southern Progressive movement via the church that by the 1920s, Progressives recognized them as instrumental leaders in reform, part of a wider network of both religious and secular women's organizations dedicated to social change in the South.²⁰⁷ In 1902, the daughter of Frederick Douglass, Mrs. R.D. Sprague, wrote that the turn of the century was "unquestionably the women's era" and praised "the missionary spirit" of the many Black women's organizations that were "tending to the amelioration of existing conditions surrounding her race."²⁰⁸

Women's self-edification groups and southern churchwomen's organizations evolved into a national women's club movement. Soon they were no longer simply providing charity or services, but petitioning the government for change. Letitia Burwell commented on women's inexorably increasing independence:

[Before the war,] the parents of a girl would have shuddered at the thought of her venturing for a day's journey without an escort on a railway car, being jostled in a public

²⁰⁶ Mary Cooke Branch Munford, "Women's Part in the Educational Progress of the South" in *The South in the Building of the Nation: A History of the Southern States Designed to Record the South's Part in the Making of the American Nation; To Portray the Character and Genius, to Chronicle the Achievements and Progress and to Illustrate the Life and Traditions of the Southern People*, ed. J.A.C. Chandler et al (Richmond: Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909): 639-40.

²⁰⁷ Frederickson, "Each One is Dependent Upon the Other," 296.

²⁰⁸ R.D. Sprague, "What Role is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of her Race?" in *Twentieth Century Negro Literature; or, A Cyclopedia of Thought of the Vital Topics Relating to the American Negro, by One Hundred of America's Greatest Negroes*, ed. Daniel Wallace Culp (Naperville: J.L. Nichols and Co., 1902): 168-9.

crowd, or exposed in any way to indiscriminate contact with the outside world, while the proposition of a collegiate course for a woman would have shocked every sensibility of the opposite sex.²⁰⁹

Southern clubwomen ventured out of their own homes and devoted themselves to “municipal housekeeping,” using their domestic expertise to solve the problems of a rapidly industrializing society.²¹⁰ A pamphlet published by the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia reads:

The place of the Woman is in the Home. But merely to stay in the Home is not enough. She must care for the health and welfare moral as well as the physical [wellbeing] of her family. SHE is responsible for the cleanliness of the house. SHE is responsible for the wholesomeness of the food. SHE is responsible for the children's health. SHE is responsible above all for their morals. How far can the mother control these things?²¹¹

Municipal housekeeping justified women's participation in public projects like urban planning and development, programs for children's welfare, the establishment of settlement houses, labor and educational reforms, and electoral politics. Female reformers took advantage of ideas of gender norms and women's special place in society to expand the private sphere into the public world and find fulfillment as activists.²¹² One antisuffragist quoted in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* begrudgingly admitted that it was better for middle-class women to join clubs, which she believed were “overdone,” than to “share men's business responsibilities” or remain idle at home.²¹³

Civil War Soldiers' Aid Societies evolved into women's organizations that looked after the welfare of Confederate veterans and their descendents, like the United Daughters of the

²⁰⁹ Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia*, 195.

²¹⁰ Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama*, 4.

²¹¹ Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, *Woman in the Home* (Richmond, n.d.).

²¹² Nancy Hewitt, “Beyond the Search for Sisterhood,” 301.

²¹³ “Division of Labor is Far From Fair,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, November 28, 1909.

Confederacy (UDC) founded in 1894. These more conservative groups enabled white women to step outside of traditional gender roles and to play a large part in the creation of the New South while maintaining the ideals of traditional southern ladyhood. Karen Cox, author of *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (2003), explains that because the UDC's work commemorating the Confederacy did not jeopardize conservative southern gender norms, southern society at large accepted the UDC as another "extension of women's role as caretakers." Rhetorically, the UDC extended white women's roles as the "moral guardian of society" while also allowing its members political expression.²¹⁴

On the other end of the political spectrum, labor campaigns were considered too liberal for respectable middle- and upper-class white Southern women to participate in, despite the fact that labor activists shared many concerns with clubwomen. One leading Richmond lady, Lila Meade Valentine, shocked her family and friends when she gave a speech in favor of women's suffrage to the Central Labor Council of Richmond.²¹⁵ Later, she wrote in letters to fellow members of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia that she was "inclined to think it far better to keep entirely clear of [labor] organizations." Valentine was anxious for the League to appear non-partisan, and labor unions skirted too close to socialism, which "savors of partisanship and . . . is a most unpopular policy among the rank and file [members of the Equal Suffrage League]." ²¹⁶ In "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political'" (1993), Eileen Boris notes that although white women's Progressive activism

²¹⁴ Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 9-10, 26; for more on early women's memorial associations, see Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008).

²¹⁵ Lloyd C. Taylor, Jr., "Lila Meade Valentine: The FFV as Reformer," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 70, no. 4 (October 1962): 483.

²¹⁶ Valentine to Mrs. Townsend, February 25, 1915, and Valentine to Mrs. C.B. Townsend, July 2, 1915, ESL Records.

opposed industrial capitalism and the problems it wrought on lower-class society, middle- and upper-class activists like Valentine disdained mothers who worked in factories. They believed that waged labor had no place in the home and “degraded motherhood, childhood, and family life.” They did not recognize that waged labor allowed working-class mothers to support their families, and worked to limit the hours working-class women worked without raising their pay.²¹⁷ White Virginia society did not sanction welfare activism that edged too close to labor relations or civil rights.²¹⁸

Valentine devoted herself to many public projects. Born in 1865, a “war baby,” she was descended from two prominent Virginia families.²¹⁹ Like Munford, Valentine was denied the opportunity to attend a formal college, but educated herself from her father’s library. She married Benjamin Batchelder Valentine, who shared her love of learning and hired tutors for her. Her reformist zeal, however, came to the forefront after a long trip in England, where the Valentines witnessed new currents of liberalism and women’s activism unseen in Virginia. Valentine returned to the United States determined to spark a reform movement among the women of the Old Dominion.²²⁰

In 1900 Valentine worked with Mary Munford to establish the Richmond Education Association “to create and foster an interest in education of children and to furnish such exhibits and hold such lectures as may best further this purpose,” according to the *Richmond Times*.²²¹ The association advocated for a public kindergarten system and established a training facility for kindergarten teachers. Less than two years after Munford and Valentine created the association,

²¹⁷ Boris, “The Power of Motherhood,” 231.

²¹⁸ Gordon, “Black and White Visions of Welfare,” 562.

²¹⁹ Mary Maury Fitzgerald, “Lila Meade Valentine—A Torchbearer,” *Richmond Magazine* 17, no. 12 (June 1931): 13.

²²⁰ Taylor, “Lila Meade Valentine,” 473-4.

²²¹ “Benevolent Association is Granted Charter—Cases in the City Hall Courts,” *Richmond Times*, May 16, 1900.

Valentine successfully lobbied for six hundred thousand dollars from the City of Richmond in order to build a new high school. The old public school had been built in 1879 and nothing had been done to exterminate the vermin that infested it or make the building less of a fire hazard until Valentine intervened.²²²

As a member of the Women's Club of Richmond, Valentine collaborated with the director of nurses at the Old Dominion Hospital, Sadie Heath Cabiness. In 1900 Cabiness founded the Nurses' Settlement, a volunteer association of nurses that sought to teach the basics of hygiene, or "the art of keeping clean," in order to lower the high rates of readmission to hospital wards.²²³ Nurses and social workers at the settlement visited the homes of impoverished patients, taught classes on childcare, hygiene, and cooking, organized community recreation activities, and provided on-site training to nurses and other female professionals.²²⁴ Together, the Women's Club and the Nurses' Settlement created the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association (IVNA) in 1903. Valentine was elected as president and board member of the IVNA until ill health forced her to resign.²²⁵ For the next two decades, until her death in 1921, Valentine campaigned tirelessly for progressive reform in Virginia.

Munford served as president of the Richmond Education Association from 1904 to 1911, and was a member of the Cooperative Education Association of Virginia. The state association dedicated itself to improving the quality of public schools across the state, in rural and urban areas, for white and Black students.²²⁶ The *Lexington Gazette* reported that members resolved to petition the General Assembly for funds for county schools in addition to preexisting educational funds, and advocated for the establishment of a college for Virginia women, "whereby Virginia's

²²² Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine," 475.

²²³ "Visiting Nurses—Gratifying Report of Work Done During the Year," *Richmond Times*, February 28, 1904.

²²⁴ Green, "Gendering the City, Gendering the Welfare State," 277.

²²⁵ Brent Tarter, "Lila Hardaway Meade Valentine," online DVB.

²²⁶ Frances S. Pollard, "Mary Cooke Munford Branch," online DVB.

daughters shall have the same opportunities as are now given her sons.’’²²⁷ As a member of the association, Munford advocated for a nine-month academic year, new high schools, industrial and vocational training, and increased training for teachers; she served as president of the Cooperative Education Association from 1910 to 1925, and in 1920 she was the first woman on Richmond’s school board.²²⁸

In 1910, there were only four state universities in Virginia and none of them accepted women. Most of the private women’s schools in the state were primarily preparatory schools. The most advanced education available to many Virginia women, both white and Black, was at a normal school, which provided training for positions at elementary schools. Munford founded the Co-Ordinate College League in order to lobby specifically for women to be allowed in state schools in 1914. Through coordinate colleges, female students would be able to attend essentially women’s colleges as part of state universities and would share facilities with the main college, but would not be taught alongside male students. Still, this gave Virginia women access to an education that was affordable and comparable to men’s education. This was considered less radical than coeducation. Members of the Co-Ordinate College League lobbied the state legislature for five separate bills, often appearing daily in the capitol, and had the support of the Virginia Association of Mothers’ Clubs and the United Daughters of the Confederacy.²²⁹ Despite the support Munford and the League received from other women’s organizations and out-of-state educators, coordinate colleges were still controversial; one opponent wrote:

Modernized as the University has become in many ways, it cherishes the old belief that women belong to its world only for social pleasures and inspiration. . . . But this new and would-be college woman who knocks now at its doors so persistently is entirely unrelated

²²⁷ “Educators in Lynchburg,” *Lexington Gazette*, December 6, 1905.

²²⁸ Pollard, “Mary Cooke Munford Branch,” online DVB.

²²⁹ Newell, “Mary Munford and Higher Education for Women in Virginia,” 31-2, 34-5.

to its social consciousness and in the main is an incomprehensible quantity to the University of Virginia alumnus, though, as often happens, she may be his daughter or sister.²³⁰

The General Assembly proved very resistant to the idea of even coordinate colleges, but in 1918, perhaps reading the writing on the wall and moving to preserve the University of Virginia as a space for white men only, the legislature passed a bill admitting women to the College of William and Mary. The president of the Board of Visitors, an ally of Munford's, quickly pushed through a measure allowing women to matriculate into graduate and professional programs at William and Mary. Munford might not have fully achieved her goals of coeducation in Virginia, but her relentless work still expanded women's educational opportunities significantly despite her own lack of formal education.²³¹

Valentine was the only woman on the Cooperative Education Association's executive committee. As she worked for the improvement of education in Richmond, Valentine saw the impact tuberculosis and general poor health had on Richmond students. Together with Cabiness and the IVNA, Valentine created the Anti-Tuberculosis Auxiliary. In 1910, the organization created the Pine Camp Tuberculosis Hospital.²³² Public health was an important aspect of women's Progressive activism across the nation. In, "Gendering the City, Gendering the Welfare State: The Nurses' Settlement of Richmond," Elna Green argues that the settlement became a vital social welfare institution in Richmond, a beacon of the women's reform movement in the South. By 1916, the nurses at the settlement saw over four thousand patients a year; 1,400 of

²³⁰ Quoted in Newell, "Mary Munford and Higher Education for Women in Virginia," 36.

²³¹ Newell, "Mary Munford and Higher Education for Women in Virginia," 37.

²³² Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine," 479-80.

those were African American. Seven of the twenty-four nurses on staff were Black women by 1930.²³³

Health reform constituted a vital component of racial uplift and the fight for civil rights, as state governments denied African Americans access to health services and the right to equal access to government resources. The mainstream, white-centered national public health movement campaigned for government programs of cash relief and regulation of laws like the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Linda Gordon, author of “Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women’s Welfare Activism, 1890-1945” (1991), points out that the majority of the Black public health movement consisted of creating private institutions, “[providing] for their people what the white state would not.” Women of color worked to fill that gap in Black medical professionals that segregation had created, sponsoring and training midwives and nurses, as well as a few dentists and doctors.²³⁴

Interracial Cooperation

One of the more popular Progressive causes within the women’s club movement was temperance. Historians disagree about how the temperance movement and membership in the WCTU affected women and their evolution as public citizens: William A. Link in *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism* (1992) says that while Northern temperance workers became embroiled in politics and lobbied directly for Prohibition, southern white members of the WCTU were more cautious. They chose to focus less on legal prohibitive measures and more on

²³³ Green, “Gendering the City, Gendering the Welfare State,” 278, 289, 298.

²³⁴ Gordon, “Black and White Visions of Welfare,” 560; Susan L. Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women’s Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995): 2.

temperance education.²³⁵ A 1908 report by the president of the Virginia chapter of the WCTU, Sarah H. Hoge, explained that the “chief work” of their four thousand members was educational:

...distributing temperance literature, holding public meetings, holding elocutionary contests with strong temperance and prohibition selections, using the press, and in every possible way getting the people to *think* on the evil of the drink habit and liquor traffic.²³⁶

But even this relatively benign degree of public participation was new to southern women.

Published in the same year as *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, Thomas in *The New Women of Alabama* points out that for many southern women, the WCTU was their first experience in a public organization, a daring first step when many Southerners still considered the WCTU to be radical and inappropriate for good southern ladies.²³⁷

In *Gender and Jim Crow* four years later, Gilmore concurs with Thomas, describing how the WCTU challenged white southern women’s “sense of propriety” and asked them to “step beyond the pale of southern ladyhood.” Elna Green, author of *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Women Suffrage Question* (1997), argues that southern women’s participation in Progressive reform steered them toward the suffrage movement. Female reformers realized that without the vote, lawmakers would not take heed of their words and learned “to appreciate the need for more political clout.” The WCTU undeniably drew on the doctrine of domesticity and municipal housekeeping to expand the scope of the organization; they made temperance an issue with special importance to women, linking alcohol to domestic violence and women’s economic dependence on male relatives. By the late 1880s, the WCTU was involved in prison reforms, child labor and welfare, and education initiatives. Hoge noted with pride that the Virginia chapter

²³⁵ Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 45.

²³⁶ Mary E. Kuhl, Katharine Lent Stevenson, Frances W. Graham, Elizabeth Preston Anderson, Frances H. Ensign, and Sarah H. Hoge. “Organization and Accomplishments of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, and Virginia,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 32 (1908): 58.

²³⁷ Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama*, 13, 15, 32.

had successfully petitioned for a matron at the state penitentiary to oversee the female prisoners. Members conducted evangelical services at the penitentiary and managed mothers' clubs. The Virginia women preached temperance and distributed tracts to soldiers and sailors and in 1906 established a "rest room" for soldiers and sailors in Phoebus as an alternative to saloons. The WCTU exhibit at the 1907 Jamestown Exposition included a room filled with cots where tired women could rest. Hoge admitted that the work was not "showy," but she looked forward to future campaigns for state prohibition.²³⁸

No matter the extent to which the WCTU fostered white southern women's public ambitions, it played an important role as a large, interracial organization in the southern states. Temperance was a popular strain of reform among southern Black women. For Black female reformers, temperance promoted middle-class values and upper-class femininity, creating a bridge between their activism and their religious and class values. The WCTU and temperance rolled into the racial uplift movement; Gilmore explains that since Emancipation, white Southerners had predicted the moral corruption of African Americans, and they reacted smugly when African Americans were found inebriated in public.²³⁹ Newspapers like the *Daily Times* and the *Daily Dispatch* in Richmond listed the previous days' criminal trials, reporting the name of the defendant, if white or "colored," the charges, and, if found guilty, their punishment, usually a fine; the distinction of white or "colored" for every name contributed to racist stereotypes. For example, in the *Richmond Dispatch* on August 18, 1885, some of the court cases listed were, "W.A. Witten, drunk. Fined \$2.50. . . . Ellen Smith (colored), drunk. Fined \$2.50 and costs. . . . Sam. Twyman (colored), drunk and resisting the police. Fined \$20 and costs. . . .

²³⁸ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 47; Green, *Southern Strategies*, 3; Kuhl et al, "Organization and Accomplishments," 59-60.

²³⁹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 47.

Charlotte Washington, drunk. Fined \$5 and costs.”²⁴⁰ The Republican *Daily State Journal* in Alexandria noted that on one occasion in 1873 that there were many intoxicated people in the streets, both white and Black, but felt the need to admonish its Black readers in particular: “It is desirable that our colored citizens, everywhere, should try to be as sober, industrious, and saving as possible, that they may commend themselves in the approval of everyone. . . .” Newspapers did not castigate white citizens arrested for intoxication as bad representatives of their race. White southerners did not have to prove they were worthy of citizenship rights through good behavior.²⁴¹

Black women involved in racial uplift worried not only about the effect of alcohol on the Black family, but on racial progress. Their work in segregated chapters of the WCTU was meant to display the dignity, diligence and thrift, and good citizenship of the Black middle class. Within the structure of the WCTU, however, white activists thought of their “sisters in black” as junior members of the organization. White WCTU activists dismissed Black women’s abilities and treated them with condescension. Before the turn of the century and the mass disenfranchisement of African Americans, white women needed Black political power and believed that they could control the politics of Black temperance reformers. After the General Assembly ratified the Virginia Constitution of 1902, many white reformers stopped trying to work with Black temperance workers, dismissing their former allies as part of the “negro problem.” Some even blamed the failure of temperance legislation to pass on the African American vote, and welcomed their disenfranchisement.²⁴²

Many of the white reformers who worked with Black chapters of the WCTU were already involved in paternalist interracial reform, promoting African American racial uplift under

²⁴⁰ “Police Court” *Richmond Dispatch*, August 18, 1885.

²⁴¹ “Colored People—Holidays” *Evening State Journal*, June 9, 1873.

²⁴² Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 46-7, 49-50, 55, 59, 70.

white auspices.²⁴³ Frederickson in 1993 describes the relationships between white female paternalists like Orra Langhorne and Black racial uplift activists like Janie Porter Barrett as one of “mutual dependence.” African American advocates needed white women’s access to public resources, but white women relied on Black women for their help creating their reform programs and accomplishing interracial initiatives. Organizations like the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church needed to make their objectives and methods palatable, “accessible but not threatening,” to white women. But these interactions prolonged white feelings of superiority and of power “derived from their race and class,” giving white women undue credit for innovative Progressive agendas.²⁴⁴ In her article about the role of educated African American women, Sprague took the time to flatter white activists:

Happily for us there have been a considerable number of the white race who are mindful of what is due to those of a race whose tendencies are upward and onward. It is with feelings of deep gratitude, love and respect when we reflect upon the great work that was accomplished in the nineteenth century for the Negro by the truly great and good men and women of the white race.²⁴⁵

Sprague and other Black writers most likely felt the need to flatter their white sponsors for fear of white philanthropists withdrawing their support. Maggie Lena Walker, leader of the Independent Order of St. Luke, said much the same: “The white women of Richmond began it. You know what some of them have done here – women who stand at the top socially and who are leaders in the church and the club life of the city and state.” She credited white Progressive women with the genesis of community work among the Black communities of Richmond,

²⁴³ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 50.

²⁴⁴ Frederickson, “Each One is Dependent Upon the Other,” 297-8.

²⁴⁵ Sprague, “What Role is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of her Race?,” 169.

saying, “the white women do not work for us; they work with us. . .”²⁴⁶ White women always described themselves as helping Black women, and would not admit to relying on them and their expertise. Black women relied on what Darlene Clark Hine calls the “dynamics of dissemblance” to protect their inner lives and selves from white eyes:

. . .creating the appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings, while actually remaining an enigma. . . . A secret, undisclosed persona allowed the individual Black woman to function, to work effectively as a domestic in white households, to bear and rear children, . . . to support churches, to found institutions, and to engage in social service activities, all while living within a clearly hostile white, patriarchal, middle-class America.²⁴⁷

At the same time, according to Patricia Beaver in “Women in Appalachia and the South,” African American women played into stereotypes about Black behavior and deference to whites, “manipulating white blindness to Black agency” to achieve their goals of “political legitimacy” and Black progress as a community.²⁴⁸

Frederickson and Gilmore remind us that interracial cooperation and race-based animosity were not mutually exclusive. Even Orra Langhorne, who took every opportunity to glorify the Old Dominion, consistently referred to African Americans as “barbarous” and lamented the loss of close relationships between enslaver and enslaved, entreated her fellow Southerners in 1880 to halt the segregation of schools:

The negro has been our faithful servant for more than two hundred years; our dependence in peace, the protector of our families in time of war. Our tutelage as his owner is ended;

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Sadie Iola Daniel, *Women Builders* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1931; New York: G.K. Hall, 1997): 50.

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Frederickson, “Each One is Dependent Upon the Other,” 298; Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 915-6.

²⁴⁸ Patricia Beaver, “Women of Appalachia and the South: Gender, Race, Region, and Agency,” *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 3 (October 1999): xxii.

by the will of God he is become our fellow-citizen. Let us truly accord him “equal rights,” and by “social toleration and social sympathy,” render him worthy the high privileges emancipation has bestowed upon him. . .²⁴⁹

Though the interactions between white and Black women in the reform movement were complex and emotionally charged at the best of times, the very fact that they cooperated at all disrupted white supremacist values as white women came to know Black women. However blind some white paternalists might have been to reality, they were trying to help. By coming to know members of the Black community in Virginia as colleagues, white female reformers became at least slightly less susceptible to white supremacist political rhetoric.²⁵⁰

Munford was one such white paternalist, a proponent of women’s education and “devotee of the Lost Cause” according to Brooks in *The Uplift Generation*. Unlike Langhorne, who was in her twenties when the Confederacy fell, Munford was born just after the Civil War. Her father was a lieutenant-colonel in the Confederate army and her maternal grandfather was a slaveholder, though Munford’s nephew and author of her biography *Sunrise in the South* (1942) refers to the people he enslaved as “Negro servants.” In 1893 she married Beverly Munford, who dedicated his book *Virginia’s Attitude Toward Slavery and Secession* (1909) to her. The book, which became a staple in Virginia classrooms, simultaneously justified slavery as humane, downplayed the cruelties of slavery in Virginia, and blamed the Civil War on northern aggression. Mrs. Munford no doubt shared her husband’s opinions on the Confederacy and the Lost Cause. Her nephew comments in *Sunrise in the South* that the couple “had similar traditions and loyalties, and at the same time his impulses were liberal and forward-thinking, as hers were.” They believed that because of their families’ status as members of the southern aristocracy, they

²⁴⁹ Orra Langhorne, “Colored Schools in Virginia,” *Journal of Social Science* 11 (1880): 40, 44-5.

²⁵⁰ Frederickson, “Each One is Dependent Upon the Other,” 297, 300; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 172.

could and should speak on behalf of Black Virginians. The Munfords were concerned both with educational reform and racial uplift. Beverly Munford had a position on the Hampton Institute's Board of Trustees before he died in 1910, and Mrs. Munford worked closely with the founder and president of the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, Janie Porter Barrett.²⁵¹

Racial Uplift Work

Janie Porter was born in Georgia; her mother was a housekeeper and seamstress for a wealthy white family. Janie grew up in the white family's home as an informally adopted member of the family. When she came of age, however, her biological mother sent her to the Hampton Institute, where she learned the tenets of racial uplift. After graduating in 1884, she accepted a position as a teacher in Hampton, Virginia and married Harris Barrett five years later. Together, they founded the Locust Street Social Settlement in their own home in Hampton. There they and other Hampton alumnae taught local African Americans, especially girls, how to make a home. Students at Locust Street could learn how to raise livestock, plant gardens, cook, bake, and preserve food, or take music and singing lessons. Those interested in furthering their education could even attend night classes there. The settlement quickly outgrew Barrett's home and in 1902 she and her husband built a small clubhouse on their own property; the Locust Street Settlement House became the new community center, kept up with funds raised by a women's auxiliary group of Hampton graduates. The second floor was dedicated to a workshop where Black homemakers could learn needlepoint, knitting, weaving, woodworking, as well as other handicrafts. The NAACP newspaper *The Crisis* reports that the crafters sold most of the items they made and contributed the proceeds to the community center, "but the chief benefit is in giving the boys, girls, and women the ennobling touch with the beautiful together with the power

²⁵¹ Walter Russell Bowie, *Sunrise in the South: The Life of Mary-Cooke Branch Munford* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1942): 9, 46, 51; Brooks, *The Uplift Generation*, 13-5, 105.

to earn a penny.” Barrett continued working at the Locust Street Settlement, what she called her “place of delight,” for almost a decade.²⁵²

In 1908, Barrett organized the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and quickly set about raising funds in order to purchase land in Hanover county and establish the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls. Barrett relied on interracial cooperation, creating a biracial board of trustees, of which Munford was a member along with the white president of the board Annie Moomaw Schmelz. Munford and other white members of the board successfully lobbied the General Assembly for funds, and the school opened its doors in 1915. Writing in an annual report of the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls, Schmelz said:

The beautiful spirit of the work all the way through, white and colored people working together in the spirit of Christian brotherhood, is not an asset that may be reckoned in dollars and cents, but it is no less real, and in its humble way it contributes its mite toward the establishment upon the earth the Kingdom of our Lord and Master.²⁵³

Barrett, Munford, and Schmelz continued to work closely together on the industrial school; according to Munford’s nephew Bowie, Barrett was “heartbroken” when Munford left the school’s board.²⁵⁴ Barrett herself praised Schmelz’s earnest approach to the cause, commenting that Schmelz spoke with her at “nearly” every meeting.²⁵⁵

Barrett and the Federation created the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls to provide a safe environment where delinquent Black girls dependent on the state could learn self

²⁵² Lily Hammond, *In the Vanguard of a Race* (New York: Council for Women for Home Missions and Missionary Education, 1922): 79-83; A.W. Hunton, “A Social Center at Hampton, VA,” *The Crisis* 4 (July 1912), 145.

²⁵³ Annie Moomaw Schmelz, “Report of the President to the Board of Trustees,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls* (Peake’s Turnout: Virginia State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1920): 9.

²⁵⁴ Bowie, *Sunrise in the South*, #.

²⁵⁵ Janie Porter Barrett, “Report of the Superintendent to the President and the Members of the Board of Trustees,” *First Annual Report of the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls* (Peake’s Turnout: Virginia State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1916): 15.

control and domestic skills. In the early 1910s, reformers estimated that there were about five hundred young Black girls in Virginia who needed care and rehabilitation; reformatory institutions already existed for delinquent white children and Black boys, but young girls had no place to go but prison. When an eight-year-old girl was sentenced to six months in jail, Barrett petitioned the judge to allow her to situate the child in an orphanage in Hampton; the judge reluctantly agreed, and Barrett took custody of the little girl and redoubled her fundraising efforts. The State Board of Welfare referred students to the Virginia Industrial School, admitting girls that they deemed incorrigible and who had nowhere else to go. If the school's residents exhibited good behavior and grades at the school, they were put on a two-year "parole" where they found jobs through the school. Over the course of their employment, the school required the parolees to send monthly reports as well as money that the school divided between a clothing allowance and a bank account created for the parolee. When they completed their parole, the girls left the school with letters of recommendation, a quality eighth-grade education, and money in their pockets.²⁵⁶

Like the Locust Street Settlement, the Virginia Industrial School had a domestic focus. In the fifth annual report on the status of the school in 1920, Barrett explained that it was through domestic training that their students would learn "means of self-support" as well as how to run their own households. The residents at the school performed all the domestic duties, including cooking meals, laundry, and sewing, as well as farm chores. Barrett and the school faculty ensured that the paroled students secured employment in respectable homes, as only commercial laundries and tobacco factories would hire Black women.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Wilma Peebles-Wilkins, "Janie Porter Barrett and the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls: Community Response to the Needs of African American Children," *Child Welfare* 74, no. 1 (January/February 1995): 144, 150, 154.

²⁵⁷ Janie Porter Barrett, "Report of the Superintendent to the Presidents and Members of the Board of Trustees," *Fifth Annual Report of the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls* (Peake's Turnout: Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, 1920):13; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 140-1.

Women's domesticity and the sanctity of the home played a large role in racial uplift ideology. Good homes rhetoric, as well as the campaigns against alcohol and sex work, was bound up in moral reform ideology: the evangelical Christian idea that individual characteristics and moral character determined one's place in society. Through this logic, the only way to effect social progress was through moral education, instead of restructuring societal institutions. After disenfranchisement, middle-class African Americans were struggling to prove themselves as citizens worthy of the vote. As the mothers of good potential citizens, it became Black mothers' special task to teach their children middle-class, Christian morals.²⁵⁸ Mrs. Sprague urged educated African American women to remain at home, "the greatest field for effective work," so they may instill the "cardinal attributes" of "industry, honesty, and morality" in their children. She lamented the fact that "few among us" were interested in "the maintenance of good government in the home," despite the fact that "the home life of the Negro has taken on a new significance during the past thirty or more years." Though Sprague's indictment of her fellow African American women might seem restrictive, her emphasis on Black motherhood which had so long been denied to enslaved African American women, challenged the white hierarchy that would rather have Black mothers working as servants in white homes than caring for their own children.²⁵⁹

Patronizing and paternalistic white reformers often insisted that Black homes and family life lacked integrity and virtue and encouraged industrial schools' focus on domesticity.²⁶⁰ While the work instilled the students and residents of the industrial schools with middle-class morals and social values, it also prepared Black women and girls solely for careers in the domestic

²⁵⁸ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 96-7.

²⁵⁹ Sprague, "What Role is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of her Race?," 170; Boris, "The Power of Motherhood," 236.

²⁶⁰ Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 75.

service. White Progressives' work at the Virginia Industrial School helped remove delinquent Black girls from the streets and overcrowded jails, and in return, they received a supply of well-trained Black domestic servants, transforming what had been a nuisance into a solution to the lack of quality servants that would work for them.²⁶¹ White reformers who collaborated with Black activists were often motivated by less than savory ideas about African Americans' proper place in southern society and the race's future. Other white female Progressives helped to establish Black kindergartens in order to prop up segregationist policies, believing that African Americans did not have the morals, intellect, or sensibilities for racial equality and integration into larger white Southern society.²⁶²

Black reformers turned the good homes rhetoric to their own advantage, making it a central tenet of racial uplift. They used it to advocate for school funding and state services that had been denied to African American communities.²⁶³ In July 1898, the *Washington Bee* printed a copy of the Hampton Conference's Report of Committee on Resolution:

The greatest evil which slavery inflicted upon the negro race was that it destroyed the home, the natural unit of all social development. Perhaps the chief progress of the race lies in the fact that out of this demoralized state of things they have established so many pure sweet homes, whose regime is regulated according to the highest Christian standards. . . . We congratulate the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute for the complete equipment of a department of domestic science; and believe that this step is as important as any which it has yet taken to upbuild the negro race.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Brooks, *The Uplift Generation*, 106.

²⁶² Smith, "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity," 497.

²⁶³ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 152.

²⁶⁴ "The Hampton Conference Report of Committee on Resolution," *The Washington Bee*, July 30, 1898.

Because home improvement began with Black women, the industrial education model gave women a special importance in racial uplift and emphasized aspects of female moral reform. The focus on domesticity reinforced African American women's presence in the public sphere and their positions as the primary leaders of the racial uplift movement.²⁶⁵

The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founded in 1896 by Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, expounded on the domestic focus of the Black women's movement and embodied Black women's position as racial uplift leaders. The NACW was the first secular Black women's organization with a national focus, founded on the principle of racial self-help.²⁶⁶ Barrett's Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Club belonged to the NACW, which by 1914 encompassed fifty thousand Black women across twenty-eight state federations and a thousand clubs. They embraced the tenets of racial uplift, devoting themselves to the sanctity of the home and the moral education of Black children.²⁶⁷ Mary Church Terrell said in 1899:

As an association, let us devote ourselves enthusiastically, conscientiously, to the children. . . Through the children of today, we must build a foundation of the next generation upon such a rock of integrity, morality, and strength, both of body and mind, that the floods of proscription, prejudice, and persecution may descend upon it in torrents, and yet it will not be moved. We hear a great deal about the race problem, and how to solve it. . . but the real solution of the race problem . . . lies in the children.²⁶⁸

Maggie Lena Walker agreed, describing how the Juvenile Branch of the Independent Order of St. Luke worked to instill values middle-class Christian values in its younger members:

²⁶⁵ White, "The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism," 252.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 247.

²⁶⁷ Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama*, 70-1.

²⁶⁸ Quoted in Peebles-Wilkins, "Janie Porter Barrett," 146.

We try to give them a sense of moral responsibility for [the wise use of money]. Of course, we can't do that without religious teaching. We teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the words of Christ, and some of the Psalms. We try to connect these things with everyday living and to show them that part of their duty in becoming independent is getting where they can help others. . .²⁶⁹

Female leaders in the Black women's club movement like Barrett, Terrell, Wells-Barnett, and Walker believed that their work with African American children was essential to the race. They saw Black middle-class women's morality as the backbone of African American society.²⁷⁰

Though moral reform gave Black women respectability and a platform for advocacy work, Deborah Gray White in "The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black Feminism" (1993) describes how moral issues like sexual exploitation exacerbated class divides. Moral reformers believed that slavery had left African American women depleted of morality and chastity.²⁷¹ They struggled to create a category of Black womanhood that could be "respected and protected," according to Brown in "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere." They hoped that a bourgeois persona completely separate from sex and the image of the hypersexualized enslaved woman would protect them and their communities from lynching and sexual violence at the hands of white men. Reformers sought to accomplish this through forays into more working-class Black neighborhoods to preach sexual purity and by making chastity a central tenet of what they taught at mothers' clubs, settlement houses, and schools for delinquent African American girls.²⁷² Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the NACW, spoke of the necessity of their work:

²⁶⁹ Quoted in Daniel, *Women Builders*, 37-8.

²⁷⁰ Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama*, 88.

²⁷¹ White, "The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism," 258.

²⁷² Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 144.

[Educated Black women] know they cannot escape altogether the consequences of the act of their most depraved sisters. They see that even if they are wicked enough to turn a deaf ear to the call of duty, both policy and self-preservation demand that they go down among the lowly, the illiterate, and even the vicious, to whom they are bound by ties of race and sex, and put forth every possible effort to reclaim them.²⁷³

Though some middle-class Black Progressives chafed at the idea of being lumped in with working-class and rural Black women, they had assumed the responsibility of reforming their race, and felt obligated to uplift all Black women. Racial solidarity overrode any class differences that separated them politically. White argues that middle-class and working-class Black women “were allied, not united.” They worked together because they shared a race and gender, not because they felt united by a shared culture.²⁷⁴ Higginbotham agrees, writing that the “zealous” middle-class Black reformers scoffed at the “folk” culture of the “poor, uneducated, and ‘unassimilated’ Black men and women” of the rural South. Educated reformers like Terrell and Walker never comprehended that rural working-class African Americans’ “failure” to live up to their bourgeois values and stubborn adherence to rural ways of life amounted to a different survival strategy and resistance to white domination.²⁷⁵

Writing on the heels of 1970s historians like Anne Firor Scott who lauded the high degree of interracial cooperation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women’s organizations, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn highlights the high degree of discrimination Black women faced in the club movement in both the South and in the national arena. In “Discrimination against Afro-American Women in the Woman’s Movement, 1830-1920” (1978), Terborg-Penn argues that Progressive women worked in racially-segregated spaces both because of discrimination and

²⁷³ Quoted in White, “The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism,” 260.

²⁷⁴ White, “The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism,” 259-60.

²⁷⁵ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 14-5.

the fact that Black women had a fundamentally different perspective than white female activists. Organizations like the NACW and the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's Clubs operated from a race-conscious point of view that white organizations lacked.²⁷⁶

Southern white club women in the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) worked to deny power and representation to Black clubwomen, refusing to welcome the NACW into the national organization. In 1900, just four years after Terrell and Wells-Barnett founded the NACW, southern white clubwomen in the GFWC blocked a Black woman from Boston, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, from serving as a delegate of the Black Women's Era Club in the GFWC's fifth biennial convention. When the Massachusetts state federation protested and formally introduced a resolution incorporating the Women's Era Club into the GFWC, white Georgia clubwomen rejected the resolution. They were determined for the GFWC to remain a segregated space, and ultimately they had their way: Mary Jane Smith in "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity within the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 1895-1902" (2010) explains that the General Federation ultimately chose "to define itself as a national organization" by prioritizing southern white women's continued participation over the memberships of Black women from all over the country.²⁷⁷

Although the white and Black women's clubs movements mirrored each other, Gilmore cautions us that it is vital to remember that Black and white clubwomen had very "different relationships to power." White middle-class women in the club movement could expect at least courtesy from men in power, if not respect. They were often lobbying their own "husbands, brothers, and sons" for services, and the needy they served were not their peers and were more

²⁷⁶ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830-1920," in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington: National University Publications, 1978; Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1997): 17.

²⁷⁷ Smith, "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity," 479-80.

like clients. Black clubwomen, on the other hand, had to approach state and local governments in different ways—Janie Porter Barrett had relied on Mary Munford and other sympathetic white women to speak to the General Assembly on behalf of the Industrial School for Colored Girls—because they were lobbying in order “to obtain services for their husbands, brothers, and sons.” But within Black communities, Black women’s club work emphasized their position as a distinct socio-political force, giving them a new sense of self-identity that went beyond even moral and domestic guardianship.²⁷⁸ White explains that over the course of more than two and a half centuries of enslavement, both Black men and women “endured incredible hardships . . . and . . . neither sex had gained any advantage,” rendering gender power dynamics within southern Black communities fundamentally different from those of the white middle-class. Greater gender equality for southern Black women empowered their Progressive activism: women of color claimed themselves as the leaders of the Black body politic and the ambassadors to the white community during the nadir of the African American experience in the United States.²⁷⁹

Black leaders’ dedication to racial uplift meant that it was their duty to help the community as a whole. They understood that class, race, and gender intersected, and allied themselves with rural and working-class African Americans, albeit sometimes reluctantly. To Black activists, “community” encompassed more than just friends and relatives who shared similar values, professions, or cultural traditions. In her study of African American community workers “‘If It Wasn’t for the Women. . .’: African American Women, Community Work, and Social Change” (1994), Cheryl Townsend Gilkes relies on James Blackwells’ definition of the Black community as one held together by both internal and external forces. Essentially disparate Black groups came together in communities in order to develop strategies and structures to

²⁷⁸ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 149; Boris, “The Power of Motherhood,” 214.

²⁷⁹ White, “The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism,” 251-3.

combat white oppression and racism and “to strengthen Black social, economic, and political institutions for group survival and advancement.” Black community workers like Barrett, Walker, Terrell, and Wells-Barnett were simultaneously confronting the external force of white racism and working to address the needs of their community members so that they might enable others to resist white oppression and lead meaningful lives.²⁸⁰ In a 1914 Hampton Leaflet “Community Work for Women and Girls,” Barrett wrote of the importance of community work and the idea of giving back to the community:

Women's clubs are all founded on the principle that women have large responsibilities, both in the home and out of the home. Many recognize the fact that they owe a great deal to their own families but they do not so often feel how much they owe to others in their community. Women's clubs aim to make the individual, the home, and the community more useful in every way.²⁸¹

Ora Brown Stokes agreed, writing vehemently, “We need Negro women who will place their ears very close to the very heart of social conditions to hear and answer the cry of the needy and depressed. We need more women who will refuse to be *parasites* in the home, church, and community.”²⁸² One of their Richmond peers in particular devoted herself to this community mindset: Maggie Lena Walker. Born in Richmond in 1864 to a working-class household, Walker’s mother was a laundress who had been freed before or during the Civil War; as a child, Walker helped her mother with her brother and her work, attended services at First African Baptist Church, and was a student of the segregated public school system.²⁸³ Walker became a

²⁸⁰ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “‘If It Wasn’t for the Women. . .’: African American Women, Community Work, and Social Change” in *Women of Color in U.S. Society*, ed. Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 231.

²⁸¹ Janie Porter Barrett, Caroline D. Pratt, Ida A. Tourtellot, “Community Work for Women and Girls” (Hampton, VA: Press of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1914); Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama*, 70, 89.

²⁸² Stokes, “The Negro Woman’s Religious Activity,” 62-3.

²⁸³ Laurant L. Lee, “Maggie Lena Draper Mitchell Walker,” online DVB.

member of the Independent Order of St. Luke at just fourteen years old and steadily worked her way up in the organization. She graduated in 1883 from the Colored Normal School and worked as a teacher in the Richmond public school system; her first year of teaching coincided with the brief period when the Readjuster Governor of Virginia appointed two Black men to the Richmond school board. Though the Readjuster party soon collapsed, this brief moment of Black teachers' empowerment would have a lasting impact on Walker's career as a reformer.²⁸⁴ When she married her fellow Colored Normal School graduate and brickmason Armstead Walker in 1886, the new Mrs. Walker gave up teaching; she threw herself into numerous organizations outside of St. Luke, including the Richmond Council of Colored Women, the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the National Association of Wage Earners, the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, and worked closely with Barrett at the Virginia Industrial Schools, often providing Christmas dinner for the girls. She and her husband had three sons, one of whom died in infancy, and adopted a daughter. All the while, she continued her activities in the Independent Order of St. Luke.²⁸⁵

Walker's leadership in the order began in 1889 when she took a business course, which qualified her for a position as Executive Secretary. St. Luke was one of the largest and most successful of the thousands of mutual benefit societies in turn-of-the-century African American communities that combined insurance with economic, social, and political development. The original founder of St. Luke, a formerly enslaved woman named Mary Prout, began the organization as a women's mutual benefit association in Maryland in 1867. It had expanded to New York and Virginia by the 1880s before the Virginia chapter broke off from its parent organization, reestablishing itself as the Independent Order of St. Luke. Elsa Barkley Brown in

²⁸⁴ Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for Black Economic Empowerment* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 2003): xxxvi.

²⁸⁵ Brown, "Womanist Consciousness," 615.

“Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke” (1989) explains that like Black churches, St. Luke and other societies were focal points of “community self-help and racial solidarity.” Unlike other mutual benefit societies, however, anyone, including women and children, could join the ranks of St. Luke. As a “mass-based organization,” St. Luke encompassed men and women of all occupations and classes.²⁸⁶ According to Sadie Iola Daniel, author of a 1931 collection of Black female reformers’ biographies *Women Builders*, Walker saw St. Luke as an important vehicle of racial uplift that could “train people to help themselves by saving and investing in time of health, and that it could teach the children to form habits of thrift and self-control.”²⁸⁷

In 1899, the incumbent Grand Secretary of the Independent Order of St. Luke William T. Forrester, refused reappointment after holding the position for over three decades, citing low pay and the crumbling state of the society. The organization had \$31.60 in the bank, only 1,080 members paying dues over fifty-seven “Benefited Councils,” and four hundred dollars of debt. Walker took over the position of Grand Secretary and the duties of verifying deaths and illnesses, keeping the books, collecting dues, and paying out claims, but earned only a third of Forrester’s salary. “My first work,” Walker wrote later in 1928, “was to draw around me women who could ‘build the work.’” In 1901, female members of St. Luke filled six out of nine electoral positions available. Over the next few years, they implemented educational loans, a large department store named the St. Luke’s Emporium, an emergency fund, the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, and a weekly newspaper, the *St. Luke’s Herald*. St. Luke grew to encompass over a hundred thousand members over 2,010 chapters in twenty-eight states.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Brown, “Womanist Consciousness,” 616.

²⁸⁷ Daniel, *Women Builders*, 33-4, 36.

²⁸⁸ Wendell Phillips Dabney, *Maggie Lena Walker and the I.O. of Saint Luke: The Woman and Her Work* (Cincinnati: The Dabney Publishing Co., 1927), 36; Brown, “Womanist Consciousness,” 616-7; Daniel, *Women Builders*, 34.

Brown emphasizes the importance of Walker's perspective as a Black woman. She writes that Walker was so successful as Grand Secretary "not merely because of her own strengths and skills. . . but also because she operated from the strength of the Saint Luke collective as a whole and from the special strengths and talents of the inner core of the Saint Luke women in particular." Walker and the women of St. Luke acknowledged their particular space in society, living at the intersection of race, class, and gender, and the unique hardships that come with that position.²⁸⁹ In a 1901 report, Walker exhorted the female members of the Order for their support for the bank and department store so that they may uplift other women of color:

Who is so helpless as the Negro woman? Who is so circumscribed and hemmed in, in the race of life, in the struggle for bread, meat, and clothing as the Negro woman? They are even being denied the work of teaching Negro children. Can't this great Order, in which there are so many good women, willing women, hard-working women, noble women, whose money is here, whose interests are here, whose hearts and souls are here, do something towards giving employment to those who have made it what it is?²⁹⁰

Walker and other Black female reformers emphasized their position as separate from Black men, creating spaces for themselves separate both from men and white women in their clubs and organizations. Black women's clubs simultaneously served two purposes for its members: to allow them access to public affairs and political issues as women when Black men had been expelled from politics, and to reinforce the femininity that had been so long denied to them as formerly enslaved African Americans.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Brown, "Womanist Consciousness," 617.

²⁹⁰ Maggie Lena Walker, *50th Anniversary—Golden Jubilee Historical Report of the R.W.G. Council I.O. St. Luke, 1867-1917* (Richmond: Everett Waddey, 1917): 23. MLW Papers.

²⁹¹ Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 140-1, n. 61.

This perspective set them apart fundamentally from white women reformers, who participated in the club movement in spite of white middle- and upper-class norms of domestic womanhood. Community members deemed them unwomanly and defiant of the proper place of women in the home.²⁹² To justify their public activities, white women like Valentine relied on their own domestic rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. Though the reality of women's lives often failed to live up to separate spheres ideology, the idea that there were proper places for men and women still governed late nineteenth- and early twentieth political thought. White female activists and political thinkers, caught between tradition and modernity, had to operate within that ideology in order to be taken seriously by the public, leading women to argue more and more that "municipal housekeeping" was women's purview and to expand the private sphere into the public domain. Both Black and white women reformers' domestic rhetoric and ideas about women's special role as mothers seemed to reflect the dominant sexist views of the time. But when Virginia women reformers called on true womanhood and maternalism as the ideological foundation of their activist work, they were challenging the dominant white patriarchal hierarchy.²⁹³

²⁹² Thomas, *The New Women of Alabama*, 68.

²⁹³ Boris, "The Power of Motherhood," 217.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE ADVOCACY IN VIRGINIA

As the women's club movement picked up speed, more and more female reformers across the nation saw the need for their direct participation in politics: not just as lobbyists, but as members of the electorate. In *The Southern Lady* Anne Firor Scott claims that the women's suffrage movement in the South could not have gotten off the ground without the women's club movement, which created a political network of "self-confident women" and male allies who would support their cause.²⁹⁴ Suzanne Lebsock agrees, noting that women's reform activity had imparted all the necessary lessons of citizenship on the reformers: "an area of activity outside the home, a heightened sense of personal usefulness, a deeper appreciation of the needs and abilities of other women, and a chance to develop leadership and organizing skills and to participate in democratic decision making." The vote offered a new avenue toward permanent change for the benefit of all women and children, and united white women across the country under the goal of women's suffrage.²⁹⁵ The *Richmond Virginian* recounted the resolutions of the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association in 1914:

Whereas, we as suffragists are convinced that women would exercise the power of the ballot to prevent war and to ameliorate social conditions; therefore, be it Resolved, That we demand. . . the suffrage for women all over the world as the work which is of the most vital importance to human welfare.²⁹⁶

In Virginia and the other southern states, the mainstream women's suffrage movement emerged as the result of the Progressive aims of the women's club movement. Langhorne herself drew connections between Progressive activism and suffrage:

²⁹⁴ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 176.

²⁹⁵ Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 196; Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Women Suffrage in Virginia*, 24.

²⁹⁶ "Mrs. Robins Will Address Suffragists," *Richmond Virginian*, November 1, 1914.

Never was so much interest shown by Virginia women in temperance work as in the past two years. Temperance societies are organizing all over the State, and if the women once understood the power the right of Suffrage would give them on this question, I am convinced the temperance clubs would soon become Suffrage clubs.²⁹⁷

In *New Women of the New South*, Wheeler writes that Virginia women's reform efforts had given them "a greater knowledge of social ills." Issues like health and education that had previously been under the purview of the private domain could now only be addressed by governments. Progressive women reformers in Virginia like Lila Meade Valentine believed that their direct participation in government was necessary in order to solve societal problems to their satisfaction.²⁹⁸

Ideologically, historians like Paula Baker and Theda Skocpol argue that the club movement and women's suffrage was a logical extension of separate spheres ideology and the domestication of politics. Skocpol writes that women's rights activists and female Progressives could involve themselves in traditionally public activities "not by abandoning the Victorian concept of women's special domestic sphere but by extending it" into the public domain. They embraced their identities as mothers and campaigned for the vote in order to improve social conditions not only for themselves and for their children, but also out of solidarity with other, lower-class mothers.²⁹⁹ And it would appear that the writings of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century activists confirm this idea. Valentine wrote of women's special role, and her friend Mary Munford had similar ideas, grounding the activist work of southern ladies in their antebellum past as the daughters of slaveholders:

²⁹⁷ Langhorne to Susan B. Anthony, March 1, 1884, in "Report of the Sixteenth Annual Washington Convention, March 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1884: With Reports of the Forty-Eighth Congress," National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, Library of Congress.

²⁹⁸ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 39.

²⁹⁹ Skocpol, "Expanding the Separate Sphere," 331.

The Southern woman comes to her task with capacities, trained under former conditions, which equip her for work. She is the daughter of the past, and her personality involves no such break, between ante and post bellum periods, as is popularly supposed. From mistress of a plantation, where the lady of the household, strong in her position of social leadership, carried on her heart and mind the welfare often of a hundred souls, it is an easy transition to a position where the creation of public opinion becomes a conscious purpose, and the sense of responsibility, born under household conditions, broadens out to include the welfare of the community.³⁰⁰

Women's writings and publications across both the South and the country at large are full of such sentiments. African American mothers also wrote of the importance of domesticity, intertwining women's special role as the public mother with the rhetoric of racial uplift. "No people ever despair whose women are fully aroused to the duties which rest upon them and are willing to shoulder responsibilities which they alone can successfully assume," said National Association of Colored Women president Mary Church Terrell. "The scope of our endeavors is constantly widening." Historians and sociologists over the years have pointed to writings such as these to prove the significance of municipal housekeeping in the boundary between the private and public domains, and the impact separate spheres ideology had on the everyday lives of women.³⁰¹

Others argue that this was more of a rhetorical strategy on the part of women's rights activists looking for an avenue into male-dominated politics, one that had mixed success. In "Reconstructing the Family: Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control" (1991), Eileen Boris argues that suffragists' emphasis on the public versus private dichotomy,

³⁰⁰ Branch, "Women's Part in the Education Process in the South," 638-9.

³⁰¹ Mary Church Terrell, "What Role is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of her Race?" in *Twentieth Century Negro Literature; or, A Cyclopedia of Thought of the Vital Topics Relating to the American Negro, by One Hundred of America's Greatest Negroes*, ed. Daniel Wallace Culp (Naperville: J.L. Nichols and Co., 1902):174.

female difference, and maternalism only reinforced women's societal role as "dependents rather than autonomous individuals," even outside of the more conservative South.³⁰² In the United States Supreme Court case *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), which upheld shorter working hours for women, Justice David Brewer wrote:

That women's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious . . . and, as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, and the physical well-being of a woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race.³⁰³

Boris points out that Brewer's verdict invalidated the boundary between public and private and established the state's direct power within the home and in women's bodies. Boris sees this as the consequence of reformers' emphasis on feminine difference within a system of law where women had no say. Suffragists' and reformers' arguments that women had a unique moral position within society and had special feminine traits of "nurturance, altruism, piety, and domesticity" strayed far too close to sexist discourse that relegated women to a subordinate place within society. When women argued that the state should protect mothers in the workforce because of their special virtues, they reinforced gender-based dependency and subordination within the economy and the body politic.³⁰⁴

Mary Ryan presents a counterview to Boris in "Gender and Public Access." Ryan notes that in order to win their rights, suffragists had to explicitly acknowledge gender differences and take up positions as feminists. They occupied the few avenues of public and political participation, "[lobbying] for sex-specific interests," in order to create the foundation of their

³⁰² Eileen Boris, "Reconstructing the Family: Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991): 75.

³⁰³ Quoted in Boris, "Reconstructing the Family," 77.

³⁰⁴ Boris, "Reconstructing the Family," 73-4.

own political identities as women and “[enlarge] the range of issues” that was under government purview. Female reformers had to create their own sex-specific political identity and campaign for their own interests in order to free themselves from their dependency and subordination.³⁰⁵ Gilmores agrees, noting that the rhetoric of sex and gender equality had failed Northern white suffragists in the early years of the movement. By relying on domesticity, women’s rights activists could argue that women needed the vote in order to protect the home as the industrial economy grew and began to invade the sacred space of the private. When reformers fused domesticity with collective rights, women’s suffrage evolved into another Progressive law, easier for lawmakers to swallow.³⁰⁶

Nevertheless, southern women’s activism was a fundamental departure from the traditional feminine role that white Southerners especially prized. Beyond temperance, educational reform, and public health advocacy, suffragists also involved themselves in reforming marital and divorce law, dress reforms, and advocacy for women’s rights to own property, keep their own earnings, and have custody of their children.³⁰⁷ Wheeler writes that many southern women had been “profoundly unhappy” with traditional gender roles and impatient to change their lives. Whether or not they endorsed separate spheres rhetoric, they were still feminists striving to change women’s role in the South. They improved women’s status in society and significantly expanded their opportunities in education, business, and politics.³⁰⁸

Movements in the North and South

Activists on the national scale had been campaigning for the vote since 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the Seneca Falls Convention in New York.

³⁰⁵ Ryan, “Gender and Public Access,” 283, 285.

³⁰⁶ Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?*, 13.

³⁰⁷ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 89.

³⁰⁸ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 73.

Suffrage was only a small part of a larger platform of women's rights, where property and custody rights, equal wages, and family planning were the major points. Even within the 1848 convention, the demand for suffrage was a controversial choice.³⁰⁹

The northern women's rights movement began as an offshoot of the antislavery movement; Frederick Douglass was in attendance at Seneca Falls, and William Lloyd Garrison had been writing in favor of women's rights since the 1830s. When southern society condemned the Grimké sisters of South Carolina for their involvement with Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society in the 1830s, they saw the parallels between Black enslavement and women's subordination, and began to incorporate women's rights into their speeches.³¹⁰

But Emancipation and the Reconstruction Amendments tore a schism into the movement; early feminists, led by Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, protested when the new amendments enfranchised only Black men. The suffrage movement split into two in 1869: the American Woman Suffrage Association led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, who believed that African American men needed the vote more than women, and Stanton and Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association.³¹¹

In *Fighting Chance: The Struggle Over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (2011), Faye Dudden remarks that Stanton and Anthony were desperate to push through women's suffrage measures, fearing that the window of opportunity created by the Civil War and Reconstruction was quickly closing. When white northern philanthropists denied the National Woman Suffrage Association funding, claiming that women's rights activism would harm African American men's chances, Stanton and Anthony's resentment boiled over

³⁰⁹ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 3.

³¹⁰ Faye Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle Over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2011): 4.

³¹¹ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998): 8.

into racist attacks on Black men.³¹² In the *Revolution*, the vehicle of the National Woman Suffrage Association, Stanton wrote scathingly of the proposed Fourteenth Amendment:

. . . the republican cry of “manhood suffrage” creates an antagonism between Black men and all women, that will culminate in fearful outrages on womanhood, especially in the Southern states. . . . It is to escape the added tyranny, persecutions, insults, horrors, that will surely be visited upon woman, in the establishment of an aristocracy of sex in this republic, that we raise our indignant protest against this wholesale desecration of woman in the pending amendment, and earnestly pray the rulers of this nation to consider the degradation of disenfranchisement.³¹³

Stanton and Anthony blamed the abolitionists for sacrificing women’s rights for Black men’s suffrage, and worked to build the National Woman Suffrage Association into a more radical and independent organization unaffiliated with Republican abolitionism.³¹⁴ The two separate suffrage organizations operated independently of each other for the next thirty years with few changes in leadership. In the 1880s, however, “New Women” including Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw began to take over the national movement. By 1890, the new leadership chose to coalesce the two suffrage organizations into one: the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).³¹⁵ By 1912, the organization had over a hundred thousand names on its membership rosters.³¹⁶

As a group, NAWSA turned away from earlier feminist campaigns that focused on a variety of issues like divorce and property rights to focus solely on the vote and more

³¹² Dudden, *Fighting Chance*, 8-10.

³¹³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Women and Black Men,” *Revolution* 3 (February 4, 1869): 88.

³¹⁴ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, 26-7.

³¹⁵ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 4.

³¹⁶ Sara Hunter Graham, “Woman Suffrage in Virginia: The Equal Suffrage League and Pressure-Group Politics, 1909-1920,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101 (1993): 228.

Progressive reforms. These more conservative goals gave NAWSA more respectability and increased its standing as a nation-wide women's association.³¹⁷

Many southern women's historians in the past thirty years have criticized the outsized role the Northern women's suffrage movement has in the national historical narrative. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, from a more historiographical perspective, explains in "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era: Labor, Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South" (1993) that the domestication of politics narrative is based largely on the experiences of Northern white suffragists. By overlooking the perspectives of southern and western women, this narrow focus casts the northeastern story of women's Progressive activism and suffragist activities as a "putative national norm," turning the trials other women across the country faced into mere regional deviations from the master narrative.³¹⁸ Gilmore agrees, writing that by deeming the northern movement as "normative," the southern movement comes up short in a number of ways: southern suffragists began their work much later, had much less grassroots organization, and were racist. Though Gilmore admits that this is mostly true, this narrative "obscures rather than illuminates" the intense racial dynamics that characterized women's suffrage both in the South and on the national scale.³¹⁹ Lisa Tetrault, author of *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (2014), dismisses the importance of the Seneca Falls convention in the history of women's suffrage, writing in a 2017 article that the focus on Seneca Falls focuses the suffrage narrative on the Northern states, prioritizes the campaign for

³¹⁷ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, 56; Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia," 228.

³¹⁸ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era: Labor, Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993): 168.

³¹⁹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 204.

the vote as the pinnacle of the women's rights movement, and obscures the participation of African American women.³²⁰

A strong women's suffrage movement did not emerge in the Southern states until the late nineteenth century, after urban life, industrialization, Progressivism and the woman's club movement had, according to Green, "[begun] to chip away at the foundations of the enclosed garden." The social dynamics and stricter gender roles of the Southern states shaped suffrage activism. Wheeler explains that the most prominent Southern suffragists were protected by their social positions, and faced less vitriol in the press than their Northern counterparts. Suffrage advocates worked to present their cause as non threatening to the Southern hierarchy and institution of womanhood.³²¹ Because the environment was so hostile to suffrage, Southern organizations relied more on a few educated and well-spoken leaders, like Valentine, Laura Clay in Kentucky, Kate Gordon in Louisiana, and Belle Kearney in Mississippi.³²² Secretary of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia Adèle Clark later recalled how much Valentine's social position protected her:

[She] was not only a woman of great social leadership in her own personally, but her husband was a member of a very distinguished family in Virginia and of a very prominent business firm, the Valentine Meat Juice Company, and the Valentine Museum here was founded by that group. Mrs. Valentine was above even any effort to say anything against her because of her social position and that of her husband.³²³

As a general rule, Southerners rejected more militant tactics and disavowed any relationship with the tactics of the suffragettes. The forceful methods of the suffragettes would have alienated the

³²⁰ Lisa Tetrault, "Women's Rights and Reconstruction," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 1 (March 2017), journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-reconstruction-studies/womens-rights-and-reconstruction/.

³²¹ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 48, 73.

³²² Green, *Southern Strategies*, 6; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 181.

³²³ Adèle Clark, interview by Winston Broadfoot, Southern Oral History Project (February 28, 1964): 35.

respectable suffragists from the Democrats, the only political party in the South. Mary Johnston, one of the founding members of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, was initially unhappy to have her name published in connection with suffrage.³²⁴ “I wish to disclaim . . . any slightest connection, affiliation, or approval with the so-called ‘militant’ or ‘suffragette’ movement now obtaining in England,” Johnston wrote in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.³²⁵ Like many Southern suffragists who were members of the socio-political elite, Johnston was concerned over her reputation as a respectable Southern lady. To be militant was to be unladylike.³²⁶

Born in 1870 to a Confederate veteran, Johnston was a successful novelist. Like Valentine and Munford, she did not attend a formal college and was mostly self-educated. Her books supported her family: her second novel set in colonial Virginia, *To Have and to Hold* (1900), was a record-breaking success, selling more than 135,000 copies in the week after its initial release. It was the most successful novel published between *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 and *Gone with the Wind* in 1936. Her literary star fell somewhat with her later books, but four of her later works—*Hagar* (1913), *The Witch* (1914), *The Fortunes of Garin* (1915), and *The Wanderer* (1917)—had political themes of women’s rights in the South. Johnston never married, and lived with her sisters all her life.³²⁷ As a member of the ESL, she would use her popularity as a southern writer to travel the state, giving speeches and trying to present suffragists as respectable Southern ladies instead of “vulgar and coarse” suffragettes.³²⁸

In the ESL, Johnston worked closely with Adèle Clark. The Clarks were a more working-class family. Clark’s father was an Irish immigrant and a railroad worker, and the family

³²⁴ Lisa A. Francavilla, “Mary Johnston (1870-1936): The Suffrage Speeches of a Virginia Novelist,” in *Southern Women in the Progressive Era: A Reader*, ed. Giselle Roberts and Melissa Walker (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019): 256.

³²⁵ “Miss Mary Johnston Outlines Her View of Woman’s Suffrage,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, November 15, 1909.

³²⁶ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 76.

³²⁷ Brent Tarter, “Mary Johnston,” online DVB.

³²⁸ Francavilla, “Mary Johnston,” 256-7.

bounced around the South after Clark's birth in 1882 as Robert Clark switched railroad companies. When the family moved to Richmond for good, Clark was twelve years old. An uncle paid for her enrollment in an elite Richmond private school for girls, where Clark discovered a passion for art. After her graduation, she joined the Art Club of Richmond, through which she became immersed in Richmond society and gained experience as a Progressive reformer. In 1916, Clark and her longtime friend Nora Houston founded their own art academy, the Atelier of the Virginia League of Fine Arts and Handicrafts. For nearly twenty years, the Atelier offered classes in painting, book illustration, bookplate creation, and other handicrafts, with the goal of developing art appreciation among its students and community cooperation. Clark's goals as an art instructor were very much in line with Progressive values.³²⁹

Clark became involved in the suffrage movement when an advocate spoke before the Art Club's board in 1909 and asked them to sign a petition calling for a federal suffrage amendment. In an interview conducted by the Southern Oral History Project in 1964, Clark said that she signed the petition along with three others. "I have thought since that [she] really reaped a large crop, getting four signatures at one effort, when I had so much trouble later. . ." A friend of hers in NAWSA noticed her name on the petition and wrote, asking Clark to become more involved in the movement and connecting her to Lila Meade Valentine.³³⁰

Despite the racial rhetoric of twentieth-century suffragists, Virginia's early, sporadic suffrage efforts in the 1870s and 1880s were relatively egalitarian. Anna Whitehead Bodeker and Judge John C. Underwood, writer of Virginia's Reconstruction constitution, created the Virginia

³²⁹ Ray Bonis, "Adèle Clark: The Artist as Activist," in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times, Volume Two*, ed. Cynthia A. Kiener and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016): 138-9, 144.

³³⁰ Clark, SOHP, 2; Bonis, "Adèle Clark," 145.

State Woman Suffrage Association in 1870 after Bodeker hosted a series of lectures by National Woman Suffrage Association representatives.³³¹

Bodeker, president of the association, went to a polling precinct intending to vote in the 1871 election. When officials denied her ballot, she instead placed a note declaring her right to vote according to the Fourteenth Amendment in the ballot box: “By the constitution of the United States, I, Mrs. A. Whitehead Bodeker, have a right to give my vote at this election, and in vindication of it I drop this note in the ballot-box, Nov. 7th, 1871.”³³² She contributed articles to the *Revolution*, and wrote a two-part defense of women’s suffrage in the *Richmond Daily Enquirer*. Unlike her predecessors, Bodeker did not use the language of domesticity in her arguments, and even criticized domestic rhetoric:

Now, the iron walls of custom which were erected about her in the early ages of barbarism confine her to a life of dependence on man for her pecuniary support, and limit the cultivation of her talents to the drudgery of domestic duties. There has been a mass of sentimental nonsense written about the peculiar fitness of woman for this position, and its peculiar sacredness and dignity.³³³

Bodeker goes on to call separate spheres absurd and superstitious “drivel,” and rails against the gender roles that trap both men and women. Despite, or perhaps because of, Bodeker’s rather modern perspective on white feminism, the association did not get off the ground. She quickly grew discouraged with the lack of support she received from her fellow Virginians, and retired in 1872. The Virginia association collapsed soon after she left.³³⁴ In her 1969 thesis, Charlotte Jean Shelton notes that the Virginia State Woman Suffrage Association did little to popularize suffrage

³³¹ Shelton, “Woman Suffrage and Virginia Politics,” 7.

³³² Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Women Suffrage in Virginia*, 17; “A Lady Voting,” *Daily State Journal*, November 8, 1871.

³³³ Anna Whitehead Bodeker, “Defence of Woman Suffrage,” *Richmond Daily Enquirer*, March 18, 1870.

³³⁴ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 155.

in the state, hypothesizing that its leaders were too closely tied with Radical Reconstruction to be considered respectable or trustworthy.³³⁵ Green writes that despite the criticism Bodeker received in the Virginia press, she was among the first to introduce the topic of women's right to vote to Virginia at large.³³⁶

Orra Langhorne led the next Virginia suffrage attempt, petitioning the General Assembly for the right to vote numerous times. A member of the National Woman Suffrage Association, and then NAWSA, she served as the representative of Virginia between 1880 and 1902.³³⁷ In her support of suffrage, Langhorne continued to call on her past as a woman of the Old South; she told Anthony in 1884 of how the crucible of the Civil War and Reconstruction "[strengthened and developed] the character of those who were bred to live in luxury and idleness," and blamed politicians for excluding Virginia women from public affairs.³³⁸ Along with other NAWSA members, Langhorne read a statement in front of a congressional committee on woman suffrage in 1896:

While we acknowledge courtesy and chivalry on the part of the men of Virginia, yet they still demand of us money for taxes without giving us the corresponding representation. They refuse us admittance to, and the benefit of, the highest and best institutions of our State, which are supported by State funds. They hold us amenable to the laws which we have no voice in making. . . . Therefore we request that the ballot be given us in order that we may protect our interests as American citizens. . . .³³⁹

Like Bodeker and unlike later suffragists who called on women's place as the moral guardians of society, Langhorne argued for the vote on feminist grounds. Her argument, however, gained little

³³⁵ Shelton, "Woman Suffrage and Virginia Politics," 8.

³³⁶ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 155.

³³⁷ Van Zelm, "Orra Gray Langhorne," 103-4.

³³⁸ Langhorne to Susan B. Anthony, March 1, 1884.

³³⁹ "Report of Hearing Before the Committee on Woman Suffrage," January 28, 1896, National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, Library of Congress.

traction with the public. Her own organization, the Virginia Suffrage Association, suffered from very low membership, and dissolved before 1890.³⁴⁰

A Virginia suffrage organization finally stuck in November of 1909, when Lila Meade Valentine, accompanied by Mary Johnston and Adèle Clark, established the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia (ESL) as a satellite of NAWSA. By January of 1910, the League had sixty-one members. Johnston and Valentine traveled the state to women's schools and business organizations. Quickly, suffragists in other Virginia towns established their own chapters of the ESL, and businessmen founded the Men's Equal Suffrage League of Virginia.³⁴¹ By the League's third annual convention in 1913 in Lynchburg, there were thirty-eight chapters across the state.³⁴² While the ESL never succeeded in their primary goal of persuading the Virginia legislature to either add women's suffrage to the state constitution or ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, the ESL had enough of a membership base to remain as an organization after 1920, transitioning into the League of Women Voters.

Despite the ESL's efforts to present women's suffrage as non threatening and in line with southern notions of gender to the legislators, their repeated efforts to lobby the General Assembly for an amendment to the state constitution failed, for a variety of reasons.³⁴³ The ESL lacked the political base it needed to push bills through the Virginia legislature, and antisuffragists had moved swiftly to oppose the league, establishing the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (VAOWS) in 1912.³⁴⁴

Green breaks down the antisuffrage movement in *Southern Strategies*, arguing that though conservative women became the face of antisuffrage, it was primarily men who opposed

³⁴⁰ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 18.

³⁴¹ Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia," 232.

³⁴² "State League Records: Third State Convention, 1913," ESL Records.

³⁴³ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 21.

³⁴⁴ Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia," 233.

the Nineteenth Amendment. Old, conservative southern families with entrenched economic and political power worried that women's suffrage would upset the exclusive political environment they had created through decades of illegal and legal disenfranchisement measures. Expanded suffrage was a threat to white Democratic supremacy, especially in counties with high Black populations. Political machines, as well as men in industries such as railroad construction, alcohol production, and textile manufacturing, opposed suffrage. They did not want women pushing through Progressive reforms that would crack down on political corruption or cut into their profits by forcing them to care for their employees. Their wives, daughters, sisters, and cousins who depended on them for support saw that it was in their best personal interest to oppose women's suffrage. "Female opponents of suffrage," writes Green, "demonstrated an allegiance to class over gender." Female antisuffragists feared that suffrage would impact their lifestyles and positions of comfort and relative power in society.³⁴⁵

Male antisuffragists, however, let women take the public lead in opposing suffrage. Their presence meant that suffragists could not frame the debate as a gender-based struggle between Progressive women and conservative men. Women's leadership role in the antisuffrage movement, however, limited their tactics. They had to operate within the strict gender roles they were trying to impose on the suffragists. Southern antisuffragists were more likely than suffragists to use regional arguments that reflected southern biases about gender, race, and class.³⁴⁶

Baker writes that many female antisuffragists, as the face of suffrage opposition, based their arguments against suffrage in separate spheres, claiming that women's involvement in politics was unseemly for ladies but also a threat to women's exalted place as the moral authority

³⁴⁵ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 39, 52-3.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31, 55, 80.

of southern society. They believed that suffrage would destroy a fundamental part of their traditional identity as women—or, as wealthy white women—and the power they derived from it.³⁴⁷

In order to defend themselves, the ESL was forced to rely on separate spheres, using the same logic to argue that women needed the vote because of sex difference. Members of the League distributed copies of Johnston's article "The Status of Woman" to Virginia legislators, which read:

Far behind us, in the mists of time, two creatures, male and female, differentiated themselves from their fellows of the universal forest. The male was physically the stronger, for the female bore the children, but there is no reason to suppose that they were not intellectually equal—equal, not similar. Each to some extent complemented the other.³⁴⁸

The Equal Suffrage League's reliance on separate spheres and municipal housekeeping represented a departure from previous women's suffrage efforts in Virginia. Bodeker and Langhorne rejected separate spheres logic and argued for women's suffrage as a mark of gender equality. Bodeker especially repudiated strict gender roles, remarking that she had known gentlemen more refined than a southern belle, and women who only "passed for ladies." But in order to combat the antisuffragists and be taken seriously as women in politics, the ESL had to use separate spheres logic and establish a political position explicitly as women.³⁴⁹

Valentine and the League had to transform separate spheres ideology, the very logic upon which their exclusion from the public sphere and politics was built upon, into a point of strength. Now when antisuffragists said that women should remain at home as mothers, the suffragists

³⁴⁷ Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 620, 635.

³⁴⁸ Mary Johnston, "The Status of Woman," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 12, 1909.

³⁴⁹ Anna Whitehead Bodeker, "An Appeal for Woman Suffrage," *Richmond Daily Enquirer*, March 23, 1870; Ryan, "Gender and Public Access," 283.

could fire back that women should be involved in politics because of their duty as mothers.

Valentine herself wrote:

There is a whole group of interests which belong peculiarly to women and which with the expanding functions of government have become political questions and which therefore demand political handling. Questions concerning food, water, sanitation, education, light, heat, plumbing, treatment of diseases, child labor, hours of labor for women and children. . . . All these questions nearly concern the home and the child. We live in an industrial era. . . machinery and electricity have revolutionized the modern world, and City, State, and National governments now manage our homes and their surroundings (whether we will or not). The interests of no class and people can be safely left to any other class. . . each class should be given the power of protecting its own interest.³⁵⁰

The ESL lived up to Valentine's ideology, and did not forget its roots in municipal housekeeping. Clark remembered "with some amusement" that the ESL had not even tried to introduce a suffrage bill to the 1910 General Assembly, "but had been very active in a pure milk bill." At the ESL's 1913 convention, they resolved to endorse the Virginia Child Labor Committee, equal pay for equal work, women's university education, equal custody laws, the eight-hour work day, temperance, and compulsory education for children among other Progressive reforms.³⁵¹ The ESL's use of separate spheres ideology and the domestication of politics narrative allowed them to campaign for change without directly challenging the status quo, and might account for the League's relative success, when compared to earlier suffrage efforts in Virginia.³⁵²

In "Woman Suffrage in Virginia: The Equal Suffrage League and Pressure-Group Politics, 1909-1920" (1993), Sara Hunter Graham documents the differences between the ESL

³⁵⁰ Quoted in Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine," 481.

³⁵¹ Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia," 237; "Minutes of the 1913 Convention," ESL Records.

³⁵² Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia," 237; Adèle Clark, SOHP, 7.

and the national associations. When Valentine founded the League, NAWSA had been in operation for over two decades. Shaw and Catt had ample time to build membership, secure funds, and build a network of local chapters across the country. With a solid base underneath them, NAWSA leaders started to involve themselves in what Graham calls “practical politics—exerting pressure on politicians, organizing by electoral district, and staging massive publicity campaigns.” Despite their affiliation with NAWSA, Valentine and the Equal Suffrage League lacked the foundation they needed in order to successfully lobby Virginia politicians. The necessary steps of consciousness-raising and educating the public took years. Graham notes that the ESL’s use of domesticity as an argument is partially due to the short time frame they had to educate the public. Valentine and her fellow League members did not have the time to educate the public on sex equality and feminism, but domesticity and separate spheres were familiar concepts to the average Virginian. Relying on domesticity and maternalist rhetoric was easier, less time-consuming, and more successful in the face of determined antisuffragists and an apathetic public.³⁵³

Even as the Equal Suffrage League worked on educating the public and building its membership, Valentine and other leaders continued to petition the Virginia General Assembly for a state amendment enfranchising women. Over the decades, suffragists across the country had debated the merits of a federal suffrage amendment versus a state-by-state strategy. Many southern suffragists preferred a state amendment. As good Democrats, they disliked the idea of direct federal supervision over elections, though their job was made that much more difficult by the south’s single-party system. There was not another political party to compete against in Virginia, and the Democrats felt no need to open up the electorate.³⁵⁴ Graham notes that Virginia

³⁵³ Graham, “Woman Suffrage in Virginia,” 231-2, 237.

³⁵⁴ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 14.

Democrats had virtually eliminated factionalism within the General Assembly by passing Progressive laws, like prohibition, child labor measures, and anti corporate corruption laws, that had been divisive in other states. As a consequence, there was no Progressive faction of Virginia Democrats, and no opposition party for the suffragists to appeal to even if they wanted to break from the Democrats.³⁵⁵

Still, southern suffragists believed in state sovereignty. Clark recalled that most of the League members preferred a state amendment, especially the older ladies: “Mrs. Valentine herself having been born in 1865 and grown up during Reconstruction—still felt a little leery about getting federal government interference in suffrage.” Southern politicians opposed a federal amendment because they did not want to give the national government any more authority over state elections. Even those who did not theoretically object to a federal amendment yearned for the enfranchisement at the state level. A state amendment would show that the state accepted women’s equality, or at least their worth as members of the body politic, and would signal the success of southern Progressivism in the face of old conservatism.³⁵⁶

For the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, a state amendment was extremely unlikely, even if the League had had the time to educate the public. The writers of the 1902 Virginia Constitution had been thorough in their efforts to permanently limit the electorate: the process of amending the state constitution was even more difficult than amending the federal constitution.³⁵⁷ A Virginia amendment had to be approved by two consecutive legislatures with absolutely no changes. “If an ‘and’ or a ‘the’ or a ‘but’ or an ‘or’ is altered,” said Clark, “. . .it doesn’t go through at all.” Then the public had to approve the amendment through referendum, meaning

³⁵⁵ Graham, “Woman Suffrage in Virginia,” 243.

³⁵⁶ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 134; Clark, SOHP, 5, 10.

³⁵⁷ Clark, SOHP, 10.

that the ESL would have had to win the approval of both the General Assembly and the public at large and sustain public support for several years, a sisyphian task.³⁵⁸

The ESL persuaded legislators to present suffrage amendments to the General Assembly in 1912, 1914, and 1916. Legislators voted it down each time, though the number of votes gradually increased with each year.³⁵⁹ At that point the Virginia suffragists abandoned the state amendment and fell in line with NAWSA and the campaign for the federal amendment.³⁶⁰

Race and Women's Suffrage Activism

In stark contrast to their contemporaries and collaborators Anthony and Stanton, neither Bodeker nor Langhorne relied on racist rhetoric or the “negro problem” to achieve women's suffrage. Perhaps Bodeker's Virginia State Woman Suffrage Association was too short-lived to rely on it, but Langhorne actively campaigned for African American rights and national reconciliation in the wake of the Civil War and Emancipation, despite relying on Black stereotypes and glorifying the Old South.

As women's suffrage efforts across the South picked up speed at the turn of the century, suffragists explicitly called upon race in their campaigns. Historians disagree on how and why suffragists and women's rights activists, especially in Virginia, used race in their arguments, how African Americans were involved in the movement, and how Black and white suffragists cooperated.

Aileen Kraditor investigates the role of race in national suffrage campaigns in *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (1965). She argues that white, middle-class women made up the backbone of the movement, struggling for a more public role in a society, “the basic

³⁵⁸ Clark, SOHP, 10-1; Graham, “Woman Suffrage in Virginia,” 240.

³⁵⁹ Clark, SOHP, 10.

³⁶⁰ Graham, “Woman Suffrage in Virginia,” 240.

structure of which they accepted.” In the South, the suffrage movement was purely a white woman’s endeavor, and their involvement with NAWSA signified a permanent schism between women’s rights and the abolitionist tradition from which the women’s movement sprung. Kraditor argues that the goal of white Southern women, indignant at being cast as the political inferiors of African American men, was to ensure white supremacy in the South by crowding out the Black vote.³⁶¹ Five years later, Scott acknowledges Kraditor’s claims that female reformers in the South employed white supremacist arguments in *The Southern Lady*, but largely dismisses these incidents as one of many tactics suffragists deployed when convenient.³⁶²

Lebsock studied the role of white supremacy in the Virginia suffrage movement specifically in “Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study” (1993), and though she concedes that Kraditor’s ideas have merit on the national scale, she reframes the white supremacy debate in Virginia as a conflict between suffragists and antisuffragists. Using Virginia suffrage collections and Richmond newspaper archives, Lebsock argues that white supremacy became a point of contention in suffrage debates only after 1915, when antisuffragists introduced the topic. Leaders of the suffrage movement like Valentine, she says, saw white supremacy as a “bogus issue,” and they merely maintained that women’s suffrage would not endanger white supremacy. By the standards of the time, this was a moderate approach. On the other hand, Lebsock says, once antisuffragists linked women’s right to vote to white supremacy, there was very little African American women could do to help the cause. If women of color came out in support of suffrage, or if white suffragists spoke of empowering African American women, they were playing into the hands of antisuffragists.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Aileen Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965): x, xi, 165.

³⁶² Scott, *Southern Ladyhood*, 182-3.

³⁶³ Suzanne Lebsock, “Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study,” in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993): 63, 65, 80.

Published in the same year, Wheeler in *New Women in the New South* contends in her study of prominent white women's rights leaders in the South that white supremacy played a large role in the suffrage movement, both in the Southern states and in the national movement. Northern suffragists began to prioritize networking and consciousness-raising in the South in the 1880s, believing the the "negro problem" could unlock a wealth of new supporters. Their use of the "Southern strategy" discriminated against Northern Black women, believing that their participation would alienate Southern white women and potentially deprive the national organizations of Southern funds. Southern women completely excluded African American women from their organizations; at best, they feared that African American participation would tarnish the movement's reputation. Before the mass disenfranchisement of African American men, Northern suffragists believed that Southern legislatures might enfranchise women in order to diminish the power of the Black male electorate.³⁶⁴ "It has always seemed to me such a curious thing," said Clark years later, "that the men of Virginia, as well as of the South, did not realize that they could have preserved what they were so anxious to preserve—the white electorate majority—had they enfranchised the women of the South."³⁶⁵ NAWSA was initially on board with the "southern strategy" under Shaw's leadership. In her autobiography *The Story of a Pioneer* (1915), Shaw claims that at NAWSA's 1903 convention in New Orleans, she initially tried to avoid the topic of race. But when accused of supporting social equality between Black and white women, she broke under pressure and said:

You have put the ballot into the hands of your black men, thus making them the political superiors of your white women. Never before in the history of the world have men made former slaves the political masters of their former mistresses!

³⁶⁴ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 101.

³⁶⁵ Clark, SOHP, 6.

Shaw was quick to change her mind, however, when the “southern strategy” proved to be a failure as southern legislatures disenfranchised African American men by instituting poll taxes and literacy tests. Southern suffragists Kate Gordon and Belle Kearney hung on, insisting that “the race question [had] the power to enfranchise the white women of the south.” When they appealed to Shaw and NAWSA for support in 1906, Shaw refused.³⁶⁶ As a group, the ESL of Virginia followed Shaw and NAWSA’s lead and distanced itself from Kate Gordon and Belle Kearney’s blatantly white supremacist Southern States Woman’s Suffrage Congress in New Orleans.³⁶⁷ The ESL had formed after the highwater mark of the “southern strategy,” and had chose to use other strategies to persuade the public.

Wheeler agrees with Lebsack, however, that Valentine and the Equal Suffrage League as an organization took a moderate approach to the “negro problem.” Like her friend Mary Munford, Valentine saw African Americans as inferior to white Americans, but she also believed that it was the duty of white Southerners to guide African Americans on the road to citizenship and civilization. In her efforts with the Richmond Education Association and the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association, Valentine advocated for the welfare of both poor whites and African Americans. However, neither Valentine nor her contemporaries in the ESL ever publicly campaigned for the political rights of African Americans. They believed that African Americans would be better off deferring to white leadership. It is to Valentine’s small credit, however, that she and the ESL did not rely on rhetoric that demonized African American men as sexual predators of white women, like Stanton and Anthony had. The extremely racist proclamations of Gordon and Kearney embarrassed the more paternalistic Valentine and Johnston.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Quoted in Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 122; Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 121.

³⁶⁷ “Minutes of the 1913 Convention,” ESL Records.

³⁶⁸ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 104-8.

Johnston was more in favor of racial equality than Valentine, and was distressed by the virulent racism of her fellow Southern suffragists.³⁶⁹ But her sympathy for African American women did not mean she treated them as equals or supported their political empowerment. In April of 1911, Johnston gave a talk to the Council of Jewish Women at a Richmond temple. She spoke extensively on the nature of the South and the suffrage movement and encouraged the Council members to join the campaign.³⁷⁰ Just two months later, she gave a particularly condescending speech to a women's auxiliary society at an African American hospital in Richmond. Making no mention of suffrage or politics whatsoever, Johnston exhorted her audience to continue their community work, work that the Black women of Richmond had been doing since Reconstruction, and quoted the Bible at them.³⁷¹

Green writes in *Southern Strategies* (1997) that suffragists' white supremacy arguments were more a rhetorical strategy than a legitimate belief, especially after the implementation of Jim Crow. The Virginia Constitution and its use of poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests did more to prevent the political empowerment of Black southerners than women's suffrage ever could. Like Lebsock, she maintains that it was the antisuffragists who introduced the topic to debate in the twentieth century.³⁷² One Equal Suffrage League handout read, "The opponents of equal suffrage claim that the negro woman's vote will constitute a menace to white supremacy. This contention is altogether unfounded. . ." It goes on to point out that white women outnumbered African Americans in Virginia and had higher rates of literacy, concluding, "We are secure from negro domination."³⁷³

³⁶⁹ Francavilla, "Mary Johnston," 270.

³⁷⁰ "Woman Movement in the South," April 4 1911, text of speech in Francavilla, "Mary Johnston," 258-63.

³⁷¹ "Talk. Coloured Women," June 5 1911, text of speech in Francavilla, "Mary Johnston," 270-5.

³⁷² Green, *Southern Strategies*, 11, 88.

³⁷³ Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, *Equal Suffrage and the Negro Vote*, (Richmond, circa 1910), ESL Records.

Terborg-Penn presents significant challenges to the idea that women of color were uninvolved with suffrage activism, even on the national scale, in 1978 and again in 1998. When earlier historians like Scott and Lebsock discount Black women's participation in the suffrage movement due to a lack of evidence, they are ignoring the fact that authors of early suffrage documents like Stanton and Anthony disregarded Black women's contributions to the women's rights movement.³⁷⁴ Terborg-Penn also objects to Lebsock's contention that Virginia suffrage leaders did not rely on white supremacy, arguing that Valentine and Johnston did not need to explicitly proclaim to be white supremacists because white supremacy was a given, "understood, if not accepted, by everyone in the South." Valentine herself said so:

The negro woman is no more of menace than is the negro man. White supremacy is maintained in both cases by the restrictions imposed by each State Constitution. It goes without saying that each State Legislature will take all necessary steps to make these restrictions apply to the woman voter. . . . That is all we need to say.³⁷⁵

The contemporary debate over how Southern suffragists used white supremacy is a moot point anyway, Terborg-Penn adds. What matters is that the Black suffragists of the South believed the white suffrage leaders were racist, and, though they cooperated with them, Black suffrage leaders never fully trusted white suffragists.³⁷⁶

As a consequence of Northern suffragists' "Southern strategy," national organizations downplayed the role of African American women, omitting their names from national reports in order to entice racist Southern women into joining. Black women, she notes, most likely saw the writing on the wall, and many began to pull away from white-dominanted suffrage efforts.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination Against Afro-American Women," 17, 27.

³⁷⁵ Valentine to Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon, October 11, 1919, ESL Records.

³⁷⁶ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, 120, 123.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Others, like Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Massachusetts, determinedly made space for themselves in national organizations, demanding to be recognized as Black delegates from Black clubs.³⁷⁸

There are many reasons why historians like Lebsock have had a difficult time identifying Black women's suffrage activism in the South. Terborg-Penn notes that white women had a much higher political consciousness and had the ability to act on their convictions. White suffragists had the money, the education, and the free time to devote to the cause.³⁷⁹ White suffragists discriminated against Black activists, who often found it easier to create their own, separate organizations than to try to work with women who did not want them there. Brown argues that African American women campaigning for universal suffrage are often looked over because they did not separate their fight for women's right to vote from the fight for racial uplift and Black men's right to vote.³⁸⁰

Like Progressive white women, African American reformers connected the vote to their ability to improve their communities. As time went on, Black women felt more and more strongly that the vote was something they specifically needed and deserved, even more than white women.³⁸¹ Educated Black women wanted the vote in order to have some say about southern education policies and other racial laws.³⁸² Talbert argued that Black women should have the vote precisely because of their "peculiar position" in Southern society. Her "clear powers of observation and judgment—exactly the sort of powers which are today peculiarly

³⁷⁸ Smith, "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity," 479.

³⁷⁹ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, 13.

³⁸⁰ Brown, "Womanist Consciousness," 63.

³⁸¹ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, 55.

³⁸² Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, "The Black Woman's Struggle for Equality in the South" in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington: National University Publications, 1978; Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1997): 53; for more on the suffrage efforts of women of color across the United States, see Cathleen D. Cahill, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

necessary to the building of an ideal country.” Ohio activist Carrie Clifford drew on maternalist rhetoric, “the great mother-heart reaching out to save her children from war, famine, and pestilence.” Black suffragists believed that, with the vote, they could uplift their communities through political means.³⁸³

In a special 1915 issue of *The Crisis* dedicated to women’s suffrage, Mary Talbert, Vice President of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, wrote that African American struggle on two fronts: as women and as “colored women.” Mary Church Terrell drew parallels between the political disenfranchisement of women and Black men, remarking that antisuffragists made “precisely” the same points about the women’s ballot that white supremacists had made about Black men’s ability to vote.³⁸⁴

The leaders of the African American reform movement in Virginia—Janie Porter Barrett, Maggie Lena Walker, and Ora Brown Stokes—certainly supported women’s suffrage, and made heroic efforts to register Black women to vote after the states ratified the Amendment.³⁸⁵ They would have understood the Black woman’s vote as a chance to redeem the Black political power that disenfranchisement had stolen.³⁸⁶ In 1914, Walker remarked on how Black Southerners were estranged from the vote and political power, saying, “The Negro has not even as yet realized the value and the importance of the ballot. . . .” Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin said in *The Crisis* a year later, “We are justified in believing that the success of this movement for equality of the sexes means more progress toward equality of the races.”³⁸⁷ As ardent racial uplift advocates, the elite Black women of Richmond and Virginia no doubt

³⁸³ “Votes for Women,” *The Crisis* 10, no. 4 (August 1915): 184-5; Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, 54.

³⁸⁴ “Votes for Women,” 184, 191.

³⁸⁵ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 48.

³⁸⁶ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, 9.

³⁸⁷ Quoted in *The Crisis* 7, no. 6 (April 1914): 278; “Votes for Women,” 188.

supported women's suffrage as a means of Black empowerment, as evidenced by their rush to register as voters.

Lebsock's assertion that Black women refrained from campaigning out of concern that their participation in the women's suffrage movement would damage the cause is flawed. Even if NAWSA and the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia rejected African American women, there were other ways to show their support in spaces for Black activists, like the Hampton Negro Conference and the Negro Organization Society, of which both Walker and Stokes were members.³⁸⁸ But there is still very little evidence of suffrage activism by female race workers in Virginia. In his monograph written for the hundredth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment *The Campaign for Women Suffrage in Virginia* (2020), Virginia historian Brent Tarter does not devote much time to the experiences of Black suffragists in Virginia, citing the scarcity of sources. The major Black newspaper, the *Richmond Planet*, did not often report on the women's suffrage campaign, and copies of newspapers that would have more closely covered Black women's suffrage activism such as the *St. Luke Herald* are scarce.³⁸⁹ Hampton Institute's monthly publication *The Southern Workman* documents the community work of the National Association of Colored Women and the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, but makes little mention of women's suffrage advocacy work. So

To the dedicated African American community workers and grassroots organizers, suffrage and the ballot was not their primary concern. The Black leaders of Richmond had built their own organizations essentially from the ground up: Barrett's Industrial School and the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, Walker's Independent Order of St. Luke, which would have died without her, and Stokes' Richmond Neighborhood Association and religious

³⁸⁸ Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South*, 117.

³⁸⁹ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 48.

organization. When Barrett appealed to the Federation for financial support for the school, she emphasized that local community work was the priority for the clubs, writing, “It is our plan . . . not to have our state work interfere with our community work. . . . To clubs already burdened . . . it seemed rather a severe undertaking to try to do something else.” Why would these women, so devoted to their communities, the physical and moral well being of the people around them, and the private institutions they had built over the years, dedicate their precious time and hard-won resources to a state suffrage campaign that absolutely rejected them and repeatedly promised that Black women’s votes would not count? The ESL explicitly promised that the same restrictions that disenfranchised Black men would apply to Black women.³⁹⁰ The General Assembly’s passage of a “Machinery Bill” in 1919 that extended existing suffrage restrictions to women if the Nineteenth Amendment proved them right.³⁹¹ It was more prudent for racial uplift advocates in Virginia to keep to their original course of improving the lives of those around them through more tangible means, like working to improve Black education and fighting the tuberculosis epidemic.

Federal versus State

The United States Senate approved the federal suffrage amendment in June of 1919, and sent it on to the states to ratify. For the federal amendment to succeed, thirty-six states needed to ratify the amendment. Despite Valentine and Clark’s hopes, the odds that Virginia would be one of the thirty-six were extremely long. Even Virginian politicians in favor of suffrage balked against the prospect of a federal amendment. “There was a dear old Confederate soldier, a Mr. Young, in the House of Delegates who had been one of our staunchest supporters,” said Clark.

³⁹⁰ Janie Porter Barrett, “Women’s Work,” *The Hampton Bulletin* 7, no. 3 (September 1911); *Equal Suffrage and the Negro Vote*.

³⁹¹ Graham, “Woman’s Suffrage in Virginia,” 247.

“But when we went to him to ask him to vote for ratification of the amendment, he said, ‘Ladies, you cannot expect me to vote for anything federal. I still bear in my body a wound I received in Chancellorsville, and I would not vote for the federal government to do anything about the electorate.’ So we lost him.”³⁹²

NAWSA, now led by Carrie Chapman Catt, did not expect any victories in the South, but was eager to avoid any major defeats. Catt instructed the southern suffragists to delay introducing the amendment to the legislatures in order to avoid rejection resolutions. Valentine and Catt believed that the amendment would have a better chance in Virginia if the amendment was introduced to the General Assembly after several other states had ratified it.³⁹³

The National Women’s Party (NWP), NAWSA’s more militant and radical reflection led by Alice Paul, had other ideas. Clark spoke derisively of the NWP, remarking that she felt “particularly bitter about the people who are pushing for an object and resort to the militant method when victory is so near at hand” via more conservative methods. Another ESL member, Executive Secretary Edith Clark Cowles, complained that the NWP members were antagonizing the legislators and alienating them from the cause. Clark and the vice presidents of the ESL from Richmond, Norfolk, Newport News, and Lynchburg had to work together to marshal the suffragists during this time as Valentine spent most of the summer of 1919 in Maine, recovering from illness and the sudden death of her husband. Valentine was back in office in late August for the special session of the General Assembly, but her ill health would continue to trouble her.³⁹⁴

The NWP believed that a rejection in Virginia could aid the cause in other states, and when President Woodrow Wilson, a native Virginian, sent a telegram to the General Assembly endorsing the amendment, NWP members persuaded sympathetic legislators to introduce the

³⁹² Clark, SOHP, 11.

³⁹³ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 174.

³⁹⁴ Clark, SOHP, 14; Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 117, 119-20.

amendment to both the House and the Senate. Both houses swiftly rejected the amendment, and the House of Delegates quickly passed a rejection resolution condemning the federal suffrage amendment as “unwarranted, unnecessary, undemocratic” and a violation of states’ rights. The Virginia Senate postponed a decision on the rejection resolution until February 1920, when the senators voted down the amendment, twenty-four to ten.³⁹⁵ The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that several senators said that they would have supported a state amendment, “but that they were unalterably opposed to any amendment to the Federal Constitution which violated the principles of States’ Rights.”³⁹⁶ The Virginia legislature would not ratify the federal suffrage amendment until 1952.

The Virginia tide, however, was turning in favor of the suffragists. The ESL had continued to campaign after the special session in August, collecting signatures and polling legislators. By the time the General Assembly met to reject the federal amendment, the ESL had collected the names of thirty-two thousand women’s suffrage supporters and at last persuaded the General Assembly that women’s suffrage was inevitable. The Assembly began the process of amending the state constitution, but before the Virginia legislators could finish the process, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26th, 1920.³⁹⁷ “At last, when victory really came,” wrote Cowles, “some of us were so stunned we could hardly realize that we had overnight become people. . .”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Wheeler, *New Women in the New South*, 174; Tarter et al 118-9, 127

³⁹⁶ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, February 8, 1920.

³⁹⁷ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 121, 128.

³⁹⁸ “Report of Executive and Press Secretary, for part of June, July, August, September, October,” November 5, 1920, ESL Records.

The Race to Register

The struggle for the right to vote over. It was time for Virginia women, both white and Black, to exercise the right. Between ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in late August and the 1920 election, Virginia women had a month to register to vote and pay the poll tax of \$1.50.³⁹⁹ Women across Virginia went to register in record-breaking numbers.⁴⁰⁰

Valentine, her ill health compounded by a debilitating case of influenza in early 1920, resigned from the League on September 9th. The next day, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia renamed itself the Virginia League of Women Voters, part of a national league organized by Cary Chapman Catt, and made Valentine an honorary chairman.⁴⁰¹ Clark stepped up as the chairman of the Virginia League, with Munford serving as first vice president.

The League sponsored registration drives and voter education initiatives, and continued to lobby the General Assembly for social welfare measures.⁴⁰² They did not forget their Progressive roots; the first bulletin of the League read:

In order to support and uphold the interests of women and children, it is absolutely necessary that the women voters should organize, not in the least as a separate woman's party, but as an earnest and serious body banded together for civic betterment and the welfare of the community in which they live, being now in a position to endorse with their votes the measures they have hitherto been unable to support effectively.⁴⁰³

Their major obstacle was not would-be voters' disinterest, but the difficulty of voter registration. The Virginia government had designed its registration system to be as confounding as possible.

³⁹⁹ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 130.

⁴⁰⁰ "Women Smash Records in Qualifying to Vote," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 9, 1920.

⁴⁰¹ Tarter, "Lila Hardaway Meade Valentine," online DVB.

⁴⁰² "Virginia League of Women Voters," Encyclopedia Virginia, Library of Virginia, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/1281hpr-6baa1f9957e4a06/>.

⁴⁰³ "First Bulletin of the Virginia League of Women Voters" (November 1920), ESL Records.

On October 1st, the day before voter registration ended, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* relayed that the Electoral Board had neglected to release a “list of the thirty-one registrars” and where they would be due to location and personnel changes since the last election.⁴⁰⁴ Registrars could quiz potential voters, asking African American women or those they suspected to be Republican “any and all questions,” according to the state constitution and the Code of Virginia. Years later, a Republican lawyer published a list of questions posed to a single woman: “How many historical flags has the United States? Who discovered the Rocky Mountains and when? Name the first state to grant suffrage to women and when. What state passed the Port Bill and when? . . .” Clark and the League had to petition the offices to hold more than two registration hours.⁴⁰⁵ The *Times-Dispatch* reported that when the City Treasurer’s office closed one day, a hundred and forty women had paid the poll tax. Registrars rejected fourteen of them, “nearly all colored,” and denied them a tax refund.⁴⁰⁶

Like its predecessor, the League of Women Voters did not welcome Black women into the organization, but Clark and Houston worked with Ora Brown Stokes to register Black women outside of the auspices of the League. Clark admitted that the League “never had the nerve” to welcome Black women into their ranks, for fear of being accused of supporting racial equality in the press. As artists, “always considered a little erratic,” Clark and Houston had a little leeway to act on their own, and they contacted local Black women leaders to show their support. On election day, Clark, Houston, and other members of the League drove out to Black polling locations to ensure that white men were not intimidating Black voters. Clark remarked that she thought the Black women voters “were very much heartened” by their presence and

⁴⁰⁴ “842 Add Names to List of Qualified Women Voters,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, October 1, 1920.

⁴⁰⁵ Tarter et al, *The Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Virginia*, 133; *Richmond Times-Dispatch* October 1, 1920.

⁴⁰⁶ “Women Smash Records,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

support.⁴⁰⁷ She went on to say that she regretted that the Leagues did not do more for Black Virginia women, but Ray Bonis, author of “Adèle Clark: The Artist as Activist,” points out that if the Leagues had allowed Black women to join, they would have lost all their political clout and legitimacy in the eyes of white politicians.⁴⁰⁸

At City Hall, registration officials chose to register African American women in the basement, separate from the white women. Towards the end of October, the offices were open for six hours a day, thanks to the petitions of Clark and Houston, but there were still far too few registrars to register the hundreds of women who waited in line. Stokes’ Richmond Neighborhood Association protested the conditions to the Electoral Board and offered to provide qualified helpers, but the board turned them down.⁴⁰⁹ In response, Stokes organized a system to avoid the long lines. When an Electoral Board member wandered into the basement, he commented that the line was thinning. Stokes replied, “There’s more to come. I’ve got them lined up in Jackson Ward waiting for the word. They are ready to come when I call them.” The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* explained that there were groups of Black women waiting for Stokes’ call throughout the Jackson Ward district of Richmond. When the line grew short, Stokes, stationed at City Hall, would call down the next batch of women to register.⁴¹⁰ Stokes had already registered, one of twenty-five hundred Black women in Richmond in 1920.⁴¹¹

The number of Black women voters that year might have been small, writes Gilmore, but it was the first time since the early 1890s that African Americans voted en masse, “the result of a coordinated, subversive campaign, a gendered attack on gender-based white supremacy.”

⁴⁰⁷ Brooks, *The Uplift Generation*, 154; Clark, SOHP, 20-1.

⁴⁰⁸ Bonis, “Adèle Clark,” 153.

⁴⁰⁹ Bonis, “Ora E. Brown Stokes,” online DVB.

⁴¹⁰ “842 Add Names,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

⁴¹¹ Bonis, “Ora E. Brown Stokes,” online DVB.

Women's suffrage transformed southern white women from symbols of white supremacy into full citizens, a huge step towards gender equality, and took away white men's ability to use "Negro domination" as a scare tactic.⁴¹² Political rights no longer denoted masculinity, as they had during Reconstruction.⁴¹³

⁴¹² Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 205-6, 224.

⁴¹³ Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics," 404.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this thesis, I have shown the evolution of separate spheres rhetoric, and how it impacted the lives of white and Black middle-class women in Virginia in different ways. While the ideology of domesticity and the public versus private dichotomy did not reflect the lived experiences of most women, especially Black and working-class women, separate spheres and masculinity as citizenship still dominated late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century political thought in Virginia.

The Readjusters used private versus public rhetoric to defend Black men's positions of power during Reconstruction, while white Progressive women used domesticity and municipal housekeeping to provide an ideological foundation for their public activism. In Reconstruction, Black women embraced the gendered domestic values that they had been denied during slavery, but as southern state governments began to disenfranchise African American men, Black women used their positions as mothers and moral authorities to take charge of the racial uplift movement. The reliance on separate spheres rhetoric in the women's rights movement successfully allowed women to join the body politic, but it did not break the iron grip the white patriarchy had on society. Boris remarks the domesticity rhetoric enforced the idea of female dependence on men, despite the fact that the women activists instituted Progressive programs that allowed women to depend on the state, rather than husbands or male relatives.⁴¹⁴

Many historians and sociologists have analyzed separate spheres doctrine and the boundaries of the public and private spheres in American society, but most, with the exception of Mary Ryan, have focused on northern society. While Ryan has discussed gender and the southern public in the postbellum era, there is room for historians to explore how separate spheres

⁴¹⁴ Boris, "The Power of Motherhood," 235.

manifested in the antebellum South.⁴¹⁵ The presence of enslaved Black men in the plantation household, herrenvolk democracy, and the enslaved African Americans' functions in southern society as both private dependents and public producers and property complicate northern-centric notions of public and private.

Post Civil War racial dynamics further complicated southern women's activism, as elite white women within the movement could at once feel responsible for African Americans' wellbeing, contemptuous of or condescending to them, and fearful of accusations of supporting racial equality. At the same time, many elite white women relied on Black domestic servants to do the work at home, so they could participate in public activities.⁴¹⁶ Black women in turn needed white women's access to resources and political connections in order to advocate for their own communities. In a strange twist, Black women reformers needed to rely on white women's racist feelings of paternalism in order to combat the white supremacist policies that were destroying Black communities by denying them not only the ballot, but also education and public health services. White suffragists and activists often wrote African Americans out of history, but by studying the experiences of African American women and situated them within the wider context of historical race relations, we see "the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation," without judgment based on a normal mode of behavior.⁴¹⁷

Black women's early twentieth-century racial uplift work in the south is little-known, overshadowed by the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. Through the study of Black

⁴¹⁵ Ryan, "Gender and the Public Sphere"; Ryan, *Between Banners and Ballots*.

⁴¹⁶ Elsa Barkley-Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 295.

⁴¹⁷ Elsa Barkley-Brown, "African-American Women's Quilting," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 921.

women's early activism, we highlight not only the origins of civil rights activism in the South, but also Black southern women's autonomy as historical actors.

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