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Constructing womanhood in public: progressive white women in a New South

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CONSTRUCTING WOMANHOOD IN PUBLIC:
PROGRESSIVE WHITE WOMEN IN A NEW SOUTH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

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by

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Introduction

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, southern white women began to participate actively in the national reform movements that helped characterize women's involvement in the Progressive Era. Between 1880 and 1917, southern white women joined the ranks of and became leaders in the temperance movement, the women's club movement, and the woman suffrage movement. With the aid of national organizers and recruiters, southern white women organized local and state chapters of the three dominate national organizations dedicated to these movements--The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Between 1883 and 1910, every southern state had a state chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and by 1913 every state had an affiliated chapter of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.¹

Having determined that they could not claim national success without the participation of southern white women, the leadership of each association was eager to recruit southern white women into its organization. Consequently, the executive leadership of the WCTU, the GFWC, and the

¹Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 161; Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981), 194.

NAWSA, at strategic times, decided to focus their attention on attracting and keeping southern white women in their associations, often at the exclusion of black women and usually at the expense of concern for African American (both female and male) civil and political rights.

The WCTU, under the leadership of Frances Willard, was the first national women's voluntary association to recruit large numbers of southern white women into its ranks. It was followed, in the 1890's, by the General Federation of Women's Clubs and later by the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Southern white women joined each group amid enthusiastic proclamations of a new era of national reconciliation between North and South and a new era of women's activism in American society. Even as southern white women claimed a common gender and race identity which bound northern and southern white women together, they actively maintained a distinct regional identity, which necessitated special considerations within the national organizations.²

²The WCTU maintained a policy of "states' rights" over the suffrage issue to shield southern white women from charges of advocating woman suffrage. At the insistence of southern white clubwomen, the General Federation of Women's Clubs amended its by laws to allow for the exclusion of black women's clubs from the national organization. The NAWSA adopted a resolution affirming the principle of "states' rights," which allowed southern white women to exclude southern black women from membership in their state chapters.

In joining national reform associations, southern white women, like their non-southern counterparts, had to confront the gender ideology of the nineteenth century. Although for most women the practices of the era were at odds with the theory, the dominant rhetorical paradigm for middle class white women in the last half of the nineteenth century was the "Cult of True Womanhood" and the ideology of separate male and female spheres. The purveyors of the paradigm insisted that men and women were assigned to different spheres of activity and influence. Women were assigned dominion over the private sphere of home and family while men were assigned dominion over the public sphere of politics and business.

In the South, white women were also circumscribed by the ideology of southern white womanhood. Promulgated by the white economic and cultural leaders of the plantation South, the image of the southern white lady was a key ideological factor in maintaining the white South's patriarchal order. After the disruptions of the Civil War, the image may have become even more tenacious as white women were constructed to be the repository of southern white culture and the personification of domestic purity, virtue and morality for defeated white southerners. When southern white women began to join women's voluntary associations, they felt compelled to justify their decisions to step outside the traditional boundaries of

home and family--as rhetorically constructed--into the public arenas of politics and reform.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was the first national women's reform organization to attract large numbers of southern white women. The WCTU was organized nationally in November 1874, shortly after the women's crusade against saloons in the Midwest during the previous winter. Although the roots of the WCTU lay in the evangelical Protestant tradition, in the minds of many conservative white southerners, its leadership, as personified by Frances Willard during her presidency from 1879 to 1898, was tainted with the radicalism of abolitionism and woman suffrage. Southern white WCTU leaders attempted to overcome the stigma of radicalism by insisting that their temperance activities were perfectly compatible with the nineteenth century ideology of domesticity. They admitted that their fight against alcohol might take them outside their homes, but they argued that ultimately they were forced to step outside their homes to protect their homes from the evils of alcohol. This "home protection" argument maintained that alcohol threatened women and children because it undermined domestic tranquility by undermining the social and economic security of the family. The rhetoric of white women's victimization by male drunkenness underscored an ambivalence toward the traditional southern notion of white

male protection of white women. White ribboners believed that white males, according to the traditional notion of white male honor, were duty bound to create a moral society free from the disruptions of saloons and male drunkenness.

However, southern white WCTU leaders attempted to confirm that while they appeared to be stepping outside their traditional gender roles, they were still upholding their regional and racial responsibilities as southern white women by affirming their southern identity within the national women's temperance movement. They publicly insisted that the national WCTU respect states' rights and not require southern white women to advocate any program, particularly woman suffrage, that was anathema to traditional white southern sensibilities. While insisting on maintaining and celebrating their regional identity, white WCTU workers also used their involvement in the WCTU to advocate national reconciliation. They and the rest of the WCTU leadership asserted that the WCTU had managed to do more to erase sectionalism in their fight against alcohol than any male political or cultural leaders and organizations in the nation.

The General Federation of Women's Clubs was organized by Jane Croly, journalist and founder of the New York Sorosis Club, a literary club she started in 1868 to promote education and culture among women. Sorosis became the template for hundreds of women's literary and culture

clubs throughout the nation. In 1890, Croly decided to bring these clubs together in a national organization to facilitate communication among the various groups. The result, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, became the largest women's voluntary association in the nation in the first decade of the twentieth century when its membership outstripped that of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. The GFWC's leadership did not bear the same burdens of antebellum affiliations as did the WCTU. Nor was the GFWC--at least initially--directly involved in politics and individual political elections as was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. The GFWC's original goal was to provide white women access to a national network of cultural and literary organizations.

Southern white members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs did not initially have to expend as much rhetorical energy defending their participation in the organization. As the organization began to accept more clubs whose goals were humanitarian and not strictly literary, however, the GFWC moved toward a program of "municipal housekeeping." Like the WCTU's "home protection" argument, the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping allowed southern white club women to engage in social and political reforms while declaring that they were still firmly within the nineteenth century ideology of domesticity. Club women argued that because they were

women, they were trained housekeepers. It was a natural progression, therefore, that they should oversee the maintenance and order of their communities as well as their own private homes. The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping justified white club women's involvement in activities as diverse as establishing parks and playgrounds, inaugurating public health and sanitation legislation, and demanding civil service appointments for government employees.

Southern white club women also used their reform activities to affirm their status as middle class women. They pointed out that, unlike white working class women, they did not have to add to the wage earning capacity of their families but they insisted that, unlike wealthy white women, they did not waste their leisure time. In fact, they argued club work taught them to use their time in service to others, especially poor white women and children. Southern white club women advocated social reform legislation, such as better child labor laws, better schools, playgrounds, and health care and sanitation facilities, especially for poor whites. While actively using club work to extend the boundaries of nineteenth century domesticity into the public realm of social and political activism, most southern white club women still insisted that their efforts did not violate the traditional southern prohibition against white women in politics, until

1918-1919, when southern clubs started to endorse woman suffrage.

Like their WCTU counterparts, southern white club women claimed the bounds of race and gender to unite them with their non-southern colleagues. They, too, however insisted on maintaining a distinct regional identity within the national organization. This insistence was most visible (and disruptive) between 1900 and 1902, when southern white club women led the effort to bar the admission of black women's clubs to the General Federation. Although the motto of the GFWC was "Unity in Diversity," southern white club women made sure that in the Federation unity meant racial and diversity meant sectional.

Southern white club women adhered, most of the time, to the traditional gender rhetoric of the white South. As middle class women, they had the leisure time as well as the social status to devote part of their energies to humanitarian reform efforts. As white women, they utilized the traditional notion of white male deference to white women to advocate the reordering of their communities to fit their standards of domestic order.

The National American Woman Suffrage Association was formed in 1890, as a result of the merger of the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association. The woman suffrage movement in the United States had split in 1869 over issues of race and gender,

specifically whether the woman suffragists should work to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, which included provisions for black male suffrage but not woman suffrage. In 1890, the two groups decided to put aside their differences but issues of race, gender, and strategy continued to divide and disrupt the woman suffrage movement in the nation and in the South until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

In the 1890's, southern white suffragists began to organize state chapters of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Although southern white women had agitated for less discriminatory laws against women throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, organized suffrage work did not begin until the last decade of the century. Woman suffrage highlighted many of the issues of race, gender and region that confronted most white women reformers in the South. Although both the WCTU and the GFWC engaged in very public arenas, they usually obfuscated the political nature of their activities by emphasizing the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and woman's duty to protect the home. White female suffragists, however, demanded political privileges outright. Therefore, their actions were less easily enfolded within the gender ideology of the nineteenth century. Southern white suffragists demanded access to and recognition for middle class educated white women in the public political arena. They insisted that because of

their class and their race they deserved nothing less. As educated, middle class white women, they believed that they should share the same privileges and responsibilities of governance as white men. Although they denounced the enfranchisement of illiterate white men when educated white women could not vote, they particularly resented the enfranchisement of southern black men. They publicly decried being politically classed below black men in a region where one's skin color determined one's present worth and future potential. Southern white suffragists brought to the fore the issues of racialized gender responsibility which usually lurked in the background for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. White female suffragists' demands for the vote directly challenged the traditional notion that southern white men could represent and protect the interest of southern white women. Rather, the suffragists demanded their own voice in government to guarantee that their interests and those of poor, particularly poor white, women and children would be protected.

By 1910, southern white women had become important advocates in the three most influential national women's voluntary associations during the Progressive Era. They had confronted the regional gender ideology that attempted to confine them to the private realm of the home and

family. White temperance workers, club women, and suffragists redefined or challenged the ideology to make clear that they considered "home" a much larger realm than the privatized nuclear family. They expanded the bounds of the public arena to include the concerns of white women, children, and the poor (especially poor white women and children). These reformers demanded that the white male South live up to its code of male honor by either protecting the interests of middle class white women and poor whites or by giving them the political voice to guarantee the protection themselves.

The study that follows is not an institutional history of southern branches of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the National American Woman Suffrage Association nor is it a prosopography of the southern leaders of those organizations. It is rather an investigation into how Progressive Era southern white women who were involved in the temperance movement, the women's club movement and the woman suffrage movement confronted and defined issues of gender, race, and regional identity as they worked to make a place for themselves on the national stage and obtain prohibition, social reform, and woman suffrage on the local, state, and national levels.

**Chapter 1:
The WCTU: Defending (White) Womanhood**

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, under the leadership of Frances Willard, was one of the first national women's organization to attract large numbers of southern white women into its organization.¹ Although southern white women began to join evangelical Protestant missionary societies in the 1870's, they had little experience in national reform organizations because most of the Protestant churches were still split into northern and southern branches.² In fact, Willard and many of the southern white women whom she recruited into the temperance ranks would make much of the role the WCTU could play in national reconciliation.

In 1881, on her first southern tour, Frances Willard visited almost one hundred towns and cities in three months.³ By most accounts, she was well received in the South, although some reports suggested the large crowds she drew were the result more of southerners' curiosity to see

¹Anne Firor Scott has noted that southern white women followed a general pattern of involvement in missionary societies, the WCTU, and then women's clubs. See Anne F. Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 150.

²Ruth Bordin, Woman and Temperance: The Quest For Power and Liberty, 1873-1900 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 82.

³Bordin, Woman and Temperance, 82.

a woman speak in public than of any genuine interest in the temperance crusade. Yet, Willard did generate genuine enthusiasm among some southern whites. By the end of her first tour, she had organized ten state chapters of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) among southern whites.⁴ And two years later, only North Carolina and Mississippi remained unorganized.⁵

Southern whites most often described Willard in terms of her eloquence of speech, her gentleness, and her dignity. Most important, for Willard's success, she was perceived by both white men and women as possessing the highest attributes of "True Womanhood."⁶ With the extreme conservatism of much of the white South on the proper role of white middle class women in society, Willard's public reception was important in paving the way for the success of the southern white women's temperance movement. In her biography of Frances Willard, Ruth Bordin suggests that

⁴Frances Willard, Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 110; Bordin, Woman and Temperance, 76-79.

⁵Some southern states organized but lapsed after Willard's visit.

⁶ On the "Cult of True Womanhood" see Barbara Welter, Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976); Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1790-1832 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," Journal of American History 75 (June 1988): 9-39.

Willard kept returning to the South because she viewed the region's prejudice against politically active women as a challenge.⁷ In an article entitled "How We Guyed the Female Temperance Leader," Dabney Marshall detailed the potential challenges that Willard faced. Marshall's article was a report of Willard's trip to Oxford, Mississippi, in 1882, to speak to the male students at the University. It exemplified the challenges Willard faced as well as revealed white southerners, male and female, tended to portray Willard as a public persona. First, Marshall explained that he and his fellow students planned to embarrass Willard by loudly applauding throughout her lecture. They would do so, he explained, because Willard had committed the three cardinal sins of being a "Yankee," speaking on "so vulgar and plebeian a topic as temperance," and, most "unpardonably of all," being a woman who dared to speak in public.⁸ But, when the students saw Willard, Marshall reported, they realized she was not the "raw boned, sallow faced, snap eyed, parasol shaped...libel on Womanhood," whom they had expected. Her face, Marshall wrote, was "aglow with that ineffable light that lies on the brows of those whose hearts are the home of angel

⁷Bordin, Ruth, Frances Willard, A Biography, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 114.

⁸Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 Oct. 1890, 5. The next three quotes are taken from this article.

thoughts" and her voice as "nothing oratorical, nothing aggressive, nothing shrill." Willard worked hard to convert white southerners like Marshall. In a display of the rhetorical skills that won her many converts in the South, Willard ended her University of Mississippi speech with an appeal to southern white men's chivalry and an invocation of "True Womanhood." Declaring she had heard that no woman had ever pleaded with southern (white) men in vain, Willard asked her audience, potentially the future leaders of the South, to aid the women of the WCTU who, in her words, "would rather be home" but who braved the ridicule of men for stepping outside their homes to protect their homes.

Although Willard's personal ability to win over southern audiences, male and female, black and white, was much praised and although she herself wrote glowingly of her trips to the South, she still met opposition. An 1881 letter published in the Independent reveals the difficulties that she and other politically active white women faced in the region. Willard claimed that visiting southern states yielded the same results as visiting northern ones and professed that the South was far more like the North than she had supposed. But she also admitted that white southerners were still very conservative in regard to white women speaking in public forums. Southern white churches were often only opened to

her in the afternoon, and southern white women gave immediate notice that they would not speak in public.⁹

Speaking in public broke a major symbolic taboo for southern white middle class women. It challenged the idea of the southern white woman as politically uninterested and, therefore, morally pure. Writing in 1889, Henry Scomp, author of King Alcohol in the Realm of King Cotton, described the ideological conservatism of the (white) South in regard to the proper role of (white middle class) women as "an all pervading belief [which] held the whole people in iron bonds".¹⁰ In tracing the ideological history of that "all pervading belief," Anne Firor Scott and Anne Goodwyn Jones have both linked its origins and solidification to the leaders of the white plantation South and their obsession with maintaining a white supremacist patriarchal order.¹¹ The economic upheavals of the Civil War, the social upheavals of emancipation, and the political upheavals of Reconstruction so upset the white South's social order that southern white women were left to represent the ideal of the southern white patriarchal

⁹Henry Scomp, King Alcohol in the Realm of King Cotton (The Blakely Printing Company, 1888), 686.

¹⁰Ibid., 677.

¹¹Scott, The Southern Lady, 4-21; Anne Jones, Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 3-50.

order. According to Jones, white women, in effect, became the repository of white southern culture and the "soul of the South."¹² After the reemergence of white political domination, the ideal of the southern white woman persisted, and with the popularity of late nineteenth century plantation literature, possibly became even more tenacious. It was this ideal coupled with the nineteenth century "cult of true womanhood" that the southern white leaders of the WCTU had to confront.

The ideal of southern white womanhood was a paradoxical mix of perceived power and powerlessness. The image of the southern white lady represented the racial, moral, and social perfection of the region.¹³ She was to be strong yet passive, aloof yet hospitable, but above all she was to be worthy and desirous of the guidance and protection of southern white men. Like the nineteenth century "Cult of True Womanhood", which it echoed and reinforced, the ideal of the southern white woman assigned her moral authority, if not technical control, over the private sphere of home and family. Because she was given moral authority in the domestic sphere, she was supposed to remain within that sphere and leave the workings of the public domain to ruling class white males. In an excellent

¹²Jones, Tomorrow is Another Day, 14.

¹³Ibid., 9.

description, Jones captured the basic truth of the southern white woman's ideological and rhetorical representation:

...the image is not a human being; it is a marble statue, beautiful and silent, eternally inspiring and eternally still. Rather than a person, the [southern white woman] is a personification, effective only as she works in others imagination.¹⁴

Although, Jones argues that southern white women did not participate significantly in creating the ideology in which "their own idealization played so persistent a part,"¹⁵ southern white WCTU leaders did use the ideology to their own advantage. By consistently employing the rhetoric of the image, southern white WCTU members suggested that they believed in the ideal even as they defied one of its basic principles. In 1882, at the national WCTU convention in Louisville, Kentucky, Sallie Chapin, the leader of the southern suffrage movement for many years, utilized this strategy when she welcomed the convention delegates on behalf of the South. She conceded that the northern delegates were "greatly in advance" of the South in their departments of temperance work. Yet, she asked them to remember that southern (white) women had realized only recently that it was possible to speak publicly "for God

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵Ibid., 9.

and Humanity" and retain their "womanly qualities."¹⁶ Indeed, southern white WCTU leaders often publicly reassured themselves and each other that they had not lost their "womanly qualities" by joining the organization. At the second annual convention of the North Carolina WCTU, Laura Winston assured her fellow workers that WCTU work was consistent with the duties of womanhood. She declared that every Christian woman should consider it her duty to protect her "tempted loved ones and imperiled home."¹⁷ Winston not only confirmed the compatibility of temperance work with the duties of womanhood but also insisted that the two were inextricable. She linked temperance work to the responsibilities of womanhood by asking her audience to consider the influence they had in their homes as mothers. Referring back to the "tempted loved ones," Winston asserted that the life of the mother formed the mind of the son. By constructing alcohol as a tempter of males and by accepting that women's major responsibility was to protect

¹⁶National Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky, November 2-8 1882, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Temperance and Prohibition Series, 1977). Hereafter cited as Minutes, National WCTU, (with appropriate year).

¹⁷Second Convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of the State of North Carolina, Held in Asheville, Wednesday, October 8th, 1884, (Greensboro: Thomas Reece and Company, 1884), 17. The North Carolina WCTU held its annual meetings in a different city in North Carolina every year and different publishers published the proceedings. Hereafter cited as Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, (with appropriate year).

the home, Winston could justify female temperance work within the conservative framework of nineteenth century southern white womanhood.

After linking temperance work to domestic responsibility, she went on to justify the woman's temperance crusade as a manifestation of woman's moral responsibility. She declared that God had called women to take "the sword of the spirit" and go forth "as brave soldiers" to battle alcohol for him, their homes and their state.¹⁸ Caroline Merrick, president of the Louisiana WCTU from 1882 to 1892, did not appeal to God to justify southern white women's participation in the temperance movement, but she, too, believed it necessary to reassure her temperance colleagues that the work of the WCTU was compatible with the duties of domesticity. Merrick acknowledged that "courage of a rare and heroic quality" was required for southern (white) women to stand up in "a public place" and advocate temperance reform; however, she advised her delegates not to be "agitated or disturbed" by the position they assumed as public activists.¹⁹ Invoking the laws of progress rather than appealing to God, Merrick argued that "in the evolution of the ages," it was only

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹"Annual Address of Mrs. Judge Merrick Before the Louisiana Convention," Union Signal, 27 March 1884, 2.

natural that women should join with men to protect the nation from the "evils of intemperance."²⁰

Even with reassurance from such respected leaders as Caroline Merrick, southern white females continued to assert their reluctance to engage in public activity.²¹ In an article written for the Union Signal, Mary Read Goodale, Corresponding Secretary of the Louisiana WCTU, expressed her dismay when she learned that she was scheduled to deliver a lecture on temperance in a Baptist church in Bastrop, Louisiana. Goodale explained that she had accompanied her husband, William Goodale, to Bastrop because he was scheduled to deliver a lecture on temperance in the Methodist church, and she planned only to advise the newly organized Bastrop WCTU. "Imagine my astonishment and consternation", she implored her readers, "when...the stage driver told us it was announced in the Baptist church...that I was to lecture on temperance [there]."²² To further complicate matters, her proposed lecture had been announced in the local newspaper. She explained her "consternation" to her non-southern readers by invoking and affirming her identity based on a separate tradition of white womanhood:

²⁰Ibid.

²¹"Public" activity usually meant political activity.

²²"Journeyings in Louisiana," Union Signal, 29 May 1884, 4.

With your more advanced ideas you can scarcely put yourself in my place. We Louisiana ladies have such habits of a quiet reticent life that we shrink with timidity and fear at the very idea of appearing in public.²³

But as if listening to Laura Winston's address on the duties of womanhood, Goodale recognized her duty to the cause. Encouraged by her husband and friends, Mary Read Goodale gave her first public lecture. Goodale attributed her courage to the same sense of duty that Winston and Merrick invoked in their presidential addresses. Goodale stated this sense plainly when she noted, "I saw what was expected, my duty was plain, I sometime ago learned...to seek for the beauty in duty."²⁴ Southern white temperance workers often appealed to this sense of duty when they justified and defended their temperance activities.

In the History of the Georgia Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Lulu Ansley declared that only God "could have induced the timid, reticent women of Georgia and other southern states, with their preconceived ideas of woman's sphere to [leave] their homes and engage in a work which called for public activity. God spoke and they obliged."²⁵ Although southern white WCTU workers may have been hesitant

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Lula Barnes Ansley (Mrs J. J.), The History of the Georgia Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1883-1907 (Columbus: Gilbert Printing, 1914), 52.

to take up public activity, when they did they were fervent in justifying their actions. Like their national counterparts, southern white women most often cited the defense of their homes as their primary reason for joining the WCTU. Southern white WCTU leaders used the rhetoric of domesticity to assure themselves and the white public that they had not strayed from the obligations and traditions of southern white womanhood.

The nineteenth century "cult of domesticity" placed women in moral control of the private sphere, particularly the home.²⁶ However, southern white WCTU leaders constructed a vision of woman as powerless in the home when the male occupants of the home succumbed to the temptations of alcohol. By joining the WCTU, they argued, they were not threatening the traditional domestic role of women but were instead protecting it from the evils of alcohol. In their speeches and writings, (white) women were portrayed as innocent and helpless victims of (white) males who drank. As early as 1884, Laura Winston enunciated this theme at the second annual convention of the North Carolina Women's Christian Temperance Union. In her presidential

²⁶There is some debate concerning whether white middle class women joined voluntary associations primarily as a way to enter the public/male domain or to strengthen their position within the private sphere. For an overview of this debate see Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History, 9-39.

address, she relied on the rhetorical strategy that southern white ribboners would use throughout the crusade:

The greatest distress and suffering which follows in the wake of this dreadful vice does not always come to the drinker himself. But for every drunkard there is often a wife, mother, sister, and children to suffer in consequence of his drinking. When he is absent, they are in a state of crushing anxiety; while he drinks and loses consciousness, they watch and weep and wait and wake.²⁷

Likewise in 1889, Mrs J. Jefferson Thomas welcomed her sister delegates to the Georgia WCTU state convention with a horrifying story of a mother whose only son had succumbed to drink. Jefferson related the troubles of a woman who lost her husband to "the drunkard's grave" and who was then left to depend on her son for support.²⁸ However, according to Thomas, in "an evil hour" the son was tempted to drink. He promptly committed a murder. Thomas then detailed how the mother stood by her son's side at the gallows and watched him hang. After relating this incident, Thomas appealed to mothers throughout the nation to join

²⁷Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1884, 17.

²⁸Minutes of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Georgia, Held in Augusta, April 16-19, 1889 (Augusta: J. M Richards, Printer and Stationer, 1889), 14. Hereafter cited as Minutes, Georgia WCTU, (with appropriate year).

the WCTU crusade to stop the further suffering of other mothers and wives.²⁹

Rarely did southern white ribboners publicly acknowledge the effects of alcohol in their own homes,³⁰ but they consistently reiterated the effects on white women in general³¹ In welcoming delegates to the 1890 Mississippi state WCTU convention, the president of the Oxford union clearly stated her belief that white women were the victims of white male drunkenness. Whatever a woman's relationship to a male drinker, it was the woman who bore the burden. The president declared that if the drinker were a son, it was the mother who suffered, if the drinker were a brother, the sister bore the shame, and if the drinker were a husband and father, the wife and daughter wept in "despair."³² The speaker linked the very essence of womanhood to the fight against liquor when she

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰It is surmised that Thomas's husband, John Jefferson Thomas, had a drinking problem before his death which may have contributed to the families considerable financial setbacks after the Civil War. See Virginia Burr, "A Woman Made to Suffer and Be Still: Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1838-1907," in In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian American South, 1830-1900, ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 215-232.

³¹When white WCTU members discussed the effects of alcohol on blacks, they rarely distinguished between black men and black women.

³²"Address of Welcome by the Oxford Union to the WCTU," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 May 1890, 3.

insisted that every "womanheart" cried out for temperance reform. She stressed the innocence of women who, she insisted, were paying for "crimes" they did not commit and were enduring a "servitude" they did not deserve.³³ In a rare, though discreet, acknowledgment of the effect of alcohol on southern white middle class homes, Mollie McGee Snell wrote to the White Ribbon, official newspaper of the Mississippi state chapter, that "every southern woman [at the national convention] from every southern state told me that 'whiskey was ruining their [sic] homes'." She also wrote that the delegates were "determined to keep up the warfare against the saloons until their states were free."³⁴

In publicly calling attention to their sense of outraged womanhood, southern white ribboners indirectly challenged the notion of southern white male chivalry. In southern white mythology, southern white males were honor bound to protect (white) women from any harm or insult.³⁵ Anne Firor Scott and Anne Goodwyn Jones have argued that the concept of white southern chivalry was directly related to the maintenance of the South's white patriarchal

³³Ibid.

³⁴"Glimpses Into the Convention," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 November 1889, 6.

³⁵For a general discussion of southern male honor see Bertrum Wyatt Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

order.³⁶ The mythology of southern white chivalry can be compared to Eugene Genevose's construction of antebellum southern white paternalism. Genevose contends that white paternalism bound both master and slave to a set of reciprocal obligations. In the black/white relationship, Genevose argues that "paternalism defined the involuntary labor of the slave as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction."³⁷ This system, Genevose argues, insisted on mutual obligations of duties, responsibilities, and ultimately rights, which served to implicitly recognize the humanity of slaves.³⁸ Southern white women's humanity was never in question but the same sense of mutual obligations and responsibilities illuminates what southern white ribboners believed to be the mutual obligations of white men and women to each other. If southern white women accepted the dominance of white men then those men were obligated to protect the well-being of white women and children.

For members of the WCTU, this protection included creating a society free from saloons and male drunkenness.

³⁶Scott, The Southern Lady, 15-18; Jones, Tomorrow is Another Day, 14-15.

³⁷Eugene Genevose, Roll Jordon Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 5.

³⁸Ibid.

Southern white WCTU members clearly blamed white men³⁹ for the problems alcohol caused in southern society, and, if not in their own homes, in other white women's homes.⁴⁰ They insisted that although women had been named the guardians of the home and societal virtue, they were helpless in the face of corrupted white males. In 1889, the Mississippi White Ribbon, printed a biting editorial entitled "Backbone". The editor explained that she had received a letter written by a woman after an election to extend local option prohibition in the woman's town had been defeated. In her letter, the woman asked if there were any men in Mississippi with "good back bones."⁴¹ The writer said if there were any, she would like to see the photograph of one "with bone exposed." The White Ribbon editor credited the women in the community with fighting a "good fight" against the liquor interests and laid the blame for their defeat squarely on white men. She accused

³⁹When southern white WCTU members referred to men, they usually meant white men. When they referred to black men, they did so specifically by race.

⁴⁰Again, when white WCTU leaders referred to women, they meant white women. When they did refer to black women, they did so specifically by race. Interestingly, southern white WCTU members rarely spoke publicly of the domestic problems that black male alcohol abuse may have caused for black women. They usually confined their remarks to the drinking habits of black men and their tendency to vote against prohibition laws.

⁴¹"Backbone," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 March 1889, 4.

Mississippi's white male prohibitionists of lacking courage and blamed them for capitulating to capitalistic interests. She held white middle class men responsible not because they took bribes directly from saloon owners,⁴² but because they wanted the profits from the trade they would get if they did not "antagonize" the liquor interests.⁴³ The editor prophesied that God would surely "curse a land [where] men so stifle their inner voices." Indeed, since white male prohibitionists had not lived up to their obligations to keep their homes and families safe, the editor decided that God had already cursed the land. In fact, the curse was those very white men who would not "stand to their colors" and vote for prohibition. In the editor's opinion, the men of this community (and by implication all white men who would not vote for prohibition) had not only betrayed women but also degraded white manhood by selling out to the liquor interests.

Since southern white men were not adequately fulfilling their obligations to protect women and children from the evils of alcohol, white WCTU leaders suggested that women assume the task themselves. The methods they advocated fit, perfectly, within the parameters assigned to

⁴²White WCTU members often claimed that black and poor white men took bribes from saloon owners to vote against prohibition measures.

⁴³"Backbone," Mississippi White Ribbon, 4. The next two quotes are taken from this article.

southern white middle class women in the nineteenth century. Since women were keepers of the private domain, white ribboners believed that women, as mothers, should simply train young white males not to drink. Mrs. J. C. Keyes, the state Superintendent of Scientific Instruction for the Georgia WCTU, instructed mothers to teach their sons that temperance⁴⁴ was essential to manliness. By linking abstinence to manhood, Keyes attacked the traditional southern notion of drinking as a male prerogative signifying adulthood.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Keyes undermined the traditional notion that parents should be tolerant of youthful male indiscretions. She warned parents who thought boys should be allowed a free rein and who dismissed smoking and drinking as "sowing wild oats" that they would reap a bitter harvest of "weak and dissipated wrecks of humanity."⁴⁶ White female temperance leaders also insisted that young white women should assume responsibility for molding the behavior of young white

⁴⁴All members of the WCTU had to take a pledge advocating abstinence, therefore temperance meant abstinence.

⁴⁵For a discussion of drinking as a male recreational prerogative in the South see Ted Ownby, Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Ownby also includes a useful discussion on what he calls the "evangelical" assault on traditional southern white male recreations.

⁴⁶Minutes, Georgia WCTU, 1884.

men.⁴⁷ An editorial in the Anchor, official publication of the North Carolina WCTU, urged young white women to insist that their male peers take the abstinence pledge. The editorial criticized young women who tempted young men to drink at parties and predicted that the guilt associated with causing the future drunkenness of males would fall heavily on their heads.⁴⁸ While arguing that white females could be responsible for controlling the behavior of white males by not tempting them to drink, the writer still suggested that ultimately white females were the innocent victims of male behavior. The writer contended that young women were innocent of the dangers inherent in the male character. She characterized the male thirst for alcohol as a "lurking lion ready to spring at the least unwary moment"; therefore, she cautioned young women to "dash the wine cup aside" and instead "offer the white ribbon."⁴⁹

Regardless of how WCTU spokeswomen used the discourse of domesticity to justify their actions, simply joining the WCTU represented a challenge to the traditional ideal of the southern white woman. The WCTU was a politically active organization dedicated to the political goal of

⁴⁷White ribboners sometimes maintained a tenuous balance between pointing to white women as helpless victims of white male drunkenness and holding them responsible for male drinking.

⁴⁸"The Y's," The Anchor, February 1886, 5-6.

⁴⁹Ibid.

national prohibition. White ribboners planned and conducted meetings, lectured in public, wrote newspaper articles, and lobbied male politicians to pass prohibition legislation. They were often known to show up at polling places, sometimes serving sandwiches and lemonade (always cold water), to influence male voters to pass prohibition legislation. Local and state leaders of the WCTU realized that in doing so they defied the ideal of the submissive, reticent, and politically innocent middle class southern white lady.

Although their actions openly challenged the ideal, members of the organization, especially in the early years, spent tremendous amounts of rhetorical energy explaining that they had not abandoned their regional identity. In 1883, Sallie Chapin, Superintendent of Southern Work for the national WCTU, reported to the Union Signal that a group of Alabama women had formed a temperance society but had not affiliated with the national organization because they believed it to be "too advanced" for them. The women called themselves the Woman's Home Union and adopted the motto "the Home is Woman's Sphere."⁵⁰ Chapin talked to the women and convinced them to join the national organization by assuring them that the national allowed for states' rights. She told them that each union could "manage its

⁵⁰"Alabama," Union Signal, 7 Feb. 1883, 12.

own work" and that state unions were not required to "adopt any advanced views." While reassuring the women that they could retain their conservative agenda, however, Chapin did allow for more "radical" action in the future. After informing Union Signal readers that southern white women would not adopt any "advanced" views even if required to do so, Chapin added "unless convinced ourselves it was absolutely necessary...to save our homes and loved ones." In which case, she asserted, southern (white) women would "go as far as any women on earth."⁵¹

Although Chapin convinced the Alabama women that the WCTU was not a radical organization,⁵² southern white women, in general, remained cautious. In the 1880's, WCTU workers frequently commented on the public perception of white women meeting to organize unions and hold conventions. Frances Willard described the January 1883 meeting to form the Georgia WCTU as "a great novelty" because it was believed to be the first state wide meeting organized and chaired by women.⁵³ Willard recalled that the people of Georgia were a little hesitant at first and

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²The Alabama WCTU did not organize as a state chapter until 1884, at that time they affiliated with the national WCTU, see "The Alabama WCTU," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 July 1889, 2; also, Mary Martha Thomas, The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1880-1920 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993).

⁵³Ansley, History of Georgia WCTU, 57.

attributed this caution to the belief that WCTU women were "short haired, platform ranters." But, according to Willard, once Georgia's white women learned that the WCTU conducted their meetings like parlor gatherings, they began to attend the meetings in large numbers.⁵⁴ Kate McVicar reported to the Union Signal that the third annual convention of the Virginia WCTU was the first meeting organized and conducted by women held in Winchester, Virginia. McVicar emphasized that Winchester was in a conservative part of the state where sentiment was "adverse" to women taking public political stands.⁵⁵ But, the WCTU had met "without censure" and McVicar predicted a "new era for womanhood" in the state. She attributed the success of the WCTU convention to the "marked intellect and Lady like deportment" of the white ribboners.⁵⁶ Like Willard, who thought that the "mild voiced" proceedings of the Georgia WCTU had attracted followers and alleviated fears of radicalism, McVicar believed that the "lady like" behavior of the Virginia women had calmed anxieties about the dangers of politically active women.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵McVicar's exact quote: "...public sentiment here is much adverse to women appearing in public in any capacity... ." One assumes she meant speaking in public places on political issues. "Virginia," Union Signal, 5 November 1885, 10.

⁵⁶Ibid.

If white ribboners conducted themselves in accord with the white South's notions of womanhood, they believed that they were less likely to face accusations of abandoning their role in southern society. Southern white female temperance workers sometimes spoke of their activities euphemistically as "appearing in public" or "taking a public stand" but the national WCTU was a reform organization committed, especially under Willard's leadership, to aggressive political action. When southern white WCTU speakers directly confronted the question of women's political activity, they usually relied on the "home protection" argument. Occasionally though, they acknowledged the larger economic and political issues involved in the women's fight against alcohol. Mollie McGee Snell admitted that the WCTU was a "great agitator" but she deemed the agitation necessary because the WCTU challenged the financial interest of the state's liquor business and the political influence of those who invested in its trade. Snell reassured the public, however, that Mississippi's white WCTU women did not like being agitators:

Let no one suppose the WCTU likes the squealing or the racket; they endure it.... The sweetest...gentlest women I have known are members of the WCTU. They love peace as much as anybody. The only difference is they [will] not

be beguiled into stillness for peace's sake, when this cannot bring peace.⁵⁷

In an effort not to be perceived as stereotypical female "platform ranters," some white WCTU leaders attempted, in the 1880's and 1890's, to make clear to potential detractors that they had no interests in "woman's rights."⁵⁸ In 1884, at the second annual convention of the North Carolina WCTU, Laura Winston announced that the North Carolina white ribboners had no desire to be represented in "the government of the state," and almost a decade later Missouri Stokes, State Reporter for the Georgia WCTU, denounced the perception that the main purpose of the WCTU was "to preach" or "to vote."⁵⁹ These women knew that, in the minds of many white southerners, the national WCTU was linked with the radicalism of the prewar abolition movement and the women's suffrage movement. They attempted to disassociate themselves from the image of radicalism by affirming their identity as traditional white southerners.

⁵⁷"A Word of Cheer," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 July 1889, 6.

⁵⁸"Woman's rights" usually meant woman's suffrage. Southern white chapters of the WCTU shied away from endorsing suffrage for women in the first two decades of organization. They began to gradually passed suffrage resolutions in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

⁵⁹Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, Convention, 1884, 17; "Georgia," Union Signal, 19 May 1892, 11.

One strategy they used was to compare their efforts at home protection with the efforts of Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. This allowed white WCTU members to align themselves with one of the white South's most sacred traditions: the Lost Cause. Historians have noted that in the 1880's and 1890's, the white South perpetuated the myth of the Lost Cause with a vengeance.⁶⁰ Gaines Foster argues that the celebration of the Lost Cause helped white southerners cope with the tensions associated with modernization and industrialization in the New South, by providing them with a sense of social order and social unity.⁶¹ Furthermore, the rituals associated with the cult reinforced traditional southern notions of deference, order, and loyalty.⁶² When southern white WCTU members compared themselves to southern white Civil War soldiers, they implicitly conjured images of a white sectional loyalty worthy of risking one's life to defend. When invoking the image of the Confederacy, southern white WCTU members recalled the loyalty and dedication of southern

⁶⁰Charles Reagan Wilson, "The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion," Journal of Southern History, XVI (May 1980): 29; Gaines Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 89-103, 113, 272.

⁶¹Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 79-87, 113-114.

⁶²Ibid., p. 195.

white women to the cause during the Civil War. Publicly recounting the sacrifices southern white women made during the period - giving their husbands, sons, and brothers to the cause⁶³ - allowed these women to firmly establish their identity as loyal white southerners. In 1887, Sallie Chapin, the most active and well known white southern WCTU organizer during the 1880's and early 1890's, announced in the pages of the Union Signal that she nor any other "true Southern heart" would ever apologize for secession or the cause which led white southerners to secede.⁶⁴ White WCTU members used the rhetoric of the Lost Cause to demonstrate their continued loyalty to their native region. Although they had joined a national women's organization whose leader was an avowed abolitionist and woman suffragist, causes anathema to the traditionalist white southerner, southern white WCTU members were determined to prove they had not abandoned their regional identity as white southerners. Paradoxically though, they also used their regional commitment to affirm their national identity as full-fledged members of the women's temperance crusade.

⁶³"Queens Re-Enthroned," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 October 1890, 6; "Address of Welcome By Oxford 'Y'", Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 May 1890, 3; Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, Convention, 1887, 55.

⁶⁴"From the South," Union Signal, 13 January 1887, 8. Also for secession as a just cause see WCTU, National Minutes, cxv.

Although the Women's Christian Temperance Union was organized nationally in November 1874, southern white women did not begin to organize state chapters until almost a decade later. Occasionally southerners commented on their late arrival to the national women's temperance crusade.⁶⁵ However, once there, they and their non-southern colleagues made much of the role the WCTU would play in national reconciliation. Like white southern celebrations of the Lost cause in the late nineteenth century, southern white participation in the WCTU helped southern white women affirm their regional loyalty while simultaneously helping to reconcile regional differences.⁶⁶ In the early 1880's, WCTU leaders stressed the importance of the organization in reconciling the North and the South. At the 1881 national convention, Frances Willard declared that the "union of the best elements of the North and South upon the principles of temperance reform is a happy omen of the destruction of that sectionalism which is so dangerous to the welfare of our country...."⁶⁷ Woman's Christian Temperance Union orators liked to assert that in the women's temperance

⁶⁵Minutes, National WCTU, 1882, 46; Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 23.

⁶⁶For discussions of the role Lost Cause celebrations played in reconciliation see Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 196; Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 310, 334.

⁶⁷Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, lxxviii.

movement there was "no North and no South, only women united in a "grand crusade" fighting an evil worse than war-alcohol.⁶⁸ Francis Willard gave the WCTU credit for being the first organization to bring southern and northern women together; thereby, accomplishing a sectional reconciliation which, she said, politicians, statesmen, and soldiers had not accomplished no matter how hard they tried.⁶⁹ Temperance, according to Willard, would be the "new national peace policy" uniting women from all sections to defend their homes and "tempted loved ones".⁷⁰

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was one of the first national women's organization to actively recruit southern white women into its ranks after the Civil War. It was the largest women's voluntary association in the country until the General Federation of Women's Clubs outstripped its membership in the first decade of the twentieth century. The WCTU provided many southern white women with their first lessons in political organization and reform. Although inherently a political organization, its leadership stressed the nineteenth century ideology of woman's domesticity and superior moral virtue. This

⁶⁸"Virginia," Union Signal, 5 November 1885, 19; Untitled article, Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 December 1889, 1; Minutes, National WCTU, 1880, 15.

⁶⁹"Our Great Heart of the South: A Tribute to Sallie Chapin," Union Signal, 4 June 1896, 3.

⁷⁰Minutes, National WCTU, 1880, 15.

allowed the organization to attract women who were skeptical of the "woman's movement" but who were deeply interested in domestic order and moral reform. When white southern women began forming state chapters in the early eighteen eighties, they claimed the protection of their homes as justification. Rhetorically, they emphasized the duty of women to protect their homes and families from the evils of alcohol, thus they remained squarely within the ideology of nineteenth century domesticity. Even as they organized meetings, lobbied legislatures and spoke in public forums, they held firmly to their regional identification as proper middle class southern white women.

Chapter 2: The GFWC: Defining Community and Class

The General Federation of Women's Clubs was organized by Jane Croly, a New York journalist, who had been actively involved in women's professional organizations, like the Woman's Press Club of New England and The Association for the Medical Education of Women during much of her adult life. In 1868, Croly called together a group of women and began Sorosis, a literary club designed to "promote agreeable and useful relations among women of literary and artistic talents...."¹ Unlike the women's benevolent reform societies of the antebellum era or the women's professional societies, Sorosis was organized strictly as a literary club. Its aim was to promote culture among women, not better society. Its four initial departments--music, art, drama, and literature--served as the basic blueprint for the hundreds of women's literary and culture clubs that would be subsequently organized throughout the nation.²

¹Quoted in Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914 (New York: Holmes and Meire, 1980), 23.

²Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist, 19-20. For histories of the women's club movement in America see also, Jane Croly, The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America (New York: Henry G. Allen, 1898); Mary I Wood, The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, (New York: General Federation of Women's Clubs); Anne Firor Scott, Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American

White women's literary clubs were often called the "middle age woman's university" because they existed primarily for the general education of their members. In their formative years, white women's literary and culture clubs studied ambitious programs in American History, European History, and in American and European Literature. Sometimes they undertook to study the entire works of a particular author or philosopher.³ In 1890, Croly decided to bring these clubs together in a national organization, in order, she said, to increase "communication" among "the various women's clubs throughout the world," so "that they may compare methods of work and become mutually helpful."⁴ The result, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, was organized for strictly literary and cultural purposes. Until 1896, its constitution stated that "clubs applying

History, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Dorothy Salem, To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990); Cynthia Neverdon Morton, Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Darlene Clark Hine, "'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible': The Philanthropic Work of Black Women," in Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy and Power (New Brunswick: Rutgers State University Press, 1990), 70-93.

³Scott, The Southern Lady, 152-153; see state reports in Croly, History of Clubwomen.

⁴Ibid., 95.

for membership...must show that no sectarian or political test is required and that while distinctly humanitarian movements may be recognized, their [the club's] chief purpose is not philanthropic or technical, but social, literary, artistic or scientific culture."⁵

Yet, even as early as 1891, a year after its formation, Jane Croly outlined broader social goals for the Federation. In a speech before the Federation Council, she recommended that women's clubs form committees to investigate municipal affairs. The members of these committees, she suggested, could oversee educational, sanitary, and technical improvements in their cities and towns. They should report on what was being done and what needed to be done to maintain "decency and order" in the streets and the schools of their respective communities.⁶ The reform impulse of the Federation quickened when club leaders began to bring their state's local women's clubs together to form state federations. These state federations accepted local clubs that were both literary and reform clubs; thereby, bringing into the General Federation groups of women who were accustomed to

⁵Quoted in Wood, History of the General Federation, 46.

⁶Croly, History of Club Women, 112.

activities beyond the literary and cultural.⁷ As the Federation accepted more club women who engaged in social and humanitarian reform, these women pushed the General Federation toward social activism.⁸

In 1896, at the Federation's biennial convention in Louisville, Kentucky,⁹ the delegates passed a number of resolutions on public issues, including education and conservation of natural resources, two issues that would remain of paramount importance to the Federation throughout the Progressive era. In her history of the GFWC, Mary Wood described education as the "keynote" of the Louisville Biennial. After hearing various presentations on educational topics, the delegates adopted a resolution presented by the education committee, asking the club women not only to study the "science of education" but also

⁷Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist, 97; Croly, History of Club Women, 150-151.

⁸When state federations began to organize, the General Federation accepted them into the national group, further spurring the formation of state federations. Until 1901-02, it was generally accepted that all clubs which were a member of a state federation affiliated with the General Federation were automatically granted membership in the General Federation. See Wood, History of General Federation of Women's Clubs, 67-68. On the initial wariness of the GFWC's leadership toward state federations see Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist, 96-97.

⁹The GFWC held its national convention every two years in a different city. These gatherings were usually referred to by the name of the city where it was held, thus the 1896 convention is called the Louisville Biennial.

to go into their communities and investigate the conditions of their local public schools. The resolution urged that club women use the "united influence of women's clubs" to work for the improvement of state education from the "kindergarten to the university" level.¹⁰ The delegates also passed a resolution protesting the destruction of the national forests. It called on club women to study and to make reports on the forest conditions in their respective states so that state officials would pay more attention to the issue.¹¹

Two years later, at the Denver Biennial, Sarah Platt, president of the Denver Woman's Club, attempted to prod the delegates even closer to the idea of reform. In a speech on club methods, she subtly chastised clubs whose main purpose was literary. Decker pointed to a women's club in Colorado whose members were planning to study the fifteenth century while, she said, "the problems of the 19th were staring them in the face."¹² However, the delegates did hear a number of presentations on the working conditions of children and women, including one led by Claire De Graffenried, a well known child activist, entitled "The

¹⁰Wood, History of the General Federation, 87.

¹¹Ibid., 88.

¹²Ibid., 109.

Industrial Problem as it Affects Women and Children."

Perhaps moved by De Graffenried's presentation, the delegates passed a set of resolutions regarding child and woman labor. They resolved that no child under fourteen should be allowed to work in factories and that no child under sixteen should be allowed to work in mines. They also called for compulsory school attendance and domestic training for all children under fourteen, and urged that women and children be limited to an eight hour work day and forty hour work week. The delegates further resolved that uniform labor laws be established throughout the nation and that each individual club should establish a committee to investigate the labor conditions of women and children in their respective towns.¹³

It was at this biennial that the Civics Section led the General Federation toward its policy of municipal housekeeping, a policy that would eventually involve federated club women in activities as diverse as establishing parks and playgrounds, inaugurating public health and sanitation legislation, and demanding civil service reform for local, state and federal employees. The Civics Section argued that club women should oversee the general maintenance of their cities and towns. Using the

¹³Ibid., 111.

standard rhetoric of domesticity, the committee members pointed out that clubs were composed of women, who because they were women, were "trained housekeepers." Therefore, they concluded, club women should consider themselves not only the overseers of their own households but also the "guardians of the civic housekeeping of their respective communities."¹⁴

White club women used this rhetoric of municipal housekeeping much the same as white ribboners of the WCTU used the rhetoric of home protection. Each drew on the nineteenth century ideology of domesticity to justify white middle class women's interest in the supposedly male domain of public activity.¹⁵ Although the GFWC publicly eschewed political involvement, municipal housekeeping became an acceptable way for middle class white women, the perceived guardians of the private home and of moral virtue, to involve themselves in various public reform activities. Municipal housekeeping became in many respects the watchword of activist club women. As the GFWC's Civics Section explained, housekeeping was what women were

¹⁴Wood, History of the General Federation, 116.

¹⁵Historians of women have begun to challenge the reality of the public/private dichotomy. The best statement of this revision is Becker, "The Domestication of Politics."

expected to do; therefore, it did not seem unreasonable that middle class white women, with growing amounts of leisure time, would look beyond their own homes for places needing to be kept clean and orderly. Additionally, The Woman's Christian Temperance Union had already provided a perfect example of how women's domestic concerns could be expanded beyond the individual home.

Whereas the leadership of the WCTU was committed to aggressive political activity, the GFWC attempted to steer clear of politics. Indeed, even as the concept of civic activity gained ground among club women, they were advised that civic clubs and village improvement societies should be separated from politics.¹⁶ Lori Ginsberg explains that antebellum white women's benevolent organizations tended to eschew politics because it was seen as a corrupting influence.¹⁷ White club women in the Progressive era followed much the same pattern. In accepting the construction of white womanhood as domestic, virtuous and pure, they also implicitly accepted the rhetoric of white

¹⁶Wood, History of the General Federation, 102.

¹⁷Lori Ginsberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), chapter 3.

women's "separateness" from the male political realm.¹⁸ They then constructed this separation as proof of their special worthiness to oversee humanitarian efforts and to address problems of social and civic reform. They argued that because they were separated from politics, they could provide guidance in the best interest of the public, unhindered by political concerns. Because club women usually viewed politics as corrupt, they saw their distance from the partisan dealings of political parties and their patronage scandals as evidence of the purity of their intentions to benefit the public good. Setting themselves above the male political fray, they positioned themselves to correct the humanitarian and social problems affecting society, especially those problems affecting women and children, whom they perceived as the most vulnerable members of society. This positioning also helped middle class white club women solidify their status as middle class, separate and apart from working class and poor women who had neither the leisure time, the financial resources nor the political connections to engage in humanitarian

¹⁸For white club women, politics seems to have meant party politics. Once a policy or course of action was decided on, white club women demonstrated little hesitancy in writing editorials, lobbying legislators and generally taking their cause to the public for support.

reform.¹⁹ The GFWC was successful partly because it gave respectable middle class white women the opportunity to engage in public work while avoiding the stigma of political involvement.²⁰

White women in the South formed literary and culture clubs as early as 1880 and by the time of the formation of the General Federation there were white women's clubs in all eleven of the former Confederate states. A number of factors prompted southern white women to form women's clubs. Many southern white women had been active in forming soldiers' relief societies during the Civil War and after the war they were active in Confederate memorial societies. In her study of the development of leadership among southern white women, Margaret Nell Price argues that clubs helped white women who had participated in the war effort and the adjustments of Reconstruction feel useful in the New South.²¹ In addition, the expansion of the white

¹⁹See Ginsberg, Women and Work of Benevolence; Mary Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1770-1865 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) for discussions of benevolent work and the solidification of middle class status; see also Croly, History of Club women, 362.

²⁰"Editorial," Keystone, June 1899, 3; Scott, Natural Allies, 142.

²¹Margaret Nell Price, "The Development of Leadership by Southern Women Through Clubs and Organizations," (M. A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1945), 59; for contemporary accounts see, "The Problem of the

middle class and the subsequent growth of leisure time among the wives of professional men left many southern women with enough time to devote to club work.

Although southern white women constituted a small percentage of the delegates who attended the General Federation's initial meetings, they held important positions of leadership. In March 1890, white club women in Tennessee and Louisiana sent one delegate each to the initial convention to organize the General Federation. Although these women accounted for only two of the sixty-one delegates present, Jennie Nobles of Louisiana, was elected to the committee to draft a constitution. At the convention to ratify the constitution, Mary Temple of Tennessee was elected Corresponding Secretary of the Federation.²² At the first biennial in Chicago in 1892, southerners were again elected to executive positions within the organization. Temple was reelected as

Feminine," Keystone, April 1901, 9; "Response to the Address of Welcome at the Sixth Convention of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Held in Columbia, 1903, Keystone, June 1903, 4.

²²For a list of the initial delegates at the organizational convention see Wood, History of the General Federation, 315-317; Ibid., 35, 38.

Corresponding Secretary and Nobles was elected to the Board of Directors.²³

In the mid 1890's, following the national trend, southern white club women began to form state federations. Kentucky became the first southern state to do so in 1894; by 1910 all southern states had state federations affiliated with the national organization.²⁴ Like most middle class American women who joined voluntary associations, southern club women had to justify their decision to devote at least a part of their energies to something other than the home. Often they did not have to face the issue immediately because small local clubs usually met in a woman's home. However, when southern white women began to gather to form state federations they acknowledged the unusualness of their actions. Like WCTU leaders, the leaders of white women's clubs conjured the image of the traditional southern white lady even as they publicly met in defiance of its basic principles. The state secretary of the Arkansas Federation of Women's Clubs noted that the women who organized its state federation were representative of southern white womanhood. They

²³Ibid., 51.

²⁴Wood, History of the General Federation, 353; Price, "The Development of Leadership by Southern Women Through Clubs and Organizations," 136.

were, she said, "timid" and reluctant to engage in public activity.²⁵ But like the WCTU white ribboners who overcame their hesitancy by stressing their commitment to duty, white club women knew they had to move forward or be left behind by the national movement.

In 1891, Ellen Henrotin, a future president of the GFWC, noted at a Federation Board meeting that cooperation and consolidation were the two main forces driving the modern world. As President of the Federation from 1894 to 1898, Henrotin stressed the importance of organization and centralization for the women's club movement. In her 1896 President's address at the Louisville Biennial, Henrotin outlined her philosophy:

The club takes the interest outside of the narrow individual life and brings it into unison with the community life, and through the state and General Federation the community life comes into unity with the national life.²⁶

Publicly, southern white club women stressed the traditional idea that southern white women had been isolated and sheltered within the home. They spoke of the tradition of guarding white women from the world of public

²⁵Croly, History of Club women, 213.

²⁶Quoted in Wood, The History of the General Federation, 79.

activity.²⁷ In describing the meeting of forty eight delegates from twenty four clubs to form the Arkansas Federation of Women's Clubs, the Federation's historian wrote:

It was a gathering typical of southern womanhood. There were apparent from the first the native timidity and shrinking from publicity characteristic of those whose lives have been passed in the seclusion of home....²⁸

Nonetheless, between 1894 and 1910, club women in every southern state gathered together in very public forums to organize state federations. White club women in the South formed state federations in the same spirit of unity, organization, and consolidation that guided the General Federation. Like other professional and volunteer associations throughout the nation, women's clubs expressed the tendency in Progressive era America to consolidate and centralize.²⁹ By organizing state federation and affiliating with the GFWC southern white women gained access to a national organization that by 1910 was the largest women's organization in the country. Although most

²⁷Croly, History of Clubwomen, 237, 1082; "The City Woman in Club Life," Keystone, March 1905, 12.

²⁸Croly, History of Clubwomen, 213.

²⁹See Robert Wiebe, The Search For Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Louis Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History," Business History Review 44 (1970): 279-90.

clubs continued to focus on literary and cultural activities, the formation of state federations quickened the pace of reform activities in some clubs.³⁰

When southern white club women met to form state federations, they, too, emphasized the importance of moving beyond the narrow limits of the literary and culture club. At the organizational meeting of the Arkansas Federation, Mrs. William C. Ratcliffe, state chairman, declared that before white club women organized state federations they had worked in a "hermit" like and selfish manner. However, she believed that the state federation would be the key to bringing club women out of their cultural and intellectual isolation. The state federation would give club women goals and directions. As an organization, the state chair believed, the federation would strengthen the influence of individual women by bringing them together into a skillfully directed and organized force.³¹ Like the

³⁰In 1906, under the leadership of Sarah Platt Decker, the GFWC took two important steps to consolidate the work of white women's clubs. First, it asked state federations and individual clubs to harmonize their committees with those of the General Federation. Second, it established a Bureau of Information which provided all members clubs with standardized information on all departments of club work and assisted clubs with the preparation of essays, addresses and club programs. See Wood, The History of the General Federation, 191-193; "A Letter from Mrs. Decker," The General Federation Bulletin, March 1905, 190.

³¹Croly, History of Clubwomen, 213.

leaders of the General Federation who advocated organized unity, the leaders of southern white club women believed that state federations would provide them with a means to engage in a broader range of public activity than would the individual club³². Southern white club leaders believed that women's clubs could be the avenue through which middle class southern white women could move beyond the limited horizons of their individual private homes and join the larger network of organized women, working to influence public policy to help solve the social problems that plagued Progressive era America. Leaders believed that club membership would engender in individual women a sense of purpose and direction. They attempted to guide women through a complicated process of individual development while also fostering a sense of local, regional, and national unity among all white club women so that their social and civic reform goals could be more effectively met.

³²Often the engagement was only abstract. Individual clubs (hence individual members) often never moved beyond studying and discussing humanitarian and civic issues. Nevertheless, club leaders thought this was even a significant step for middle class southern white women; see Yearbook, 1911-1912, North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs; Speech of Helen Varick Boswell, Chair of Committee on Industrial and Child Labor (GFWC) quoted in Wood, History of General Federation, 261.

Southern white club women already knew they were supposed to possess a special influence with the men of their society.³³ Club leaders wanted white women to use this influence to persuade their political leaders to right the wrongs they saw in southern society, especially those affecting women and children. But before this could be achieved, white club women needed to develop both a sense of individualism and a sense of unity in purpose with other white club women.³⁴ The early clubs organized by southern white women were designed to educate their members on

³³Croly, The History of Clubwomen, 362; "North Carolina Club Women," Federation Bulletin, June 1904, 185; "Woman's Sphere," Keystone, January 1907, 5; "Mississippi Federation," General Federation Bulletin, April 1912, 58; see also, Nancy Faderhouse, "'Limited Only by Earth and Sky': The Louisville Woman's Club and Progressive Reform, 1900-1910," Filson Club Quarterly 59 (July 1985): 342.

³⁴Clubs in the South were segregated by race. The General Federation of Women's Clubs did not officially draw the color line until 1900-1902. Before that time there were a few women of color who were members of predominately white women's clubs in other regions of the country which were affiliated with the General Federation. It is unclear as to whether these women were considered individual members of the General Federation because the issue of membership and representation was under continuous discussion until 1902, when the bylaws were finally amended clarifying some aspects of membership. Under the 1902 bylaws the General Federation effectively excluded black women's clubs from joining the organization. Again, although it is unclear, one assumes that individual black women who were members of individual clubs or state federations affiliated with the GFWC were considered members after the bylaws change because individual members were not voted on for membership, only clubs and federations of clubs. See Wood, History of The General Federation, 54-157, 345-348. For a discussion of the movement to exclude black club women see Chapter Five.

various subjects, mostly literature, art, history, and music. Historians have stressed the role these clubs played in developing club women's sense of self-esteem and leadership.³⁵ Like WCTU meetings organized and conducted by women, club meetings were often the first time individual white women addressed an audience or held a leadership role, outside their homes. Clubs introduced women to parliamentary procedures, organizational methods, and public speaking.³⁶ To develop and maintain a member's growth and self-assertiveness, white club leaders advised women to take part in their clubs activities. Acknowledging that some women were more likely to assume leadership roles than others, leaders still stressed the necessity of all women being involved. They counseled members to participate in all aspects of club work and not leave club activities in the hands of a few members.

³⁵In her study of white women's study clubs, Theorda Martin argues that the nineteenth century ideology of True Womanhood allowed little, if any room, for white women to develop a sense of autonomy. She describes True Womanhood as "lacking a rite of passage." Women, she argues, "melded True Daughter to True Wife without opportunity to discover True Identity"; Theorda Martin, The Sound of Our Own Voices, 132.

³⁶Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist; Martin, The Sound of Our Own Voices; Scott, The Southern Lady; Wedell, Elite Women and the Reform Impulse in Memphis; Mary Martha Thomas, The New Woman in Alabama: Social and Suffrage Reform, 1880-1920 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 41-68; Faderhouse, "'Limited Only By Earth and Sky'," 343.

However, they also warned club members not to use their respective clubs for "personal power and aggrandizement" but rather to "further the power and influence of the association as a whole."³⁷ In an article on individuality and group responsibility, Mary Putnam Gridley, a white South Carolina club woman, acknowledged that southern white women needed to cultivate principles of individualism. Calling America a nation of individuals rather than of masses, Gridley told South Carolina's white club women that they would be left behind by the national club movement unless each woman developed an individual sense of leadership and responsibility. Enfolded the principle of individuality with that of collectivity, Gridley argued that as each member claimed her individual share of responsibility her club could then act more effectively as a unit.³⁸ Individualism, therefore, became a key component in developing group identity and collective success. As each club became a more effective individual unit, its strength as part of the national club movement would be enhanced.

³⁷"A Talk with Clubwomen By A Club Woman," Keystone, December 1899, 9; Yearbook, North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, 1911-1912, 15-16.

³⁸"Individuality," Keystone, July 1899, 8; Yearbook, North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, 1910-1911, 16-17; "Texas," General Federation of Women's Clubs Bulletin, March 1906, 293; "Editorial," Keystone, June 1899, 3.

The importance of developing individualism in southern white club women overlapped with the importance of developing group identity, especially class identity. Theorda Martin argues that smaller clubs helped middle class white women feel anchored in a national environment that was rapidly becoming more and more complex. Drawing on Robert Weibe's thesis of growing interdependence and diminishing face to face personal contacts in a national market economy, Martin postulates that study clubs were a reaction to a rapidly changing society. Women could gather together in their clubs where they knew each other as well as each other's families and feel less threatened by outside forces.³⁹ Clubs provided security and stability by solidifying middle class status for their members. For Croly's 1898 volume on women's clubs in America, the Secretary of the Woman's Club of New Orleans reported that the conditions in Louisiana for fostering (white) women's clubs were "less fortunate" there than in any other state. She characterized the economic and social classes of Louisiana as consisting of "cultivated women" who represented "wealth and exclusive society", "poor white women" who were "little above the negro in social scale" and a "half caste creole element" who were often "refined"

³⁹Martin, The Sound of Our Own Voices, 65, 148.

but lacked any "common ground of equality in the social relations of women."⁴⁰ Club women, both black and white, often, considered themselves different from both wealthy women and working class women.⁴¹ White club women, more often than not, detached themselves from black women of all classes.⁴²

Like women of the national club movement, southern white club women used club membership to solidify their class standing while simultaneously justifying their moves toward public activism. Partly as a reaction to those who thought club work was frivolous and a waste of a woman's time, club leaders emphasized the benefit of club work to the individual club woman, her community and her family.

⁴⁰Croly, History of Clubwomen, 510.

⁴¹Sallie Southall Cotton, "North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, The First Decade of Growth", Yearbook, 1912-1913, North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, 14-35. For historical analysis, see Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence, 34; Deborah White, "The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black Feminism," in Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lesbock, ed., Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 247-269; Salem, To Better Our World, 22.

⁴²A few of the larger predominately white women's clubs, such as the Chicago Woman's Club and the New England Press Club did admit black women. The Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs fought to admit black clubs to the General Federation (or, at least, not to bar their admission) and the short lived National Federation of Afro-American Women made a point of not drawing the color line as did southern white women's clubs. On the NFAAW, see Salem, To Better Our World, 22, 41-42.

They argued that the broadening of a woman's horizons through a study club made her less idle and more efficient. Club work trained women not to waste time but rather to put "spare moments" to use either through self education or service to others. Furthermore, this training made a club woman a better wife and mother because, according to an editorialist from the South Carolina Keystone, a woman who had broadened her horizons "by occasionally stepping outside the narrow bounds of household cares...[was] more companionable to her husband and better fitted to grace his home and train his children."⁴³

Efficiency was one of the salient features of Progressive middle class identity. Historians have argued that a distinguishing feature of the emergent American middle class of the 1820's and 1830's was its new emphasis on the use and value of time. Entrepreneurs routinized work schedules and began to rigidly enforce the distinction between working time and leisure time.⁴⁴ The Progressives, with their emphasis on efficiency, were even more concerned

⁴³"Club Contrasts," Keystone, June 1899, 12; Croly, The History of Clubwomen, 1095, 1106-1107; North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Yearbook, 1911-1912, 23.

⁴⁴For a clear, concise discussion of this, see Paul Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester New York, 1815-1837, American Century Series (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 37-61.

with maximizing the use of time.⁴⁵ The middle class had more leisure time, but it was very concerned with the proper use of that time. Mary Wood argued that the General Federation of Women's Clubs was organized to represent the goals and values of middle class (white) women. According to Wood, the women who formed the GFWC were neither working class nor wealthy. They were rather, she said, a third class of "earnest eager women...neither forced by the exigencies of their fortunes to add to the wage earning capacity of their families nor...willing to give themselves up to a life of personal indulgence."⁴⁶ Contrasting middle class club women with wealthy women, Wood insisted that club women did not waste their new found leisure time. Instead, she argued, they viewed it as added responsibility and looked for ways to be of service to their communities. Wood's description of middle class women fit within both the ideology of (white) womanhood and Progressivism.

Although middle class club women spent less time working in their respective homes, club women did not regard this as a diminution of their responsibilities. Although Wood had to justify the tendency of early clubs to

⁴⁵Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age, American Century Series (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 38-69.

⁴⁶Wood, History of The General Federation, 25.

shun social reform, she argued that the real meaning of club work was service to others.⁴⁷ This was the aspect of utility that southern white club women stressed most often. They acknowledged that many white women lead very sheltered lives before getting involved in club work.⁴⁸ This was both a recognition of the restrictions placed on white middle class women's lives and an indication of their status as middle class women who could afford to lead lives primarily centered around home and family rather than home, family, and wage earning. However, club leaders argued that club work lead women to realize their value as community leaders because it educated them to the problems of their society. The chair of the state Education Committee of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs described Georgia's (white) club women as mostly women of "culture and leisure," but insisted that they thought of poor women in their "poverty, ignorance, and hard work" and gave freely of their money, intelligence and time" to aid poor women and their children.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Ibid., 26-31.

⁴⁸"Editorial," Keystone, June 1899, 3; "The City Woman in Club Life," Keystone, March 1905, 12; Price, "The Development of Leadership in Southern Women," 157.

⁴⁹Croly, History of Clubwomen, 362.

Even before Sarah Platt Decker began to spur the GFWC toward humanitarian and social reform, southern white club leaders encouraged white club women to move beyond the limits of cultural and literary study. They publicly congratulated club members when they branched out into humanitarian activities. In 1899, the Keystone, the official newspaper of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs,⁵⁰ praised both the Thursday Club of Greenville, South Carolina, and the Charleston Female Seminary Alumnae Association for moving beyond self-improvement and personal enjoyment to service activities. The Thursday Club, which formed as a "purely literary" club, decided to get involved in library extension work and subsequently donated a traveling library to the South Carolina Federation to send out to rural districts.⁵¹ The Alumnae Association, organized as a social club in 1889, began to feel "discontented with past achievements" and

⁵⁰By 1913, the last year of its publication, the Keystone was also the official magazine of the North Carolina, Mississippi, Virginia, and Florida Federations of Women's Clubs as well as various other white women's organizations including chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

⁵¹Keystone, (Month) 1899, 6. Traveling libraries usually consisted of books and magazines donated by women's groups and sent out to rural districts where there were no public libraries. Citizens of the towns could borrow the books for a limited time at no charge.

decided to work "less for self and more for others."⁵² As a result in 1893, the club took over the management of a kindergarten for factory workers' children, and in 1898-99 they, too, joined the state federation's library extension program and put together a traveling library for rural districts. Furthermore the club members urged other clubs to get involved in humanitarian activities, otherwise, they warned, the problems of factory workers and their children would present a "grave problem to thinking men and women" in the future.⁵³

The editors of the Keystone joined the Alumnae Association in advising white women to involve themselves in public activities. In June 1899, the paper published an editorial urging older women, whose children had left home, not to grieve their losses but rather to realize that they were just beginning to "awaken to the real meaning of life," which according to this editorial, was service to others.⁵⁴ The editor acknowledged that most readers had already spent their lives in service to their families, as wife and mother; however, she insisted that this was really service to themselves. Now she was advocating service to

⁵²Keystone, September 1899, 8.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴"Editorial," Keystone, June 1899, 3.

the "sad and suffering," who were as much "kinfolk" as a woman's own family and who also needed the "sympathic hands" of womanhood.⁵⁵

At the sixth annual convention of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Sarah Visanska, president of the Kelly Kindergarten Association and of the Civics Club, told the delegates that the "social economy" of the state needed the skills of (white) women more than ever. Like her WCTU counterparts, she used the familiar rhetorical trope of recalling how southern white women had risen to the challenges of the Civil War. Now, however, she asked the delegates to rise to the different challenges of the New South. Visanska noted that "on the site of the old plantation, with its swarm of happy, child-like, improvident negro slaves" now stood the "modern factory with its "village of pale, oft-neglected children," who (apparently, unlike black plantation slaves) needed to be educated.⁵⁶ She advocated the building of public parks, playgrounds, and libraries so that the white workers and their children could occasionally escape the "stifling air

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶"Response to the Address of Welcome at the Sixth Convention of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Held in Columbia, 1903," Keystone, June 1903, 4.

of the tenements."⁵⁷ Visanske felt the necessity to end her speech by assuring her fellow club workers that they would not be criticized for their efforts. She told them that "no critic however conservative" could claim that the work was "beyond the sphere of woman."⁵⁸

Even as their clubs embraced reform activities, staying ideologically enclosed within the "sphere of woman" remained as important to southern white club women as it did to members of the WCTU. Although club women, like WCTU workers, operated in a very public environment, they continued to employ the rhetoric of nineteenth century domesticity. Since, unlike the WCTU, the GFWC was not tainted with the radicalism of abolition or woman suffrage, southern white club women had to spend less time than white ribboners affirming their loyalty to the ideology of traditionalist white southerners. In public opinion woman's suffrage was usually the benchmark of whether a woman's organization was perceived as politically and socially extreme. The General Federation of Women's Clubs did not endorse woman's suffrage until 1914 and the issue did not come up for debate at a Biennial until 1910. In fact, in 1912, the president of the Federation, Ellen

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

Henrotin, asked those in favor of woman suffrage not to push the issue because there was a large minority of women in the organization who were conservative on the issue. She compared the divisiveness of the issue to that of admitting black clubs to the Federation a decade earlier and recalled how non-southern club women had deferred to the wishes of their southern colleagues and voted not to bring the issue to the floor for open debate and then effectively excluded black clubs by amending the bylaws.⁵⁹

Additionally, the Federation did not engage in the same type of personality cult as did the Woman's Christian Temperance Union with Frances Willard. The GFWC president was limited to two consecutive terms, therefore no president ever served for more than four consecutive years. The Federation was able to maintain consistent policy because Presidents were usually sitting members of the Board of Directors or often sitting Vice-Presidents, but, unlike the WCTU, the organization was never identified with a single dominate personality capable of pushing a political or social agenda far to the left of its most conservative membership, as Frances Willard did with the woman suffrage issue. Additionally, the Federation policy

⁵⁹"Presidents Address," General Federation Bulletin, 265.

allowed for shifting geographical representation at the highest levels of executive authority.

Although the GFWC was not considered by most people to be a radical "woman's rights" organization, club women were occasionally criticized for getting too close to politics. Just as some critics charged that local and state chapters of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union advocated woman's suffrage, during the Federation's early years, some critics also charged that the women's clubs advocated woman's suffrage. Southern white club women usually responded by insisting that they were not interested in politics. In 1900, the Keystone, assured those "who could not associate the name clubwoman with augut save the ballot box" that South Carolina's (white) club women were too busy working for the advancement of their communities to "take up politics."⁶⁰ Four years later, the president of the Raleigh Woman's Club echoed the same sentiment. She declared that although southern (white) women had a reputation for bravery, there were two things they were afraid of, "doing something unwomanly and getting mixed up

⁶⁰Non-titled, Keystone, April 1900, 3.

in politics."⁶¹ She assured potential critics that neither of these had a place in the Woman's Club of Raleigh.

However, shortly after organizing, several members of the Raleigh Woman's Club formed a committee, called the City Improvement Branch, which did seem to lead them close to "getting mixed up in a politics." The committee was dedicated to cleaning up the city. The chair of the committee outlined to the club members a plan to ask the city's male administrators for cooperation in their project. In her speech, the chair noted that the members did not intend to be "aggressive," although, she did point out their belief that "taxation without recognition was not right."⁶² She averred that being disfranchised was "perfectly agreeable" to the club women; however, she noted that the committee members did expect the city administrators to listen to them and receive their suggestions "in the same spirit that they were given;" furthermore, she added, they expected results.⁶³ Like their WCTU colleagues, southern white club women lobbied

⁶¹News clipping, dated 15 October 1904, Elvira Moffitt Papers, Box 6, vol. 12, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, hereafter cited as Moffitt Papers.

⁶²"Speech read to Woman's Club of Raleigh," Box 6, vol. 12, Moffitt Papers.

⁶³Ibid.

legislatures, wrote editorials and demanded in very public arenas that they be listened to and that their suggestions be taken seriously.

Publicly acknowledging their disfranchisement even as they became involved in the public arena allowed southern white women to remind southern white male politicians that white women could only rely on the tradition of white male deference to the wishes of white women to implement the legislative changes they sought. By not challenging their disfranchisement,⁶⁴ but, nonetheless, working to affect social change in the New South, white club women served notice that they expected white male leaders to honor their ideological code and respectfully consider club women's demands and implement the changes they requested. Rather than challenge the gender conventions of southern society directly, southern white club women relied on the ideology of domesticity and southern white womanhood (with its concomitant notion of white male chivalry) to achieve their goals of reordering the environmental and educational

⁶⁴Southern white club women began slowly to endorse woman suffrage after 1914, most state federations did so between 1918-1920.

conditions of poor whites and white women in the post war South.⁶⁵

In 1904, Lindsey Patterson, president of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, told the readers of the General Federation Bulletin that North Carolina's (white) club women had created departments of Village Improvement, Education, and Library Extension but had no intention of creating a department of Civil Service Reform because it bordered too closely on politics.⁶⁶ Patterson explained that the (white) men of North Carolina had spoken "in no uncertain terms" against women being involved in politics, and because North Carolina's club women respected male wishes they could not duplicate the Federation's department of Civil Service Reform. Although, Patterson acknowledged that in doing so, they adhered to traditional

⁶⁵Although southern Progressivism was not "for whites only" because blacks engaged in intensive efforts to improve their environmental, social, political, educational and economic conditions in the New South, southern white Progressives tended to concentrate their efforts on measures that benefitted whites, and white women reformers tended to focus their efforts on poor whites (especially children) and white women. See, C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 369-395; on southern black Progressive Reform, see, John Dittmer, Black Georgians in the Progressive Era, 1880-1930, 110-122; Neverdon-Morton, Afro American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race; Rouse, Lugenia Burns Hope, 57-121.

⁶⁶"North Carolina Clubwomen," General Federation Bulletin, June 1904, 185-86.

notions of southern gender conventions, she insisted that they did so by choice. North Carolina's white club women chose to honor the wishes of North Carolina's white men, Patterson explained, because the men loved them and would do anything in their power to pamper and protect them.⁶⁷ Like Eliva Moffitt who professed that disfranchisement was "perfectly agreeable" to Raleigh's club women and then demanded that Raleigh's city administrators listen to club women's suggestions because they were playing by the rules of the southern white gender order, Patterson abided by the traditional notion of white male chivalry but invoked the two way nature of the agreement: North Carolina's white clubwomen would steer clear of politics and North Carolina's white men would take care of them and respect their efforts at humanitarian, educational, and civic reform.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid. In 1910, Laura Holmes Reilley, president of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, suggested to the delegates at the state convention that they create a modified department of Civil Service Reform. Reilley admitted her belief that club women could not solve the problems of civil service classification at the national level but did believe that North Carolina's clubwomen should work to inaugurate a merit system of appointment for employees at state institutions which cared for children, the poor, and the mentally handicapped. She also suggested that club women visit these institutions to verify that they were being administered in an efficient and humane manner. The delegates approved her suggestion and a department of Civil Service was created, see "President's

Southern white clubwomen insisted, most of the time, that they were happy within the boundaries of southern white womanhood, although, they did acknowledge that they were attempting to widen those boundaries. In 1905, the State Secretary for the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs reported that Texas clubwomen had broaden their concerns. She noted that they started their organizations declaring that they would "never have anything to do with politics" but as time passed discovered that they were interested in all issues affecting the lives of women. This recognition led them to investigate the legal status of women, to challenge the Texas divorce laws that they believed discriminated against women and to publicly denounce the double standard of morality. In her presidential farewell address, a year later, Mrs. E. P. Turner, outlined the philosophy of Texas's white clubwomen. Mrs. Turner began her address by emphatically stating that there was "no such being" as the "New Woman" in women's clubs. She claimed instead that the mothers of the country were simply entering a "broader" field of usefulness and "protesting" their exclusion from engagement with the more "serious problems of life." Like other members of the southern

Address," North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Yearbook, 1910-1911, 20; Ibid, Yearbook, 1911-1912, 19.

white club movement, Turner expanded the definition of True Womanhood. She stated that the "truest" woman extended her interest beyond the raising of her own children and accepted her new responsibilities of public activism. In fact, Turner obliquely criticized the traditional women of the preceding generation for raising men who, in her words, "[had] fastened themselves, like human leeches, on the industrial, commercial, and political vitals of the world...."⁶⁹ From this perspective, women, who were not actively involved in the problems of society, were unfit to raise male children who could be trusted morally and politically to run the nation.

Women's clubs provided southern white women with the opportunity to further their own education as well as engage with the growing number of women's organizations attempting to tackle the country's social problems, especially those affecting women and children. Additionally, their clubs helped confirm their own position in the social and economic order. As middle class white women, they had the social status and economic security to expend part of their energies attempting to reorder their communities to fit their standards of decency and domestic order.

⁶⁹Ibid.

Chapter 3: The NAWSA: Demanding Race and Gender Justice

In 1918, after many attempts by white women to enact woman's suffrage legislation in the South, Mrs. Guilford Dudley of Tennessee, wondered, publicly, if, after all, southern (white) men did not trust southern (white) women with the ballot.¹ Nearly forty years earlier, in 1878, Caroline Merrick of Louisiana, wondered, publicly, if southern (white) men thought southern white women incapable of the "intelligent exercise" of the vote.² The question of woman's suffrage highlighted the ideological issues of race and gender identity that confronted most white women reformers in the South. The WCTU could and often did hide its political character behind the rhetoric of morality and domesticity. White clubwomen advocated a political agenda but insisted that their goals were not political and that their members were only interested in ameliorating the country's social and moral ills. However, the woman's suffrage movement was an overtly political movement with overt political goals. Although woman suffragists, like the temperance leaders and the women's club leaders, often

¹Mrs Guilford Dudley, The Negro Vote in the South, A Southern Woman's Viewpoint (New York: National Woman's Suffrage Publishing Company, 1918), no pagination, in Laura Clay Papers, Margaret King Library, University of Kentucky, hereafter cited as Clay Papers.

²Elizabeth Stanton, Susan Anthony, and Matilda Gage, The History of Woman's Suffrage, 1876-1885 (Rochester: Susan B. Anthony, 1887), 3:793.

employed the rhetoric of domesticity to advocate women's enfranchisement,³ ultimately, the woman suffrage movement was based on justice rather than morality. Therefore, it was more difficult for southern white suffragists to offer a convincing argument that woman suffrage fit within the traditionalist's nineteenth century conception of "true womanhood."⁴ In addition, the movement faced the burdens of its pre-war political affiliations. If, in the minds of some white southerners, the leadership of the WCTU was linked to the radical cause of abolition, the National American Woman Suffrage Association [NAWSA] was inextricably bound to it. All of the leaders of the pre-war woman suffrage movement had been leaders of the anti-slavery crusade, and the first American woman suffrage conference grew out of a British anti-slavery meeting where women had been denied the right to participate in the proceedings.⁵

³Suffragists sometimes argued in terms of the social good that woman's votes would achieve, such as prohibition laws and better laws protecting the interests of women and children, see Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965, reprint 1981), 1-4.

⁴For a discussion of the role that the traditional notion of southern white womanhood played in anti-suffrage thought, see Marjorie Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 4-37.

⁵For histories of the woman suffrage movement in America, see Carol Ellen Dubois, Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an American Women's Movement, 1848-1869 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Anne Scott and Andrew Scott, One Half the People: The Fight for Woman

The woman suffrage movement, in America, split into two factions (in 1869) over the issues of universal citizenship and suffrage for black males. The suffragists who formed the American Woman Suffrage Association [AWSA], led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, believed that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments should include women in their provisions for citizenship and suffrage rights. Therefore, these suffragists opposed the passage of the two amendments if they did not include women. The suffragists, who formed the National Woman Suffrage Association [NWSA], led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, regretted that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments did not guarantee citizenship and suffrage to women but agreed with some Republican politicians that including women in the amendments would jeopardize their passage, particularly in the South. The two groups also

Suffrage (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Ross Paulson, Woman Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control (Glenview: Scott, Foreman and Company, 1973); Paul Fuller, Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975) Scott, The Southern Lady, 166-184; Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 159-170; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination Against Black Women in the Women's Rights Movement," in The Afro American Woman: Struggles and Images, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Kennikat Press, 1984), 17-42; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discontented Black Feminists: Prelude and Postscript to the Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment," in Decades of Discontent: The Woman's Movement, 1920-1940, ed. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 264-267; Guy-Sheftall, Daughters of Sorrow, 99-130.

differed over the question of how best to obtain woman suffrage legislation. The AWSA believed that the best method to enfranchise women was to work for individual state amendments whereas the NWSA believed the best strategy was to work for the passage of a national woman suffrage amendment.⁶ In 1890 these two factions decided to put aside their differences and merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. However, the issues of race, gender, and strategy which divided the woman's movement before 1890 would be played out again and again in the southern suffrage campaigns.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, southern white women continuously agitated for less discriminatory laws, especially marriage and property laws. When Redeemer legislators met to revise their states' Reconstruction constitutions, southern white women petitioned for laws to give married women control of their own property and for school or full suffrage with property and/or educational qualifications.⁷ Although these entreaties yielded few results, the arguments and implications of these arguments would be used to justify white women's demands for suffrage until the Nineteenth Amendment was finally ratified.

⁶Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1-4.

⁷See state reports in Stanton, et al, History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 3.

Like most Americans, southern white suffragists equated the right of suffrage with the cause of justice and the privileges of citizenship. Although they rarely demanded universal suffrage for males or females, they did believe that as the "better class" they should have access to all of the prerogatives of local, state and national citizenship. Most white suffragists believed that because the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments excluded women that they were an insult to white women, especially southern white women because, politically, they were classed below black men.⁸ Caroline Merrick reported a story, included in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1887 History of Woman Suffrage, that typified the resentment that many white suffragists harbored against white male politicians and African American men owing to their political disfranchisement and second class citizenship status. Merrick told of a German woman who for many years lived in a New Orleans asylum and who upon becoming ill decided to leave her life's savings to the asylum. The asylum's Board of Directors, composed entirely of women, helped the patient write her will. The women, acting as witnesses, signed the will and when the woman died forwarded it to the probate judge. The

⁸See Josephine K. Henry, "Kentucky Women and the New Constitution" (Kentucky Equal Rights Association, 1890), Clay Papers, n. p.; Virginia Young, "A Star in the West" (Boston: Woman's Journal Publication, 1893), 2, Clay Papers; Orra Langhorn, "Prepare for Suffrage" (Boston: Woman's Journal, 1892), 1, Clay Papers.

directors were later told that the will was invalid because under Louisiana law women could not act as witnesses to a legal document. Therefore, the woman's savings could not go to the asylum. Merrick offered Stanton's readers this commentary on the issue:

Had they [the Directors] only called in the old darkey wood-sawyer, doing a day's work in the asylum yard, and had him affix his mark to the paper, the money would have accrued to the asylum; as it was it went to the state⁹.

A year later, Caroline Merrick attempted to convince the asylum's directors to sign a petition to the 1879 Louisiana Constitutional Convention, which she and Elizabeth Lyle Saxon wrote to protest the exclusion of (white) women from full citizenship rights. Merrick attempted to convince the directors to sign the petition by recounting the will signing incident and telling them it demonstrated that they were not really citizens of the state able to act as free and independent agents but only "children playing the part of the people and citizens of the state."¹⁰ In their appeal to the legislators, Merrick and Saxon emphasized the lack of citizenship rights for women in Louisiana. They pointed out that women of "whatever age or capacity" had no rights of representation, could not hold office and could not act as witnesses to

⁹Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:789.

¹⁰Ibid.

legal documents even when executed by women. Yet, these same women, they emphasized, were expected to bear their full burden of taxation. Recognizing that full voting privileges might be too much to ask, the petitioners urged the legislators to consider granting women school suffrage based on a property qualification. They urged that women be allowed to vote on school and educational matters since those involved the particular interest of women and children.¹¹ Although the petition did not specify women by race, it seems safe to assume that the women Merrick and Saxon had in mind were primarily white women. As with white clubwomen and white WCTU leaders, in the lexicon of white southern suffragists, black women were usually ignored or classed with black men.¹²

White women's arguments for woman suffrage frequently involved some reference to the enfranchisement of black men to highlight what they considered the injustice of having black men as black possess a political right white women as

¹¹Ibid.

¹²White anti-suffragists did seize on the issue of having to enfranchise black women if white women were enfranchised, see Anti-suffrage Literature in Madeline McDowell Breckenridge Papers, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky. For helpful analysis of the historic decentering of gender in the lives of black women, see Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Diacritics 17 (Summer 1987): 65-81; bell hooks, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 22-23; 71, 124-158; Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women On Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 159-164.

white were denied. From the beginnings of the postwar southern woman suffrage debates, white suffragists linked the lack of citizenship rights for white women with the post war enfranchisement of black men. In a region where white skin determined one's perceived present worth and future potential, white suffragists were purposely questioning white southerners on their own racial mythology.¹³ Speaking before the legislators of the 1879 Louisiana Constitutional Convention, Merrick called attention to the legal disabilities of women by comparing their situation to black males in 1867:

Allow me to ask, are we less prepared for the intelligent exercise of the right of suffrage than were freedman when it was suddenly conferred upon them? Has not this right been to them a beneficial stimulant, inducing them to use exertions to promote their improvement, and has it not raised them to a superior place, above the disfranchised classes, such as the Chinese, Indians, and women.¹⁴

¹³On the racial ideology of the South, especially attitudes toward blacks see, George Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York: Harper, 1971), 198-332; I. A. Newby, Jim Crow's Defense, Anti-Negro Thought in America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); Thomas Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (New York: Schocken, 1965), 253-286; There are no specific studies of southern white women's racial ideology, for discussions, see Guy-Sheftall, Daughters of Sorrow; Wheeler, New Women of the New South; Jacqueline Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

¹⁴Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, 3:793.

To underscore the fact that black males could vote but white women could not, southern white suffragists at times compared themselves to antebellum black slaves.¹⁵ Caroline Merrick equated her being asked to speak in favor of woman suffrage before the 1879 Louisiana Constitutional Convention to a plantation owner requesting a group of his slaves to come to his mansion to request their freedom.¹⁶ White female suffragists also used the slave analogy to chide southern white women for not being more interested in the vote. Perpetuating the myth of the "happy" slave, Merrick, when asked why more southern (white) women did not support the suffrage movement, replied that they were like "contented" slaves who "under the rule of good and humane masters" did not "trouble themselves" to obtain their freedom.¹⁷ In 1890, after the Mississippi Constitutional

¹⁵This was also a tactic used by northeastern antebellum white women's rights activists. See, Jean Fagan Yellin, Women and Sisters: The Anti-Slavery Feminists in American Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Karen Sanchez Eppler, Touching Liberty: Abolitionism, Feminism and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Southern white women married to plantation owners also used the analogy but in a different context. Usually, their complaints involved the energy it took them to direct the domestic affairs of a plantation, especially policing slaves, see Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon, 1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Big House (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹⁶Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, 3:792.

¹⁷Ibid., 3:793; see also, Josephine Henry, "Kentucky Women and the New Constitution," Clay Papers.

Convention had briefly considered giving educated women the vote, an editorial in the Mississippi White Ribbon admonished (white)¹⁸ women for not being more active during the proceedings. The writer accused Mississippi's white women of being like slaves who were too busy and "too ignorant" during the Civil War to be concerned with their own emancipation.¹⁹

Although southern white suffragists used the slave analogy to highlight the injustice of their inferior political status relative to black males, they usually made it clear that they considered themselves superior to black men who, under the Fifteenth Amendment, had been enfranchised before them. In 1879, Sarah Dorsey, an aging and physically ill widow, wrote an open letter to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention protesting her disfranchisement and her political status as a white woman.

¹⁸Again, these articles did not specify women by race but considering that before and during the Mississippi Constitutional Convention, the Mississippi White Ribbon published a number of editorials advocating giving educated and/or propertied (code for white) women the vote to counter the votes of black males it's safe to assume that these articles were directed at white people and were about white people, see "Woman Suffrage and the WCTU," February 1889, 4; "Constitutional Convention, Resolutions and Reports, 15 September 1890, 4; "That Franchise Clause," 15 October 1890, 4; see also, Mississippi White Ribbon articles that routinely characterized black male voters as "the ignorant, vicious negro vote", "The Duty of the Hour," 15 June 1890, 2; "Tactics of the Enemy," 15 June 1890, 4; "Who Are the Enemies of a Restricted Ballot," 30 June 1890 4.

¹⁹"Ye Knew Not Your Hour," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 October 1890, 3.

Dorsey informed the representatives that she was alone and had no male relatives to represent her in the political sphere.²⁰ She noted, also, that although she held large property holdings in the state she was still denied a voice in her government. Yet, what seems to have been the height of the injustice for Dorsey was that, in her words, her "hundreds of negro lessees [could] vote and control my life and property" while she, as a white woman, could not.²¹ Southern white suffragists usually considered themselves better educated, morally superior, and more vested in the interest of good government than black men. They saw their vote as a potential counter to what they considered the irresponsible votes of black men.²²

²⁰It is interesting to consider whether this was simply a rhetorical strategy on Dorsey's part to make her point more dramatically or whether she believed that the white male representatives in the Louisiana convention were incapable of sufficiently representing her interest, even though the traditions of southern white womanhood and white male chivalry held otherwise. In New Women of the New South, Marjorie Wheeler postulates that southern white suffragists were discontented with the way southern white male politicians were administering the New South. See Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 40, 65-69. This point is significant considering the implicit assumption of similar political values enclosed in the suffragists' argument that if enfranchised they would ensure the dominance of white supremacy in the South. Possibly, the most important common political interests between the white suffragists and white males were a common racial identity signified by their racial status as white and a common determination to maintain white supremacy in the South.

²¹Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, 3:794.

²²Particularly after 1890, most white suffragists used some kind of racial argument to justify their demands for the vote. Northeastern white suffragists, more often than

Southern white suffragists constructed complicated arguments for their right to vote based on race, justice and class. Women, like Sarah Dorsey, resented the gender discrimination they faced as women as well as the lack of racial privilege accorded them as white and the lack of class privilege accorded them as educated, property owners. After 1890, northern white suffragists attempted to disassociate the issues of woman's suffrage and black suffrage, by arguing that the two were unrelated. Yet, particularly before the latter phase of the suffrage movement, roughly from 1916-1920, white advocates of woman suffrage in the South rarely separated the issues of race and suffrage.²³ Even in circumstances where the

not, spoke of native Anglo-Saxon women's votes as a counter to the "ignorant immigrant" vote, see Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 52, 123-138; Alieen Kraditor, ed., Up From the Pedestal, Selected Writings In The History Of American Feminism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 257-259, 261-262.

²³Suzanne Lesbock has recently argued that responsibility for the racist rhetoric of southern woman suffragist campaigns needs to be reexamined. In an article on the Virginia suffrage campaign, Lesbock contends that the anti-suffragists rather than the suffragists were primarily responsible for the racist rhetoric of the debates, particularly after 1915; Lesbock states: "The principle actors in the story of woman suffrage and white supremacy...were the anti-suffragists. The antis introduced the white supremacy issue... [then] pressed it with increasing intensity and disregard for truth; and they refused to give it up, even after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Responsibility for the white supremacist dimensions of the woman suffrage debates rests squarely on the shoulders of the antis," see Suzanne Lesbock, "Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study," in Visible Women, 62-100, quote on page 65. After 1910, southern white suffragists did seem to be on the defensive

enfranchisement of black males was not the focus of the debate, southern white suffragists still appealed to the racist argument to make their case for gender equity in the political realm. In 1889, the editor of the Mississippi White Ribbon published an editorial defending the National WCTU's woman suffrage resolution. First, it was necessary to explain that the Mississippi state chapter of the WCTU did not have to adopt a woman suffrage resolution because the national organization believed in state's rights and did not require individual state chapters to adopt resolutions that their members believed inappropriate. This done, she then pointed out that the national and international attention being given to woman's suffrage was the logical result of justice rather than simply the result of agitation by the white ribboners. Although the enfranchisement of black males was not central to this editorial, the editor raised the issue in making her final point about woman suffrage. After assuring her readers that the Mississippi WCTU was not compelled to officially

rather than the offensive on the issue of black voting because black males had been effectively disfranchised and white male politicians argued that reopening the suffrage question would endanger the white South's political settlement of the "negro problem." Indeed part of the rationale of the Southern States Woman Suffrage Conference was that enfranchisement by state amendment rather than federal would not reopen the "negro question" or endanger white supremacy. Additionally, after 1910, southern white suffragists must have been more wary of using the white supremacist argument as an offensive strategy because it had proven miserably ineffective in convincing southern legislators to grant white women suffrage.

advocate woman suffrage and contending that there were more woman suffragists in southern (white) churches than in the WCTU, she ended her editorial by asserting that there was a very "practical argument" for woman suffrage: she left her readers to consider the implications of "the ignorant, negro coachman, who does not own a dollars worth of property, going to the polls to vote a tax on a white woman's property without her consent...."²⁴

In 1890, Henry Blackwell, former abolitionist turned woman suffragist, published "A Solution of the Southern Question," an essay unifying the arguments of race and justice that southern white suffragists had been expounding since the enfranchisement of southern black males. In this essay, Blackwell argued that white supremacy in the South could be ensured by granting women the vote with an educational qualification. Blackwell explained that there were more educated white women in the South than educated black men and women combined.²⁵ In 1895, Blackwell

²⁴"Woman Suffrage and the WCTU," Mississippi White Ribbon, February 1889, 4; see also, Young, "A Star in the West"; Langhorne, "Prepare for Suffrage".

²⁵Henry Blackwell, "A Solution to the Southern Question" (Boston: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1890), in Box 38, Hemphill Family Papers, Duke University Library. In 1867, Blackwell published an essay entitled "What the South Can Do" in which he basically made the same argument without the educational qualification. His point was that numerically there were more white women in the South than black men and women combined. However, as it became apparent that the movement in the South, as well as in the rest of the nation, was toward a more restricted franchise and that he had not adequately

reiterated this point at the NAWSA convention in Atlanta, Georgia, where he urged Georgia's white male politicians to consider woman's suffrage with an educational qualification because there were 149,895 educated white women in the state whereas there were 143,471 black voters of whom 116,516 were illiterate.²⁶ Blackwell was implicitly assuming that the South's educated white women would align their political interests with white men to counter any opposing interests of black men and women.²⁷ Although this "statistical" argument would be used again and again, the

considered the demographics of the black southern population (there were some states with a black majority) he refined his argument to include the educational qualification, see Kraditor, Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 168.

²⁶ Excerpt of Blackwell's speech quoted in Susan B. Anthony and Ida Harper, ed., The History of Woman Suffrage, 1883-1900 (Rochester: Susan B. Anthony, 1902), 4:246. Blackwell justified an educational qualification based on the notion of an "informed" citizenry and rationalized it by asserting that with free common schools every citizen could qualify without "money or price."

²⁷As southern campaigns for white women's suffrage failed, one after another between 1890 and 1910, and as the Progressive movement gained ground, white suffragists began to speculate that southern white politicians refused to pass woman suffrage because they were afraid that white women would actually vote against the entrenched interests of the South, especially textile and liquor interests by supporting child labor and prohibition, see Stanton and Harper, ed., History of Woman Suffrage, 4:466, 477, 584; "ERA Club 15th Anniversary, May 1911," 4, speech in Box 3, F.20, Judith Hymans Douglas Papers, Hill Library, Louisiana State "Minutes of Mass Meeting, May 3, 1920, Democratic Woman's Club, (five leaves), in Box 1, Wilson Papers, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky; Kraditor, Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 197; Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 10-13.

controversy over granting women school suffrage in Kentucky demonstrated the complications of the political assumptions for southern white suffragists.

In 1892, the Equal Rights Associations of Lexington, Covington, and Newport petitioned the Kentucky General Assembly to allow women in these cities the right to serve on school boards and to vote in all school board elections through a special clause in the cities' charters. In 1894, the General Assembly passed a measure giving women the right to vote on the same terms as men in these three towns termed second-class cities.²⁸ In the 1901 Lexington school board elections, the number of registered Republicans outnumbered Democrats by three hundred and twenty voters. However, in what seemed more dangerous to the city's white Democratic politicians, 1,997 women registered as Republicans and only 662 as Democrats. It was assumed that most of the women who registered as Republicans were African Americans. Although sufficient measures had been taken to discourage black women from voting and although white Democratic candidates had won all of the school board seats, Lexington's white Democratic politicians were appalled at the implications and appealed to the General Assembly to have female school suffrage rescinded in the

²⁸Anthony and Harper, ed., History of Woman Suffrage, 4:672, 674; Paul Fuller, Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975), 89.

three second class cities.²⁹ Arguing that nineteen hundred colored women and only seven hundred white women had registered to vote and that "colored women had practically controlled... school elections in Lexington," the city's white Democratic representatives were able to convince the General Assembly in January 1902 to repeal the woman's school suffrage measure. White suffragists, WCTU workers, and clubwomen joined together to protest the repeal. Under pressure from white women activists, one of the legislators, who had initially proposed the repeal, offered a substitute measure that would have retained school suffrage for educated women, obviously a measure designed to retain voting privileges for white women (code: Democrats) but to disfranchise black women (code: Republicans). Although the substitute measure failed, Kentucky's white women suffragists championed the educational qualification as a method to regain suffrage for white women until 1912, when they were finally refranchised.³⁰

²⁹Anthony and Harper, ed., History of Woman Suffrage, 4:672, 674; Fuller, Laura Clay, 89-90.

³⁰The quote is from Fuller, Laura Clay, 90. In 1910, the Kentucky Equal Rights Association asked the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs to lead the fight to restore school suffrage (with an educational qualification) as part of their program to improve Kentucky's schools, which they did until 1912, see Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 6:210.

Shortly after the repeal, in February 1902, Mary Atkinson Cummingham, state regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution, responded to an appeal from white suffragists to support woman suffrage in Kentucky. Cummingham readily admitted that she embraced the goals of the suffragists but she expressed ambivalence regarding the consequences of woman's suffrage. To explain her reservations, Cummingham referred to the 1901 Lexington school board elections. She said that when she inquired why the (white) people of Lexington asked to have the woman's school vote repealed, she was informed that twice as many black women as white women had voted and that blacks had "practically controlled" the city's board of education. Cummingham concluded that if this were the result of woman's suffrage, she would "rather see the board controlled by (white) men than by negroes and a few white women."³¹ Cummingham linked the issues of race, segregation, progress, and political power that would haunt white southern suffragists throughout their fight for the vote and hurt southern African Americans in their efforts to gain or retain civil and human rights throughout the Progressive Era.³²

³¹Mary Atkinson Cummingham to [] Miller, February 6, 1902, Clay Papers.

³²For discussions of the fate of African Americans and southern white Progressive reform efforts, see Jack Temple Kirby, Darkness At The Dawning: Race and Reform In The Progressive South (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company,

Cummingham described the presence of African Americans in the South as a "black cloud" hanging over the region preventing its progress, especially in the areas of public improvements. She blamed blacks for keeping whites away from two public parks in her hometown of Henderson. She said very few whites would go to the parks because blacks believed that they had the same rights to use the parks as whites. Cummingham also blamed blacks for derailing a proposed public library for the town. She explained that a donor had agreed to donate 25,000 dollars to the city for a library, if the city agreed to maintain the facility, probably through levying an additional tax. Cummingham said that although she was already heavily taxed, she was willing to support the idea until she heard a "gang of negroes" saying that they, too, would use the library. Cummingham used these examples to make her most important point about woman's suffrage:

So I am afraid that we will have to give up any rights that will give additional rights to the negro. That is why this idea [woman's suffrage] does not take a greater hold on southern [white] people. They must consider the practical working of it.... If the effect would be here as...in Lexington[,] I fear we could not do much for the cause.³³

1972); Dittmer, Black Georgians in the Progressive Era.

³³Cummingham to Miller, February 6, 1902, Clay Papers.

Mary Atkinson Cummingham shared the perspective of Lexington's white Democratic legislators who believed it better to have no women vote than to have any black women vote. Cummingham's willingness to accede to the dictates of white racial fear-- in arguing that white women should subordinate their demands for gender equity to white fears of black political empowerment-- illustrates the difficulties that southern white suffragists faced in attempting to extricate their demands for the vote from the questions of white supremacy and black political empowerment. Although the leaders of the NAWSA had proclaimed that the issue of black rights was "irrelevant" to the issue of woman suffrage, southern white suffragists could not so easily divorce the two issues.

Laura Clay's comments on the Lexington school suffrage issue further illustrate the dilemmas that the complexities of race and politics in the New South created for southern white suffragists. In a letter dated shortly after the Assembly decided to rescind female school suffrage, Laura Clay, probably the white South's best known suffrage leader, explained the situation to Ida Harper. During the school board elections, Clay began, Kentucky was in a "miserable political condition," with the Democrats split between two factions and both factions aligned against the Republicans, each, according to Clay, unwilling to yield any ground of factional or party advantage. This was the

political situation that black and white women stepped into to elect a school board for Lexington. The white women, most of them Democrats, split into two factions, thereby, giving black women the balance of power in the election. Clay claimed that black women had voted in large numbers to prevent the election of a candidate who they did not want to sit on the school board. She expressed her concern over the black voting strength by noting that the controversy could have been avoided had white women turned out "as generally as the poor negroes." Nonetheless, she emphasized blacks had not nominated a ticket for the elections, thus they only had a choice between white candidates nominated by white Democrats and Republicans. Therefore, according to Clay, "the worse [sic]" blacks could have done was to elect the white Republican ticket, nominated by whites.³⁴ Clay did not mention that the black women were simply exercising their right to have a voice in the political process--the same goal that had prompted white suffragists to demand the vote initially. In Clay's opinion, as in Cummingham's, the presence of African Americans had compromised the situation for white women both in theory and in practice. Clay knew that Lexington's white Democratic legislators had repealed the woman suffrage measure because black women had registered and

³⁴Laura Clay to [Ida] Harper April 3, 1902, Box 2 F. 20, Clay Papers.

voted in significant numbers. She also realized that the image of blacks voting--male or female--and the fear that they could hold the balance of power in an election was enough to threaten any gains that white suffragists could make in the South, even in Kentucky where the percentage of blacks in the population was relatively low.

Although most regional and national suffrage leaders assumed that southern white women would register and vote as Democrats, factional strife within the party could still leave blacks in a position of relative political power. The 1901 Lexington school board election proved this point. But unlike Mary Atkinson Cummingham, southern white suffrage activists were unwilling to postpone the demand for voting rights until the specter of African American voting was banished. Rather, they demanded the vote with sufficient educational and/or property qualifications to disenfranchise as many African Americans as possible. Yet, the demand for these qualifications did not succeed in separating the issues of gender, race and justice in the minds of most white southerners. Indeed, the constant calls to enfranchise white women to counteract the votes of African Americans only served to link the two issues even more tightly.

Between 1890 and 1900 every southern state organized some type of woman suffrage association, often with the help of the southern committee of the NAWSA, under the

leadership of Laura Clay.³⁵ As a regional movement, the southern suffrage organizations came into being simultaneously with the efforts of white Democratic male politicians to guarantee the political dominance of the Democratic Party and white supremacy in the New South. As white politicians gathered together to rewrite their state constitutions to restrict suffrage to white males, southern white suffragists, with the encouragement and financial assistance of the NAWSA, sent petitions and personally appealed to their legislators to grant educated white women the vote as an effective and legal means to ensure white political dominance. Blackwell's 1890 thesis urging southern politicians to grant women the franchise with an educational qualification to counter the votes of illiterate black males served as a constant refrain for white suffragists throughout the early years of the southern suffrage movement, especially the years before black men were effectively disfranchised. Southern white

³⁵See state reports in Harper, ed., History of Woman Suffrage, vols. 5 and 6; Elizabeth Taylor, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee (New York: Record Press, 1957); Elizabeth Taylor, "The Origins of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Georgia," Georgia Historical Quarterly 28 (June 1944): 63-79; Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Arkansas," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 15 (Spring 1956): 17-52; Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas," Journal of Southern History 17 (May 1951): 194-215; Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Mississippi," Journal of Mississippi History 30 (Spring 1968): 1-34; A Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review 38 (January 1961): 45-62; Fuller, Laura Clay, 58-61.

suffragists consistently used this argument to voice their dismay at being denied the right to vote on the basis of their gender. Their arguments demonstrated their belief that their racial classification as white entitled them to the same prerogatives of citizenship and political participation that the men of their race enjoyed. At the 1903 annual convention of the NAWSA in New Orleans, white southern suffragists, male and female, clearly made this point.

At the convention, Belle Kearney, former WCTU national lecturer, gave a keynote address that set out these themes in bold relief. Kearney began by recounting her version of the glory of the antebellum South and its place in the nation. She then developed the argument that would be repeated again and again by southern white suffragists until they began to downplay the racial issue after black men had been effectively eliminated from the southern political landscape.³⁶ Interweaving the justice argument with a racial essentialist argument, Kearney claimed that "the passion for individual liberty" was a basic characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race. She then declared that white southerners were the purest Anglo-Saxons in the nation and that since the North was threatened by an influx of foreign immigrants Anglo-Saxon northerners would be

³⁶Although rhetorically, the specter of the black vote would continue to be used against the white suffragists.

forced to look to the South for redemption of its Anglo-Saxon blood and values. When this happened, Kearney argued, the white South would then be forced to look to its Anglo-Saxon women as the "medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African."³⁷ And since southern Anglo-Saxon women had demonstrated that they held the same beliefs and values as southern Anglo-Saxon men, the best way for the South and hence the nation to ensure Anglo-Saxon supremacy was for southern politicians to enfranchise southern white women. Employing the same strategy as white WCTU leaders and white clubleaders, Kearney characterized woman suffrage as a means to unite white northerners and southerners at the expense of African Americans.³⁸ Kearney also used the symbolism of Anglo-Saxon racial unity to argue that white women should be allowed to possess the same political privileges as white men. She urged white northerners and southerners to lay aside their sectional differences and their outmoded gender

³⁷"Woman Suffrage South," The Sunday News: Charleston, South Carolina, 12 April 1903, news clipping in Belle Kearney Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³⁸For discussions of white northern and southern reconciliation and the adverse effects on African Americans in the areas of politics, society, and education, see Rayford Logan, The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson (London: Collier Books, 1965); Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 247-261.

ideology in order to guarantee the continued dominance of the Anglo-Saxons in America.³⁹

The rhetoric of southern white suffragists, particularly at the New Orleans convention, provides a good example of how racial classifications effect ideologies of gender.⁴⁰ Southern white activists in the WCTU, the GFWC, and the NAWSA often relied on their racial identity as white women to justify their participation in public discourses from which, according to the prevailing gender ideologies, they were supposed to have been excluded. Taken together, much of the recent scholarship on white women's activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century suggest that the paradigm of domesticity and its concomitant gender ideology applied primarily to white middle class women. Therefore race and class seems to have played as significant a role as did gender in the ideological formation of the "Cult of True Womanhood" and the creation of the private sphere. However, in a region where cultural, economic, and political leaders attempted to dismiss the importance of class by emphasizing the

³⁹"Woman Suffrage South," clipping in Kearney Papers.

⁴⁰For discussions of the role that gender plays in defining white womanhood, see Vvon Ware, Beyond The Pale, White Women, Racism, and History (London: Verso Press, 1993); Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/National Bodies: Imitation of Life," in Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text, ed. Hortense Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 110-140.

importance of racial unity for whites, race had even more of a significant role to play.⁴¹

Hala Hammond Butts, President of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association, echoed the same themes of racial justice to white women at the 1903 NAWSA convention as did Belle Kearney. Butts, like Kearney, denounced Reconstruction and the "evil" effects of enfranchising black men while educated white women were left politically powerless. Butts, also, looked to the enfranchisement of educated white women as the political salvation of the South. Yet, the pre-text for Butts' speech was her contention that (white) women shared the same blood as their (white) fathers, sons and brothers. She told her audience that since white women possessed the same "impulses and aspirations" as white men that they should not be "held in leash by the same bond that holds the ignorant, the illiterate, the vicious, [and] the irresponsible."⁴² Both Belle Kearney and Hala Hammond Butts argued that white women possessed the same characteristics and values as white men. They then used this as evidence to demonstrate why they, too, deserved the right of full citizenship.

⁴¹For a discussion of how political leaders attempted to erase the importance of class in southern society through the concept of "herrenvolk democracy", see Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, 61-68, 267.

⁴²Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 5:76.

Each also recognized that the presence of a large number of black male voters in the South affected their position in the southern political economy. While both advocated, at least in 1903, that suffrage requirements should be applied equally to both races as well as both sexes, they explicitly aligned their interests with the men of their race and class by arguing that together they could redeem their region from the "evils" of Reconstruction politics. Kearney, Butts and other southern white suffragists at the convention criticized but defended the illegal measures southern whites employed to keep black males from freely exercising their right to vote.⁴³ All argued that enfranchising educated white women would render these measures unnecessary. They assumed that educational and/or property qualifications for voting would effectively erase the presence of blacks from the equation of southern politics. Although Kearney acknowledged that southern blacks were being educated at institutions such as Tuskegee, she predicted, that rather than this leading to blacks being "responsible" voters, instead it would lead to a race war between blacks and poor whites because poor whites would feel threatened by African American achievements. To avoid this, she again suggested the educational and/or property qualification as a method to induce poor whites to "keep up with the march of

⁴³Ibid., 5:66, 76, 80, 82, 83.

progression" and hold their own in the racial struggle for survival.⁴⁴

For Kearney, as for Butts, race was the key. They assumed that the votes of educated white women would solve the white South's political "negro problem" by adding more white women to the electorate.⁴⁵ Southern white suffragists also argued that enfranchising educated white women would prevent southern whites from having to resort to illegal measures to secure white supremacy. Inherent in this argument was the notion that blacks who qualified would be allowed to exercise their political rights and southern elections would no longer be cites of political terror and fraud. At the New Orleans convention, both Kearney and Butts, postulated that educational and property qualifications should be applied equally to both sexes as well as both races.⁴⁶ Yet when white public opinion questioned the effectiveness of the white suffragists

⁴⁴Ibid. Kearney was obviously influenced by the Social Darwinism and/or the "scientific racism" which permeated American intellectual thought at the time, see Gossett, Race: The History of An Idea In America, 144-175; for the south particularly, see Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, 228-255; for background, see William Stanton, The Leopards Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

⁴⁵See Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 5:80, 66; Young, "A Star in the West," Clay papers.

⁴⁶Ibid., 5:75; "Southern Suffrage South," Kearney Papers; See also, Wheeler, New Women of The New South, 114-119; Fuller, Laura Clay, 62-63.

scheme both moderate and radical negrophobes altered their arguments.

In 1895, Laura Clay, after initially planning to urge the South Carolina Constitutional Convention delegates to adopt woman suffrage with an educational qualification, added a property qualification to the list when white South Carolina editorialists questioned whether literacy qualifications were a sufficient means to disbar black females from voting.⁴⁷ As early as April 1903, Belle Kearney, answered the white anti-suffrage argument that black women would have to be enfranchised with white women by countering that "the negro women would be subject to the same franchises that now govern Negro men."⁴⁸ Four years later, Belle Kearney, Laura Clay and the leadership of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association, with the acquiescence of the NAWSA, would endorse Kate Gordon's plan to enfranchise white women specifically in Mississippi.⁴⁹ It is therefore difficult to assume that, ultimately, most of the white leaders of the southern woman suffrage

⁴⁷Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 114-119; Fuller, Laura Clay, 66.

⁴⁸"Woman Suffrage South," Kearney Papers.

⁴⁹Manuscript, "Mississippi," 4 in Lily Wald Thompson Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. In fact, the only major NAWSA leader who vigorously opposed the plan was Alice Stone Blackwell, recording Secretary of the NAWSA, see Fuller, Laura Clay, 108.

movement had anyone's best interest in mind except those of Anglo-Saxon women and white supremacists.⁵⁰

Before the effective elimination of black men from the southern political equation, it is difficult to disentangle the rhetoric of race and justice in the arguments of southern white suffragists. Ultimately, white suffragists demanded the vote because they believed that white women deserved a voice in their local, regional, and national governments. They believed that political and racial justice to middle class white women called for nothing less. In the lexicon of southern white suffragists, justice demanded that educated white women be allowed to share an equal responsibility with white men in governing the New South. Southern white suffragists argued that since they were taxpaying citizens and met all other requirements of the franchise, they should not be disbarred on the sole basis of their gender. Although they made rhetorical gestures to the notion of southern white male chivalry, they, like their WCTU counterparts, ultimately,

⁵⁰Marjorie Wheeler calls attention to what she terms the "Kraditor\Scott controversy" over the "centrality of racism as a motive of Southern white suffragists." Scott argues that Kraditor gives too much weight to the "statistical" argument of educated white women countering the votes of black males. Scott concludes: "It is beyond any doubt that southern women wanted the vote primarily because of their concern about the place of women in the world, not because of their concern about the place of negroes." Wheeler agrees with Scott's assessment, see Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 233, note 38; Scott, The Southern Lady, 182-183, note 33; Kraditor, Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 163-218.

held little faith in that particular white male myth of southern white female protection. White suffragists also knew that regardless of the rhetoric of domesticity, disfranchisement meant the absence of any direct influence in government.⁵¹ The right to vote equaled political power. And white suffragists knew that political power was necessary to have any real voice in the governance of the New South.

⁵¹Henry, "Kentucky Women and the New Constitution," Clay Papers; Young, "The Star in the West," Clay Papers; Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:822; Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 5:312, 329; Fulton and Dekalb Branch, Equal Suffrage Papers of Georgia, Yearbook, 1915, 4, Georgia Department of Archives and History, hereafter cited as GDAH; Douglas, "President's Annual Address to the ERA Club," Douglas Papers, non-paginated, Box 3 F. 20, Hill Memorial Library.

Chapter 4: Temperance In Black and White

Race as a biological category has proved to be a fiction; however, Progressive era southern white women reformers involved in the temperance movement, the club movement and the woman suffrage movement, like most black and white Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, believed race to be a fact. And like most white Americans during the Progressive era, southern white ribboners, clubwomen, and suffragists believed in the superiority of whites, especially Anglo-Saxon Protestant whites. It is important to document and analyze the racism that nineteenth and twentieth century whites held toward blacks. It is equally important to document and analyze the racialism of nineteenth and twentieth century whites. In the case of southern white female reformers, it is necessary to ask how these women's attitudes toward blackness and whiteness affected how they defined whites as well as blacks and how their definitions of whiteness and blackness affected their rhetoric and their programs and goals as reformers. Most supported the systems of legal segregation and political disfranchisement. Yet, not only did they tacitly and actively support and contribute to the white circumscription of black life and violence against

southern black bodies, they also actively worked to bolster and ensure the discursive and material domination of southern whites over southern blacks.

In the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the public rhetorical construction of womanhood was inextricably entangled with the simultaneous public rhetorical construction of race. Specifically, in America, the dominate white nineteenth century ideal of true womanhood excluded non-white women.¹ Southern white women were deeply involved in creating the material and rhetorical underpinnings of race and gender relations that were being worked out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century South. As white southerners, most Women's Christian Temperance Union, General Federation of Women's Clubs, and National American Woman Suffrage Association spokespersons were determined to mark clearly their identity as white in a society where race was being used rhetorically to confer on most whites the privileges of useful citizenship while it was being used materially to

¹See note in chapter one as well as Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Robyn Weigman, American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Nancy Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science," in David Theo Goldberg, ed., Anatomy of Racism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 38-57.

disfranchise most blacks as unruly and therefore unworthy of the privileges of citizenship. Southern white leaders of these three national women's voluntary associations in the South followed the white southern fictions of race as well as the realities of white southern racism.

From the earliest days of their involvement in the WCTU, southern white women were determined to make clear distinctions between themselves and southern blacks. In 1881, Sallie Chapin, speaking on behalf of the South at the national WCTU meeting, described temperance in the South as a "peculiar thing." Like Mary Atkinson Cummingham, who in explaining her opposition to re-enfranchising women in Lexington, Kentucky, for school suffrage, described African Americans as a "black cloud" hanging over the South, Chapin explained to the audience that blacks stood like a "cloud" between "the sun and us," which caused, she explained, the "temperature" of temperance in the South to be lower than in the rest of the nation.² The idea that blacks were particularly prone to intemperance or "drunkenness" would become a prevalent theme among white WCTU workers. White leaders of the southern temperance movement used the rhetorical trope of drunken blacks to achieve a variety of

²Mary Atkinson Cummingham to [] Miller, 6 February 1902, Clay Papers; Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 25.

goals. They used the image to contrast the behavior of enslaved blacks to freed blacks, to draw clear distinctions between blacks, both male and female, and southern white women, and to demonize blacks generally as a dangerous element and a threat to the domestic order of the New South.

Some of the most prominent southern temperance leaders had been slave owners or the wives and daughters of slave owners before the Civil War.³ Some used their status as members of the former slaveholding class to presume an intimate knowledge of the southern African American character. White temperance leaders often informed their white audiences that free blacks were temperamentally and morally inferior to blacks as slaves. Sallie Chapin, the best known southern WCTU leader in the 1880's, informed readers of the Union Signal that since the Civil War southern blacks had been "maddened and destroyed" by

³Rebecca Latimore Felton, Belle Kearney, Elizabeth Meriwether, and Caroline Merrick all wrote memoirs of their experiences before, during and after the Civil War. For examples see, Rebecca Latimore Felton, Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919); Belle Kearney, A Slaveholder's Daughter (New York: Abbey Press, 1960); Elizabeth Meriwether, Recollections of 92 Years, 1824-1916 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1958); Caroline Merrick, Old Times In Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memoirs (New York: Grafton Press, 1901).

drunkenness. Employing the technique of using the words of a "respectable" black to condemn the majority of blacks, Chapin told her readers that a black minister had tearfully confided to her his belief that if the government could not pass prohibition then blacks would have been better off had they been left in slavery. The minister, according to Chapin, reasoned that, at least, as slaves, blacks had "died sober and went to heaven."⁴ As early as 1881, when Chapin addressed the national WCTU convention in Washington, D. C., she made similar rhetorical gestures of suggesting that blacks were better off as slaves than as "drunken" freedmen. Regarded by most WCTU members as the spokeswoman for southern white ribboners, Chapin, at the convention, asserted that the federal government and the North had done southern blacks a disservice by freeing them from slavery. Chapin declared that since freedom, blacks had replaced religion with alcohol, resulting, she said, in blacks being held in "far more abject slavery" by drink than southern whites had ever held them.⁵ Indeed, southern

⁴"Our Southern Letter," Union Signal, 26 April 1883, 4-5.

⁵Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 25; see also, Sallie Chapin, "Another Brave Southern Campaign," Union Signal, 25 October 1883, 5; E. L. Saxon, "Tennessee," Union Signal, 4 February 1886, 12; Mrs Clinton Smith, "The Battle For Womanhood Is the Battle For the Race," Union Signal, 2 July 1896, 6.

white temperance reformers linked alcohol to the very meaning of black freedom. They asserted that since emancipation liquor had become a "badge of freedom" for African Americans.⁶ By linking drinking to African American freedom, WCTU reformers were able to imply, again, that southern blacks were better off under southern slavery than they were as freedmen.

Southern temperance leaders were also able to imply that blacks, without the supervision of white slave masters, had degenerated morally to such an extent that they would rather spend their time in idle drunkenness than in productive spiritual, familial, or economic pursuits.⁷ Chapin again led the way. At the 1881 National WCTU Convention, she related her disappointment with freed blacks. Chapin had spent much of the previous summer visiting black churches and gathering names on prohibition petitions. Although, she said, "the colored people are

⁶"Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 October 1890, 5; "An Open Letter to Those Who Seek to Say What the Cause of Race Conflicts In the South," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 September 1889, 4; Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1887, 50; Minutes, Georgia WCTU, 1887, 27.

⁷See for example Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 25; "Prohibition Long May It Wave," Mississippi White Ribbon, October 1903, 4; "The Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, October 1903, 4; "Report of Relative Statistics," Minutes, Georgia WCTU, 27; "Inspiring Talk," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 March 1889, 5.

naturally religious[;] they were so before the war," she discovered that all was not as well since slavery's end. Although their plantation melodies had been "full of hallelujahs," according to Chapin, the "sediment that settled down among us after the war" had made blacks demoralized, sacrilegious, and drunkards.⁸ Chapin continued her assault on the meaning of black freedom in the pages of the Union Signal. In an 1886 article, "A New Experience In the Sunny South," Chapin wrote that she was informed by a railroad section master that blacks were bartering away their earnings on alcohol rather than feeding their families. She reported that when the rations for the section hands arrived, the saloon keeper, who had the men's ration tickets, immediately came and took half of the rations.

And in the tradition of the best of temperance literature,⁹ Chapin related another story in which a saloon

⁸Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 25. Chapin's statement to the convention: "The colored people are naturally religious[.] They were so before the war. Their recreations were religious; their plantation melodies full of hallelujahs, and they would have been so yet if it had not been for the sediment that settled down among us after the war. Now they are demoralized; taught by barroom teachings they speak flippantly of sacred things, and they say they want whiskey and more of it."

⁹Although Chapin asserted that these stories were told to her by people she met thus implying their truth, they employ the same kinds of formulaic strategies as much

keeper went with a warrant to a "poor negro's hut" seized all of the furniture and even took the skillet in which the man's wife was frying meat at the time.¹⁰ It is not stated directly but the implication is that what few pitiful possessions this man had were taken because he had spent money which he did not have on liquor. Therefore, the moral, from both stories, was that black men, without the supervision of whites, were so irresponsible that they would drink rather than provide their families with basic necessities like food and furniture.¹¹

The only way this situation could be remedied, under the terms of emancipation, was to introduce prohibition. In March 1889, Ellen E. Hebron, Corresponding Secretary of the Edwards County Mississippi WCTU, reported to the

nineteenth century temperance literature (both fiction and non-fiction) as well as other sentimental fiction. See, Barbara Epstein, The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 100-114; Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Temperance in the Bed of a Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth Century America," American Quarterly, 47(March 1995): 1-33; Shirley Samuels, ed., The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁰Sallie Chapin, "A New Experience In the Sunny South," Union Signal, 4 February 1889, 4.

¹¹It is clear that the saloon keepers are also portrayed as villains in these stories. Which was also a standard strategy of nineteenth century temperance literature.

readers of the Mississippi White Ribbon that blacks in Edwards County had spent more money than usual on "the necessaries and comforts of life" rather than on alcohol since the passage of prohibition. Under prohibition, houses were occupied and painted, fences were up and whitewashed, gardens were planted and enclosed, and even flowers were now well kept and abloom.¹² These stories were formulaic, and similar stories were used by non-southern WCTU leaders (often about poor white men and immigrants particularly) to paint alcohol as a predominately male activity that primarily affected women and children.¹³ However, southern white WCTU women used these stories not only to indict men who drank to excess (usually working class and poor white men) and anti-prohibition men (middle and upper class white men who actively opposed prohibition legislation, such as saloon owners, plantation owners and Republicans) but also to indict southern black people as a race and to portray southern blacks as a dangerous and destructive element in the post-emancipation South.

¹²Ellen E. Hebron, "Inspiring Talk," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 March 1889, 5.

¹³See chapter 1 above; See also, Epstein, Politics of Domesticity and Anastatia Sims, "The Sword of the Spirit: The WCTU and Moral Reform in North Carolina, 1883-1933," North Carolina Historical Review 64 (Oct 1987): 394-415.

Sallie Chapin, once described as "representing the intense southern war sentiment among southern women,"¹⁴ portrayed the antebellum South as a place where "every breeze wafts health and every sound is but the echo of tranquility."¹⁵ But after the war, the domestic peace of the South was shattered. The nights of the New South, according to Chapin, were "made hideous by the shrieks and screams of drunken negroes."¹⁶ Adding to the level of discursive violence against emancipated southern blacks, southern white WCTU supporters accused blacks of making the New South a dangerous place. Harriet Kells, the editor of the Mississippi White Ribbon, published an article that argued that racial conflict in the South could be eliminated by passing prohibition. The article began by asserting that the licensed liquor traffic was the cause of racial violence in the South. The writer asserted that no race riots have begun in places where there are no licensed saloons and clearly located whiskey as "the nucleus of

¹⁴Mr. C. E. Richards to F. Willard, 3 April 1893, Historical Files of the National Headquarters, reel 19, frame 1165-1170, WCTU Papers.

¹⁵Sallie Chapin, "Our Southern Letter, Union Signal, 26 April 1883, 4-5.

¹⁶Ibid.

every race conflict."¹⁷ However, the writer also clearly placed blacks at the center of the evils perpetuated by the liquor trade. Blacks were described as a "doubled edged sword" brought into the prohibition controversy as a "powerful political force" and in the process "bribed, threatened, and made drunk" for their votes. The trope of black men selling their votes for alcohol was a familiar one that readers of southern and national prohibition literature encountered often.

Agreeing with and elaborating on the article, Kells reported that in some Mississippi towns, white women would not go downtown on Saturdays because they wanted to avoid the "crowds of drinking negroes." Kells quoted a white woman with whom she had recently spoken:

I forgot it was Saturday until I found myself at a saloon on a corner, which had a back door on a side street, at which negroes were permitted to drink. From the corner to that door -a distance of 60' perhaps-was densely crowded with negroes waiting their turn, though which I had to elbow my way.

¹⁷"An Open Letter To Those Who Seek To Say What the Cause Of Race Conflicts In The South," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 September 1889, 2. For similar arguments see also, "Alabama," Union Signal, 30 August 1900, 11; "The Race Question," " Mississippi White Ribbon, 28 February 1890, 2; "The Prohibition of the Liquor Traffic, The Solution To Our Most Perplexing and Difficult Social and Political Problems," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 May 1889, 4; "The Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, October 1903, 4.

There was so much loud talking and rudeness among the black groups on the streets-in which were even drinking women-that I was frightened enough never to forget again not to go down street on Saturday.¹⁸

This woman's comments were echoed by a state librarian. She wrote to the White Ribbon that she and her mother had stayed in Jackson during a recent yellow fever epidemic. She reported that there were about two hundred and fifty white men in Jackson and about three thousand negroes. Therefore, she and her mother expressed their relief daily that Jackson was a prohibition town where blacks could not get liquor. She urged her readers to consider "how horrible it would have been if they [negroes] could have done so."¹⁹ This writer intimates that drunken blacks menaced not only the general domestic peace of the South but the safety of southern white women in particular. Harriet Kells alluded to this same sentiment in her 1889 editorial comment concerning the causes of racial conflict

¹⁸"Race Conflicts," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 Sept 1889, 4. For similar accounts of towns overtaken by "drunken negroes" on Saturdays, see, "Prohibition Long May It Work, Mississippi White Ribbon, October 1903, 4; "The Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, October 1903, 4; Belle Kearney, "How It Happened In South Carolina," Union Signal, 15 November 1900, 4-5.

¹⁹Editorial, Mississippi White Ribbon, December 1888, 1.

in the South. After castigating planters for selling black laborers alcohol in their plantation stores, Kells concluded her commentary by asserting that "as everywhere else in the liquor traffic in race conflicts the innocent, helpless women and children must take the blame."²⁰

Southern white WCTU leaders worked strenuously to define southern African Americans (usually males but occasionally females) as drunkards and therefore unfit for the responsibilities of sober citizenship. Yet, the WCTU was the only southern women's national voluntary association which actively recruited southern blacks into its ranks. Indeed the national WCTU's efforts to recruit white southern women was for a time simultaneous with its efforts to recruit blacks into the organization.

In 1879, Eliza Stewart was appointed head of the WCTU committee on southern work. Stewart made organizing trips to Kentucky, Georgia and Tennessee. Although she organized several local unions in Kentucky and Georgia, she was unable, at the 1880 national conventional, to report any organized southern states.²¹ The WCTU would not create viable southern state chapters until 1881 when Frances

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Eliza Stewart organized local unions in Louisville, Macon, Griffin, Forsythe and Atlanta. Minutes, National WCTU, 1880, 93; Barnes, History of the Georgia WCTU, 38.

Willard made her first southern tour. At the 1881 national convention, ten southern states reported organized chapters and nine representatives from southern states signed a resolution of thanks to the WCTU and Willard.²² With the organization of the South almost complete, the delegates to the 1881 national convention decided to turn the department of southern work over to southern women. Sallie Chapin, one of the earliest and most active southern white temperance leaders, assumed her role as Superintendent of Southern Work and leader of the southern delegation.²³

Along with the development, organization, and reorganization of the WCTU's southern work came the development, organization, and reorganization of the WCTU's work among colored people. At the same convention where delegates gave southern white women control of the department of southern work, they also recommended that work among non-Anglo Saxon Protestant Americans be reorganized and expanded. Specifically, the delegates recommended that the Department of Work Among the Foreign Population, Colored People, and Indians be divided into four separate departments each with its own

²²Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 49.

²³Ibid, 49.

superintendent.²⁴ With this resolution the Department of Colored Work was elevated to separate departmental status. Frances Willard also requested that a black woman be appointed superintendent of the new department.²⁵ However, in a decision that reflected the complications of the national WCTU leadership's relation to blacks, and to southern blacks in particular, and southern white women, the WCTU, at its next annual convention, sectionalized the work among African Americans. At the 1882 convention in Louisville, Kentucky, the delegates decided to add "work among southern colored people" to the department of southern work. There were then two superintendents in charge of the "work among colored people," Mrs Chase Kinney of Michigan and Sallie Chapin of South Carolina.²⁶ A year later, the activist, novelist, and race leader Frances E. W. Harper assumed leadership of the department of Colored Work North, while Sallie Chapin maintained her leadership of the work in the South. Chapin retained leadership of the southern black work until 1888 when the black temperance leader, Sarah J. Early of Tennessee, briefly

²⁴Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, 50.

²⁵Ibid., 42.

²⁶Minutes, National WCTU, 1882, 20-21. Interestingly, at this same convention, the Department of Southern Work was abolished and reestablished.

assumed leadership of the black work in the South. Early, however, soon resigned to help her husband launch a business in Nashville and the work was turned back over to Sallie Chapin.

This configuration was also short-lived. At that year's national convention, southern delegates requested that the Department of Southern Work be abolished. A special committee of southern delegates asked the national convention to discontinue the department of southern work for racialist, sectionalist, and nationalist reasons. First and foremost, the southern delegates declared that the South was "in no sense a missionary field." In fact, they maintained it was "painful" to be reported as a missionary field akin to the colored and foreign work. The southern delegates also argued that a separate department of southern work violated the "no sectionalism" plank of the WCTU national platform. These southern delegates demanded that the South be treated as equal to the other sections; they wanted southern delegates to come to the national conventions on an equal footing with other delegates.²⁷ From the records it is unclear what happened to the southern department of colored work during the next four years. Frances E. W. Harper continued to work as a

²⁷Minutes, National WCTU, 1889, 56.

national lecturer and organizer for the WCTU, and southern white women continued to speak to southern black gatherings on their lecture and organizing tours. At the 1892 convention the national WCTU allowed the department of colored work (North and South) to become inactive. According to Lucy Thurman, it was reinstated at her behest at the 1893 convention, but the department was not officially listed in the national convention minutes as a separate department again until 1895.²⁸ At that time, Lucy Thurman headed the work, both North and South.

The various configurations and re-configurations of the Department of Southern Work and the Department of Colored Work demonstrates how difficult it was for the national WCTU to attempt to attend to different sectional and racial constituents and concerns within the organization. It is apparent that in the early and mid 1880's, the national WCTU considered both white southerners and black folk as separate and special concerns needing special attention from the organization. Dividing African Americans between the North and the South was no doubt economically and geographically expedient. However, when the national organization handed leadership of the southern

²⁸Lucy Thurman to Frances Willard, 23 January 1895, WCTU series, Correspondence, frame 625-626, Historical File; Minutes, National WCTU, 1895.

black work to southern white women, it gave southern white women a tremendous amount of discursive and material control over shaping the relationship between southern blacks and the national WCTU audience.

Southern white temperance leaders, some of whom had been members of slave holding families,²⁹ often believed that they had a special knowledge of, and therefore, a special relationship with southern blacks. Sallie Chapin, the acknowledged leader of the southern temperance movement until her death in 1896, was especially noted, among whites, for her work among southern blacks. Chapin was an activist in the WCTU even before Willard's first southern tour spurred the development of the movement in the South. From Chapin's earliest involvement with the WCTU, she stressed to the national organization her efforts to recruit blacks to the temperance cause. In 1880, Chapin, as president of the South Carolina WCTU, sent a short written report of the state's activities to the national convention. She acknowledged that the South Carolina group was small; she and her colleagues had spent most of their time conducting a petition drive. However, Chapin stressed that "week after week" she had met with blacks in their

²⁹Among those were Sallie Chapin, Caroline Merrick, Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, Belle Kearney, and Rebecca Latimore Felton.

churches where she talked with them about the importance of prohibition. She reported that not only had blacks shown "much interest" but also that several thousand had signed a petition in favor of prohibition which was to be submitted to the state legislature.³⁰

Throughout her role as Superintendent of Southern Work and Colored Work, South, Chapin wrote reports and gave speeches about her work among southern blacks and always maintained that she was enthusiastically received by black audiences. In 1884, Chapin reported to Union Signal readers that after speaking to a group of blacks in Hamilton, Georgia, her hands were crushed because "my colored friends insisted my hands should be shaken by each one of them...."³¹ Chapin's white contemporaries, both South and North, also commented on her relationship with and influence among southern African Americans. Missouri Stokes, corresponding secretary of the Georgia WCTU, asserted, after hearing a speech Chapin delivered to a black audience in South Carolina, that "probably no temperance lecturer in the United States knows so well how to reach the minds and hearts of the colored people as does

³⁰Minutes, National WCTU, 1880, 84.

³¹"Mrs. Chapin in Georgia," Union Signal, 22 May 1884, 4.

Mrs. Chapin," even though Frances Harper, an acknowledged leader of African Americans was delivering the temperance message to blacks, both North and South.³² Similarly, Mary Read Goodale, president of the Louisiana WCTU, after hearing Chapin speak to an audience of blacks in Baton Rouge, declared that Chapin was a "true southern woman" who "knows and loves the colored people."³³ In her annual report to the national WCTU, Mrs. F. A. Walters, state corresponding secretary of the South Carolina WCTU, commended Chapin on her compassion, especially for parents whose children were victims of drink. Walters noted, however, that Chapin's compassion was especially true for blacks to whose hearts, she said, Chapin "holds the key."³⁴

In the spring of 1883, during one of her many southern tours, Sallie Chapin reported to the Union Signal that one of her lectures in Allendale, South Carolina, drew such a large crowd at a black church that many whites were refused admission. In her speech, Chapin said she reminded the African Americans in the audience that they had helped southern white women take care of southern households when

³²M[issouri] H. S[tokes], "More About the South Carolina Convention," Union Signal, 26 November 1885, 4.

³³Mary Read Goodale, "Louisiana," Union Signal, 9 May 1883, 13.

³⁴WCTU, National Minutes, 1886, cx-cxi.

southern white men had left those homes to fight the Civil War. In a refrain reminiscent of the stories southern whites told of the "faithful" slaves who hid the silver during the war, Chapin insisted that when she recounted the tales of the confederate dead, the grief of the blacks was "loud and long."³⁵ In her speech, Chapin brought the image of the Civil War front and center. She recalled the days of the war and southern black participation in the war to aid white Confederate homes; however, she never used the word slavery or acknowledged forthrightly that many of the blacks listening to her speak could very well have been ex-slaves. Yet, by referring to the war and constructing an image of southern blacks helping southern whites against their own best interests, she successfully conjured the institution of slavery and its attendant requirement of unconditional black obedience and loyalty to southern whites. Although the very war to which Chapin referred eventually freed southern blacks and, at least legally, erased the requirement of black obedience to whites, Chapin and her contemporaries continued to use the trope of black subservience by emphasizing the "influence" that middle class white women of the former slaveholding class had over

³⁵Sallie Chapin, "Our Southern Letter," Union Signal, 26 April 1883, 4-5.

southern blacks. Chapin reported to her Union Signal audience that when she explained to blacks in Allandale the dangers that liquor posed to southern homes, they "promised by standing never again to vote for liquor."³⁶

Chapin's influence over southern blacks was commented on again by the corresponding secretary for Southern Work in 1885. In her report on Colored Work to the national convention, the secretary credited Chapin with "arousing" black southerners to "a sense of [their] responsibility." She asserted that Chapin had in public meetings "fearlessly blamed" black southerners for defeating prohibition legislation in local elections.³⁷ However, publicly shaming blacks, as if they were children, was not seen as behavior that could cause blacks to turn away from the temperance cause, or at least, away from the white leaders who were the source of their public humiliation. Instead it was seen as furthering the influence of whites, like Chapin, over blacks. At the end of the 1885 report, it was noted that owing to Chapin's "acknowledged influence among [blacks]," she had been made an "honorary member" of black societies and she claimed their "loyal" co-operation.³⁸

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Minutes, National WCTU, 1885, cxvi.

³⁸Ibid.

Other southern white leaders were also praised for their relationship with and influence over southern blacks. Mattie Sherman, state superintendent of the YWCTU in Tennessee, wrote to the Union Signal to report on the organizing work of Mrs. M. L. Wells, a national WCTU organizer and native southerner from Chattanooga, Tennessee. Sherman described Wells, who was organizing in her home state, as "being a southern woman and knowing the negro so well."³⁹ Owing to Wells' native southernness, Sherman concluded that Wells "knew exactly how to appeal to their [blacks] hearts and consciences."⁴⁰ Lide Meriwether and Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, temperance reformers of Tennessee and Louisiana, respectively, expressed similar sentiments about the special relationship between southern white women and blacks. While traveling in Tennessee, Meriwether reported on a visit she and Saxon made to a black church in Dyersburg. Concluding the report, Meriwether stated flatly, "I have always been a favorite with the race...."⁴¹

Southern white WCTU leaders also used victories in local option elections where they had held special meetings

³⁹Mattie Sherman, "Tennessee," Union Signal, 10 February 1887, 11.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Lide Meriwether, "Gleanings Afield," Union Signal, 1 April 1886, 9.

with blacks to demonstrate their influence over blacks. Before southern state legislators rewrote their state constitutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to disfranchise black male voters, the WCTU often pointed to the influence that black male voters had in prohibition elections. Temperance leaders often asserted that blacks held the balance of power in these elections.⁴² This assertion coupled with the simultaneous construction of blacks, particularly although not exclusively black men, as especially prone to drunkenness, allowed white WCTU women to highlight their roles in black communities and in directly influencing black behavior.

In reporting on two prohibition campaigns in Georgia in 1884, Mrs George McLeod, Secretary of the Department of Southern Work, credited Sallie Chapin with delivering the black vote for prohibition in the campaigns. McLeod managed to give Chapin credit by asserting that the black vote for prohibition represented the fulfillment of pledges that blacks had made to Chapin at various temperance

⁴²See for example, Mrs. G. H. McLeod, "Southern Gleanings," Union Signal, 13 March 1884, 11; "Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, September 1888, 1; "Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, November 1888, 1; Minutes, National WCTU, 1911, 183; "Presidential Address," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 April 1889, 1; "Tactics of the Enemy," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1890, 6; "Report of Superintendent of Legislation," National Minutes, WCTU, 1881, xiv-v.

meetings that they would vote for prohibition.⁴³ Likewise, Missouri Stokes, State Corresponding Secretary of the Georgia WCTU, praised the role that Mrs. E. E. Harper, State Superintendent of the Department of Colored Work of the Georgia WCTU, played in securing the cooperation of blacks during the 1885 local option campaign in Atlanta Georgia. Harper, like Chapin, was described as being especially devoted to "the colored work." During the weeks before the campaign, Harper personally spoke to black audiences and arranged for other temperance lecturers to speak to blacks. One of whom was Sallie Chapin. Chapin and Harper held four public meetings with blacks, three at churches and one at Clark University.⁴⁴ Other white Georgia WCTU members aided in the efforts to pass prohibition in Atlanta and draw blacks into the campaign. They made banners which were sent to black prohibition clubs and held a contest whereby the black prohibition club which turned out the most prohibition voters in its ward would win a blue and white satin banner with "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men" painted on one side and the WCTU motto, "For God Home and Native Land" painted on the

⁴³Mrs George Hulse McLeod, "Southern Gleanings," Union Signal, 27 March 1884, 12.

⁴⁴Barnes, History of Georgia WCTU, 76, 86-87; Scomp, King Alcohol in the Realm of King Cotton, 695.

other.⁴⁵ Mrs. Ansley Barnes in her History of the Georgia WCTU credits Harper and Chapin for getting blacks involved in the Atlanta campaign:

As a result of Mrs Harper's and Mrs. Chapin's work among the colored people, a number of colored women came out on election day and liberally aided with contributions and service at the lunch tables. The students of Clark University sent thirty gallons of milk and other colored people rendered substantial assistance in providing for the dinner that was to be served to prohibition voters.⁴⁶

On the day of the election, Harper chose to spend the day in church prayer services with black women. Of those services, Harper was quoted as saying, "I never heard women who in their prayers seemed to get any closer to God than some of the old aunties."⁴⁷

Unlike the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which under the leadership of southern white clubwomen excluded black women's clubs from its organization in 1900-02, and southern branches of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which excluded black women from their state

⁴⁵Barnes, History of Georgia WCTU, 86-87.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Missouri Stokes, "Woman's Work in the Recent Local Option Campaign in Atlanta," Union Signal, 24 December 1885, 5.

chapters, southern white WCTU chapters made a place, however constrained, for blacks in their organizations.

As early as 1881 at the National WCTU annual convention, the corresponding secretary for the Texas WCTU reported that an African American union had been formed in Texas but unfortunately there was no report from the Union.⁴⁸ According to Ruth Bordin black and white southern unions were affiliated with the same state unions in the 1880's. From their beginning efforts at bringing the temperance message to blacks, white WCTU workers organized blacks into separate local unions. Although southern white WCTU women rarely explicitly detailed lines of organization,⁴⁹ it seems that white women expected black local unions to be under their control through their state and local departments of colored work. Furthermore, only state unions could send official delegates to the national convention. According to reports at the 1886 National Convention and in the Union Signal, the first southern black state chapters of the WCTU were organized in

⁴⁸Minutes, National WCTU, 1881, ci.

⁴⁹See for example, E.C. Bryce, "Colored Work: The Relation of the Colored Work to the WCTU," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 August 1889, 5; "Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1889, 1; Minutes, National WCTU, 1890, 218; Lary Gould Baldwin, "Louisiana," Union Signal, 14 May 1896, 10; "State Convention at Arkansas," Union Signal, 21 May 1896, 14.

Tennessee and Alabama.⁵⁰ Before southern blacks organized into separate state unions and before the lines of segregation hardened further in the late 1880's and 1890's, black women occasionally attended state meetings of southern white WCTU conventions. It was commonly accepted that southern whites could, would, and should attend black gatherings, especially churches to proselytize and organize southern blacks. It was rare that southern blacks were given the same access to white public spaces.

In 1885, Mrs. Alexander, president of the black union of Greenville, South Carolina, attended the South Carolina WCTU annual convention. Her attendance at the white convention and the response of the white delegates to her presence once again reveals the complex dynamics of race within the southern WCTU. According to the convention records, Mrs. Alexander made an "earnest appeal" to the delegates to aid the black unions by forming a committee to work with them. Although she was allowed to speak, she was not listed as an official delegate on the delegates page even though she was obviously an active president of an active union. During the convention, Sallie Chapin and

⁵⁰Minutes, National WCTU, 1886, 42, "Alabama," Union Signal, 25 March 1886, 11, Lide Meriwether, "Tennessee, Colored WCTU State Convention," Union Signal, 7 October 1886, 10.

other delegates spoke to a black audience at Springfield Baptist Church, where Mrs. Alexander presented Chapin with a bouquet of flowers and expressed to Chapin the allegiances of black temperance workers with the words: "We love God and Home and Native Land; we love each other; we love our white friends and dear Mrs. Chapin, we love you."⁵¹ At the end of the convention, the white delegates answered Mrs. Alexander's appeal. They appointed not one but four superintendents of Work Among the Colored People to organize black unions statewide. However, the resolution the delegates passed supporting Mrs. Alexander's request reasserted the white belief that blacks were more susceptible to drunkenness than whites, although as reported in the convention Minutes, Mrs. Alexander's appeal had indicated nothing of the sort.⁵² In a report sent to the Union Signal on the convention, the writer, after

⁵¹Minutes, South Carolina WCTU, 1885, 15.

⁵²*Ibid*, 16-17. The resolution passed by the convention delegates stated: "Resolved, that as our colored population, even more than the whites, are victims of the rum traffic, that we appoint to superintend the temperance work among the colored people, four of our most responsible ladies and gentlemen, and urge it upon them to form unions for the colored people all over the state." The convention records report Mrs. Alexander's request as the following: "Mrs. Alexander, a colored woman, made an earnest appeal on behalf of the colored unions begging the ladies to give them a committee to work for them and promising their aid and support." See, Minutes, South Carolina WCTU, 1885, 14.

praising Sallie Chapin for her role in the convention, alluded to Mrs. Alexander's presence (although she was not named). Rather than reporting her words as recorded in the convention records, the article stated that "a colored woman...earnestly begged that the WCTU of South Carolina would assist them [the colored union] by appointing our own ladies to help them save their race from the curse of alcohol."⁵³ This statement reemphasized, once again, the notion of black susceptibility to alcohol and the special role of southern white women in the southern black community.

A year later, in 1886, four black women attended the fourth annual convention of the North Carolina Women's Christian Temperance Union. The ambiguous position of these black delegates at the convention highlights the complexity of attempting to discover the relationship between white and black WCTU chapters in the South as well as the relationship between white and black women temperance workers in the South. As reported in the Minutes, two delegates each from the black unions at Charlotte and Greensboro attended the meeting. Their status at the convention is difficult to determine. It

⁵³"W," "South Carolina," Union Signal, 5 November 1885, 10.

appears that each local union was allowed to send two delegates to the state convention. Therefore, the black unions at Charlotte and Greensboro were represented by a requisite number of delegates. However, their names were not listed on the delegates page of the convention minutes, although the names of the four delegates from the white Charlotte and Greensboro local unions were listed.

Although the women were asked to give reports from their unions, it is not clear if they would have been allowed to do so if Mrs. Rose Steele, North Carolina Superintendent of Work Among the Colored People had been present. According to the Minutes, the report on Colored Work was "not given" because Rosa Steele was out of town during the convention. Sallie Chapin then moved that the convention hear from the black delegates "in reference to their own work." The Minutes report that the President of the colored union gave "an interesting ex-tempore speech" on their methods of work.⁵⁴ As both Anastasia Sims and Glenda Gilmore have pointed out, the fact that the black women were present at

⁵⁴Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1886, 63. It can be argued that since Rosa Steele was superintendent of Colored Work for the entire state, she would have been responsible for giving the report for the Charlotte and Greensboro unions. Therefore, the question is whether the delegates would have been allowed to give general reports from their local unions as were white delegates from local unions.

all indicates an attempt at interracial co-operation among southern WCTU women.⁵⁵

However, interracial co-operation within the North Carolina WCTU proved a tenuous task. Rosa Steele's 1887 report suggested the difficulties of interracial work:

I come to you with a burden scarcely to be endured. For three years called to superintend a department whose importance I fully appreciate, and being able to give it but the leisure moments of a life full of domestic cares and educational work among God's lowly ones, I feel like making this an appeal for help than a report of work accomplished.⁵⁶

In her report, Steele explained the difficulty of heading a department that included not just one branch of WCTU work but all branches of temperance work. She attempted to convince the North Carolina WCTU that the department was "as [important] as the sum of all other departments, and

⁵⁵Anastatia Sims, "'The Sword of the Spirit': The WCTU and Moral Reform in North Carolina, 1883-1933," The North Carolina Historical Review 64 (October 1987): 394-415; "'A Melting Time': Black Women, White Women, and the WCTU in North Carolina, 1880-1900," in Hidden Histories of Women in the New South, ed. Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Theda Perdue, and Elizabeth H. Turner (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 153-172; 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), 49.

⁵⁶Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1887, 50.

should receive as much attention as all others combined."⁵⁷ Steele asked each delegate to ask herself if her local union had taken up the work among colored people. To help make her plea, Steel restated the notion that a special bond existed between white women and black people: "Every union has in it some woman who is well known and loved among the colored people." She suggested that this woman be appointed superintendent of colored work, even if it meant "[robbing] your own society of a president."⁵⁸ The members of the Plan of Work committee echoed Steele's request and submitted a resolution to the convention that emphasized the importance of the work among colored people. The committee members "earnestly recommended" that the local unions redouble their efforts to organize African American women and children. However, their advice concerning how the work should be carried out highlighted the difficulties of white WCTU women working with African American women rather than among colored people. The delegates recommended that "some one or more of the [local union] should be present at each meeting to keep the organization on its proper line of work" because they maintained "unskilled hands without someone to direct, will

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 51.

soon find difficulties which will break up the organization."⁵⁹ This recommendation was no doubt meant to encourage North Carolina's white white ribboners to work with black women and children to further the cause of temperance. But the implication of the recommendation that black women were incapable of properly conducting meetings or maintaining a viable union indicates an inability of North Carolina's white WCTU women to recognize the skills and abilities of North Carolina's black WCTU women, even when those skills and abilities had been presented to them the previous year at their own state convention.

Although the Plan of Work Committee questioned the ability of black women to lead and sustain their own organizations, Rosa Steele acknowledged the importance of black women in the effort to both organize black unions and bring black people into the temperance crusade. Steele ended her 1887 report by suggesting that Frances Harper, the National Superintendent of Work Among the Colored People, North, be brought to North Carolina the following year to help organize black North Carolinians. Steele referred to the argument used by some white North Carolina white ribboners that they were reluctant to engage in the colored work because blacks viewed whites with suspicion;

⁵⁹Ibid., 12.

although she dismissed the argument, she did acknowledge that Harper would be "heartily received by her own people, and would have no opposition to overcome."⁶⁰ Rather than Frances Harper, Sarah Early visited North Carolina the following year. Sarah Early, who had recently assumed her duties as the Superintendent of Work Among the Colored People, South, spent five weeks in North Carolina in 1888; she spoke fifty two times, organized one union and revitalized another. In her 1888 report, Steel declared Early's visit a success but she still lamented the difficulties of getting local white unions to appoint Superintendents of Work Among the Colored People.⁶¹

Rosa Steele resigned as Superintendent of Work Among the Colored People shortly after the 1888 state convention. The Executive Committee of the North Carolina WCTU formed a special committee, which included the President of the state union, Mary Woody, to determine the future direction of the colored work. After attending black local union meetings and talking with black women, the committee discovered that North Carolina's black WCTU leaders preferred to lead themselves:

⁶⁰Ibid., 51.

⁶¹Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1888, 40-41.

By occasional conversation and attending two or three meetings of the colored people...we are of the opinion that the leading white ribboners among them prefer not to stand in the relation of a superintendency of taking rank under every department of our state union, but as loyal members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union they desire to obtain their full development and think this can best be done in an independent organization allied to the National as a state organization, with the department work under their own control. They earnestly request our continued co-operation and support until their work is well organized.⁶²

The meeting to organize North Carolina's black state WCTU was held two days before the 1890 annual convention of the state's white chapter. Prominent members of North Carolina's white WCTU state union helped organize the event and Frances Willard, who also attended the white meeting, addressed the convention.⁶³ As noted in earlier, Frances Willard was much beloved by southern temperance workers. Indeed, Mary Woody, President of North Carolina #1, expressed the general sentiment of southern white temperance women when she welcomed Willard to North Carolina's eighth convention with the words, "We are especially favored...to welcome...our beloved President,

⁶²Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1889, 17.

⁶³Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1890, 21, 23.

the leader of us all. The women of every clime would rejoice at the privilege we enjoy this hour.⁶⁴ However, just as North Carolina's black temperance women had asserted their independence in preferring to form their own organization, they likewise asserted their desire to choose their own speakers at their state conventions. Mary Lynch, Corresponding Secretary of North Carolina #2, in her report to the National Convention asserted that although "Miss Willard's address was fine...we want a speaker of our race."⁶⁵

⁶⁴Ibid., 42.

⁶⁵Ibid., 217

**Chapter 5:
Organized (White) Womanhood: The WCTU and the GFWC**

In her 1883 report to the national convention, the Corresponding Secretary of the Mississippi WCTU wrote "one or two colored women, with good character who are willing to rough it among the colored people here would be a great help."¹ The casual, off hand, but deeply imbedded racism of that remark reflects the complexity of race and race relations within the southern Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

However, complex the problems of race were within the WCTU, it was an interracial organization; the WCTU never excluded black unions from membership. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, though, went through a two year debate to determine if it would officially declare itself an interracial organization. Before 1902, there was no official bar to the admission of black clubs to the Federation. Led by southern white club women, the General Federation was forced to confront this potential inter-racialism beginning in 1900 at its sixth biennial meeting in Milwaukee and lasting until 1902, when it changed its by-laws to effectively exclude black women's clubs. Although southern white club women held positions of

¹Minutes, National WCTU, 1883, 88-93.

prominence within the Federation, including the Presidency in 1900-1902, many threatened to leave the organization if it did not bend to the southern regional dictates of racial segregation. In contrast, the national WCTU and southern state affiliates (both black and white) continuously worked to forge a relationship, however difficult and complex, between black unions and white unions throughout the Progressive Era.

White WCTU state chapters organized blacks into separate local "colored unions," which were supposed to report to and be supervised by white state and local superintendents of "Work Amongst the Colored People." Although national and state WCTU leaders constantly advocated the importance of the "colored work," according to Rosa Steele, one of the most active and dedicated state superintendents of colored work, it was difficult to get white women on the local level to take up the cause.²

When whites did work among blacks, the kind of casual, off hand racism expressed by the Mississippi Corresponding Secretary often characterized their efforts. On one of her many tours through the South, Sallie Chapin found herself

²Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1887, 50. See also, F. E. W. Harper, "Department of Work for Colored People," Union Signal, 13 September 1888, 5; Minutes, Kentucky WCTU, 1887, 14-16; "The Year's Last Word," Mississippi White Ribbon, December 1903, 4.

at a loss as to how to describe to the readers of the Union Signal her meeting with a group of blacks in Hamilton, Georgia. She explained that "the Holy Spirit came down in great power upon both colored and white," but, according to Chapin, the effect was indescribable because "unless you are familiar with the excitable nature of the colored race[,] you can form no idea of the scene."³ Likewise, Lide Meriwether, who once described herself as a "favorite with the race," informed Union Signal readers that with their "showers of amen's" and "tokens of approbations as 'Dat so honey; hit'em again twixt the eyes'," she did not know "any better fun than to talk temperance to a crowd of negroes."⁴ Rather than seeing her black audiences' verbal responses as an attempt to build community with the speaker, Meriwether, like many southern whites, chose instead to code black expressions of approbation as amusing and entertaining.⁵

³"Mrs. Chapin in Georgia," Union Signal, 22 May 1884, 4.

⁴Lide Meriwether, "Gleanings Afield," Union Signal, 1 April 1886, 9.

⁵For an analysis of black audience participation and its meanings, see, Portia K. Maultsby, "Africanisms in American Music," in Joseph E. Holloway, ed., Africanisms in American Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 185-210. Meriwether seems to fit into the tradition of whites who believed that black worship practices generally represented a sign of black inferiority, childishness, and a lack of acculturation to white values

Mattie Sherwood, State Superintendent of the Tennessee Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union, also saw black audience participation as entertainment. Reporting on the organizing efforts of Mary Wells, Sherwood explained the special connection that, as a southern white woman, Wells had with blacks. She concluded by noting the response of blacks to Wells' speeches: "it was amusing to hear their [the blacks] hearty responses, 'that so!' 'dat's de troof!' 'Yes ma'am!'"⁶ Both of these references to the traditional patterns of African American audience participation came within the context of southern white women asserting their special relationship with blacks. The gesture of asserting white women's intimacy with blacks by Sherwood ("Being a southern woman and knowing the negro so well.") and Meriwether ("I have always been a favorite with the race.") is immediately followed by an equally distancing gesture of presenting blacks as childlike and inferior. In this way, middle class southern white women

and mores; see, Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 141; Dena J. Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 191-216.

⁶Mattie Sherwood, "Tennessee," Union Signal, 10 February 1887, 11.

kept their status as white evident,⁷ which served to demarcate clearly the boundaries between themselves and African Americans.⁸

The southern WCTU's inter-racialism had to be consistently negotiated. Just as the national WCTU had to negotiate and renegotiate its relationship to the departments of Colored Work and Southern Work, southern white chapters had to negotiate and renegotiate their relationship to southern black unions, southern black women, and blackness in general.

In 1886, Mary Read Goodale, state corresponding secretary of the Louisiana WCTU, reported to the national

⁷See Paul Gilroy, 'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The cultural politics of race and nation (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 38-39. Gilroy states: "Race has to be constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of racialization which has characterized capitalist development....Accepting that skin 'colour', however meaningless we know it to be, has strictly limited material basis in biology, opens up the possibility of engaging with theories of signification which can highlight the elasticity and emptiness of 'racial' signifiers as well as the ideological work which has to be done in order to turn them into signifiers in the first place."

⁸For discussions of the conflation of "blacks and women," see, Nancy Stepan, "The Role of Analogy in Science," in David Theo Goldberg, ed., Anatomy of Racism, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 38-57; Robyn Wiegman, American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 14-49; Jean Fagan Yellin, Women and Slaves: The Anti-Slavery Feminist in American Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-124.

convention that the Louisiana WCTU did "a great deal of work among the Negroes." However, she explained that when she organized black local unions, she organized them differently than white unions. In the black unions, she made the "men and women alike members," and she also appointed men as officers in the black unions.⁹ Goodale does not explain why she organized black unions in this particular way. Like most white women, Goodale acknowledged that although she had worried about stepping beyond the bounds of traditional southern white womanhood, working in the WCTU gave her a greater sense of confidence in her skills and abilities.¹⁰ Black women involved in voluntary associations tended to worry less about stepping outside of traditional female roles and more about general racial uplift and protecting and defending the names of black women. However, it is interesting that Goodale was either unwilling to acknowledge or unaware that black women, too, could benefit from being members of female associations with all female leadership.¹¹ Goodale

⁹Minutes, National WCTU, 1886, 101.

¹⁰Mary Goodale, "Journeyings In Louisiana," Union Signal, 29 May 1884, 4.

¹¹On black women's clubs, see, Salem, To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990); Mary Martha Thomas, The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reform and Suffrage, 1880-1920 (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University Press of Alabama,

characterized organizing blacks as "purely missionary work," implying an unequal relationship between those giving assistance and those needing assistance, which also mirrored the perceived and material unequal social, economic, and political relationship between southern blacks and whites.

In June 1889, the Mississippi White Ribbon informed its readers that the Mississippi State WCTU had changed its relationship to the "colored work." The state chapter engaged Mrs. W. M. McInyon of Moss Point to "labor in Mississippi" for the WCTU. According to the White Ribbon, McInyon visited a number of towns along the coast and organized two unions. However, what is interesting is that the White Ribbon reported that "The colored unions will form an independent organization not allied with our WCTU, will meet in separate conventions, and chiefly will form

1992), 71-71; 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), 53; Deborah Gray White, "The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black Feminism," in Nancy Hewitt and Susan Lesbock, ed., Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 247-269. White states: "...[T]he first truly national secular black association organized around the principle of racial self-help was an organization founded by black women in the interest of black womanhood and race progress....," 247; Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Southern Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in Southern Women: Histories and Identities, ed., Virginia Bernhard, et al. (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 177-189.

alliances in their churches.¹² Although unexplained, the formation of independent black unions was a departure from the pattern of white unions organizing local black unions under the auspices of the state and/or local white departments of colored work.¹³ The Mississippi White Ribbon seemed to distance the black and white work even more when it concluded: "We hope our Unions will show their sympathy and their interest, and when they see that work can be done for the colored people in this line please notify Mrs McInyon at Moss Point who is well spoken of by all who know her earnest, active and intelligent spirit."¹⁴ Again, although the White Ribbon does not explain why, it appears that in 1889, the Mississippi State WCTU decided to give up primary responsibility for organizing blacks in the state.

Two months later, the Mississippi White Ribbon published a statement by Ellen Bryce, former president of the Alabama WCTU, addressing a controversy involving confusions around segregation, race, and regionalism within

¹²"Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1889, 1.

¹³This is especially interesting because the Minutes of the National conventions do not list a black state union in Mississippi until 1900.

¹⁴"Colored Work," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1889, 1.

the WCTU. Although the accusations surfaced in 1889, the events to which they referred actually took place two years earlier. In an article entitled, "Colored Work: The Relation of the Colored Work to the WCTU," Ellen Bryce responded to an article which appeared in a Tuscaloosa paper alleging that she had been forced to resign her position as President of the Alabama WCTU because she violated the white South's mores of segregation and regional autonomy at a National WCTU convention in 1887:

[T]wo negro women, representing unions organized by a northern paid agent, sat with the national convention in Nashville, by the President of the Alabama State Union. She was an elegant lady and was forced to resign.¹⁵

Bryce responded to the accusations:

I need not tell you that the foregoing contains several important errors. In the first place, I did not resign the office of President of the Alabama WCTU, but simply declined reelection...on the ground of bad health.¹⁶

Bryce explained that the black woman in question was the President of the WCTU #2, which had been organized "with the assistance of a lady from the North," and that the

¹⁵"Colored Work: The Relation of the Colored Work to the WCTU," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 August 1889, 5.

¹⁶Ibid.

President attended the convention in Nashville as the "sole representative from her union." Bryce continued to explain that "when the drawing for seats took place, she [the black president] was not present; and having no seat, I consented to her request for a seat next to my delegation." Bryce, once again, made clear: "I did not therefore 'resign' as alleged...but declined reelection...and I had determined on this course before the meeting of the national convention in Nashville."¹⁷ This controversy involved the perceived violation of the dictates of southern segregation by a southern middle class white woman in a southern city. Although Bryce adamantly denied that she was forced to resign, it is clear that the inter-racialism of the national WCTU and questions of the nature of the relationship between black and white in the southern WCTU put Bryce in a position where she felt compelled to publicly explain her actions at a national convention that had taken place two years earlier. Additionally, the editor of the Mississippi White Ribbon believed it

¹⁷Ibid. Although Ellen Bryce never refers to the president by name, she was probably Mrs. C. C. Booth who was elected in 1886 as the first president of the Alabama WCTU #2. Also according to the National WCTU Convention Minutes, Mrs. Booth was appointed a member of the WCTU Executive Committee at the 1887 convention in Nashville; see, Mrs. Sloan, "Alabama," Union Signal, 24 March 1886, 11; Minutes, National WCTU, 1886, 97; Minutes, National WCTU, 1887, 11, 103.

necessary to address the question of the northern paid agent, which raised concerns of northern interference in southern race relations. The editor stated flatly, "It is said also by those having knowledge that there was no paid agent."¹⁸

This incident and its attendant controversy led the editor of the Mississippi White Ribbon to try to clarify the relationship of black and white within the WCTU:

"There seems some confusion of idea on this subject. For the information of all it should be stated that the colored unions are not auxiliary to the state unions. When a colored union is formed in any state it elects its own president, who conducts its work with such advice as it seeks from the white union."¹⁹

The editor noted that the relations between the two unions were cordial and reminded the readers that "for humanity's sake, the education of the negro on the Prohibition question should be pushed by our organization [because] it is vital in more than one point."²⁰

The attempt to publicly explain the racial organization of the WCTU by the editor of the Mississippi

¹⁸"Colored Work: The Relation of the Colored Work to the WCTU," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 August 1889, 5.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

White Ribbon is notable. The declaration that the "colored unions are not auxiliary to the state unions" would, according to the usual organizational structure of the WCTU, apply only to black state unions. However, the issue of the relationship of black local unions to the white unions, both local and state, is left unaddressed. Additionally, the editorial states, "It is considered wisest to send out colored workers to this race and leave them to manage the temperance question in their churches, which they understand and we do not." This statement contradicts the arguments that southern white WCTU workers made, especially in the early years of the southern temperance movement, that it was whites' duty to take up the temperance work among blacks and that southern white women were especially suited for the task because of their special relationship with blacks and their special influence over blacks. However, in the years between 1888 and 1895/96, when Lucy Thurman took over the National Department of Colored Work, various southern white unions reported varying relationships to local black unions.

In 1890, Caroline Merrick, reported to the National WCTU Convention that she had little information about the colored work in Louisiana. She wrote that "I do not draw the color line," but she insisted that "colored people here

prefer to be taught by their own color," and that her "superior officer thought it best to have things as at present arranged." That same year, similar reports of having little or no information about the "colored work" also came from Mississippi and Alabama, although a black state union had been organized in Alabama in 1886.²¹ However, in 1896, the white Arkansas State WCTU, not only seated four black delegates at its annual convention but also made them members of various committees. Arkansas also continued to make black unions auxiliary to the white state union. A Union Signal article noted that Arkansas was the "only southern state, besides Missouri, where blacks are allowed auxiliaryship to the state union." The Arkansas state president was given credit for "this advance."²² That same year a white woman served as president of the newly organized black WCTU state chapter in Louisiana; the union decided to affiliate directly with the National, although it is unclear whether they were given the option of auxiliary membership to the white state chapter.²³

²¹Minutes, National WCTU, 1890, 215.

²²"State Convention at Arkansas," Union Signal, 21 May 1896, 14.

²³"Louisiana," Union Signal, 14 May 1896, 10; Union Signal, 23 July 1896, 1.

These changes in perceptive and organizational structure among southern white and black unions coincided with the shifting configurations of the Departments of Southern Work, Colored Work, and Colored Work, South within the national WCTU. In 1888, Sarah Early took over the Colored Work, South from Sallie Chapin, although her leadership was short lived. In 1889, at the request of southern white women, the Department of Southern Work was abolished, leaving the Department of Colored Work, South undefined.²⁴ Between 1890 and 1892, the national WCTU abandoned the Department of Colored Work all together. During these years of shifting organizational structure, the first three separate black state unions were formed in Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina.²⁵ When the National WCTU re-instated the Department of Colored Work in 1894, Lucy Thurman was made Superintendent of the Department, and by 1901 she had organized separate black state unions in a majority of southern states, thereby, completing the shift

²⁴Union Signal, 25 April 1889, 1; Minutes, National WCTU, 1889, 56.

²⁵On the formation of the Alabama Union, see, Mrs. Sloane, "Alabama," Union Signal, 24 March 1886, 11; Minutes, National WCTU, 1886, 97; Minutes, National WCTU, 1887, 103; On the formation of the Tennessee Union, see, Lide Meriwether, "Tennessee, Colored WCTU State Convention," Union Signal, 7 October 1886, 10; Minutes, National WCTU, 1886, 112; on the formation of the North Carolina Union, see, Minutes, National WCTU, 1890, 217; Minutes, North Carolina WCTU, 1890, 18.

from white to black control of local and state black WCTU unions.

Although the lines of segregation seem less fluid in the WCTU in the 1890's, it remained an interracial organization. A few blacks continued to attend white meetings and whites continued to organize black unions and speak to black gatherings, though less frequently. However the national WCTU never explicitly excluded black women from its ranks as did the General Federation of Women's Clubs under the leadership of southern white women.

In June 1900, at the fifth biennial convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in Milwaukee, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a black woman, attempted to take her seat as a delegate from the Woman's Era Club, a woman's voluntary association she had organized in Boston in 1893 for the expressed purpose of African American uplift.²⁶ Josephine Ruffin attended the biennial, not just as a representative of the Woman's Era Club,²⁷ but also as a representative of the New England Woman's Press Association

²⁶Dorothy Salem, To Better Our World, Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920 (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), p.16.

²⁷Ruffin's club was variously referred to in contemporary newspaper reports as the "Woman's Era Club" and the "New Era Club." It is also referred to variously as the "Woman's Era Club" and the "New Era Club" in recent secondary sources. It is referred to here as the "Woman's Era Club."

and the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs. Ruffin believed that the Woman's Era club had been admitted to the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) shortly before the biennial; however, several state delegations of white club women from the South, led by Georgia, objected to Ruffin being seated as a delegate from the black woman's club.²⁸ They demanded that the GFWC deny Ruffin a seat as a delegate from the Woman's Era Club, and they demanded that the GFWC officially bar the admission of all black women's clubs. The public debate that ensued, lasting about two years, says much about how southern white club women perceived their role in the national organization and how the nation perceived the strength of southern white club women in bending the national organization to their regional perspectives.

In 1890 Jane C. Croly organized the General Federation of Women's Clubs as a national union of American club women. Although most clubs were strictly literary, under the leadership of the GFWC many quickly became involved in public reform activities. Consciously retaining the

²⁸There are differing accounts of whether the Woman's Era Club had been officially admitted to the General Federation of Women's Clubs. In a newspaper report, Ruffin is quoted as saying that the President of the Federation, Rebecca Lowe, greeted her before the convention and congratulated her on her clubs acceptance to the Federation. Other reports say the Woman's Era Club had not been admitted to the Federation.

nineteenth century rhetoric of separate spheres and female moral superiority, these club women began to use that rhetoric to transform public policy, especially in the areas of educational reform, municipal housekeeping, and civic reform.²⁹ Like other middle class American women, southern white women had taken advantage of increasing leisure time to form women's clubs in the mid eighteen-eighties. As the club movement grew, southern white women formed state federations of women's clubs, and by 1900 many of these had affiliated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs.³⁰ Like the leaders of the Women's Christian Temperance Union earlier, national leaders of the GFWC had been eager to bring representatives from southern clubs into their organization. In 1898 Rebecca Douglas Lowe of Georgia was elected the General Federation president. Never as overtly political as the Women's Christian Temperance Union or the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the GFWC provided southern white women access to a national organization of women dedicated primarily to self-improvement and community activism.

²⁹Karen Blair, True Womanhood Redefined: The Club Woman As Feminist, 1868-1914 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), 93-100.

³⁰Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 152-161.

Yet in 1900, despite the growing number of southern clubs in the General Federation and southern white women's growing prominence in its ranks, southern white club women threatened to withdraw their state federations from the national organization over of issues of race and region. Although the southern white delegates who objected to the Woman's Era admission were successful in keeping the issue off the convention floor for general debate, they were not successful in suppressing it altogether. The press quickly picked up the controversy, making the issues of sectionalism and racism within the Federation a matter of national public debate.

Exactly what happened at the fifth biennial in 1900 is somewhat unclear. Several observers reported that the members of the General Federation's Executive Board asked Ruffin to return her credentials as a member of the Woman's Era Club after the Board received complaints from a number of southern delegates. Ruffin refused, maintaining that the Federation had already accepted the Woman's Era Club and its membership dues. An account in the Chicago Tribune claimed that the formal demand for Ruffin's badge came after a member of the credentials committee attempted to take it by force. The Tribune reported that Mrs. George H. Noyes "attempted to snatch [the badge] from Mrs. Ruffin's

dress [wherein] the colored delegate avoided the clutch and fled with her badge."³¹ The credentials committee then requested that the Massachusetts State Federation revoke Ruffin's badge. When the Massachusetts Federation refused, the members of the Executive Board, trying to find a compromise, decided that Ruffin could be seated as a delegate of the Massachusetts Federation and the Woman's Press Association but not as a delegate of the Woman's Era Club. Ruffin, again, refused.³² Joined by at least seven other state delegations, the Massachusetts delegation protested the action of the Board members. They presented to the Board formal written resolutions stating that, as a national body, the General Federation should make no distinction of membership on the basis of race.³³ The Georgia delegation, joined by six other southern delegations, countered with a resolution demanding that the

³¹"Color Line in Women's Clubs," Chicago Tribune, 6 June 1900, 7.

³²For various newspaper reports of these events see the Chicago Tribune, the Louisville-Courier Journal, The New York Times, and the New York Herald Tribune. For brief treatments in secondary sources see Blair, Clubwoman, 109-110; Anne Firor Scott, Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 127.

³³"The Color Line Drawn at Convention of Women's Clubs in Milwaukee," The Louisville-Courier Journal, 6 June 1900, 3.

Federation officially bar all African American women's clubs and become an organization for white women only.³⁴

Various participants noted the sectional loyalties and affiliations in this controversy over seating Ruffin. One New York delegate commented that "on the color line," there seemed to be an "apparent understanding between the women of the South and West as against those of the North and East."³⁵ Repeating a common reference to the political maneuvering during the convention, this observer also noted that northern and eastern delegates were "no match" for the southern and western delegates and the eastern and northern delegations needed "to develop more aggressiveness and tact if they [wished] to further their interest in the club movement".³⁶ In a speech before a Chicago audience after the biennial, Josephine Ruffin praised the western delegates as "noble" and asserted that they, along with the eastern delegates, wanted to defeat Rebecca Lowe for reelection as president, but she also admitted that they were outmaneuvered by the southern delegates.³⁷ Ruffin

³⁴Southern Woman, 25 May 1901, 1.

³⁵"General Club News Of Present Interest," Louisville Courier Journal, 24 June 1900, 5.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷"Mrs. Ruffin is Firm in Purpose," Chicago Tribune, 11 June 1900, 7.

praised the southern delegates on their organizational and parliamentary skills:

The southern women were the best organized body of women I ever saw. They had their husbands and brothers back of them. When they heard of the fight they began telegraphing: 'Stand firm. Knock Susan B. Anthony over the head wherever you find her'³⁸

On 30 June 1900 the Georgian and New Era, the official newspaper of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs, asserted that, if the action of the Executive Board had been put to a general vote, it would have been approved by the South with a large majority of western and northern delegations because all believed that "the integrity of the Federation could not be otherwise sustained."³⁹

The question of the Federation's "integrity" is an important one. Before the 1900 biennial, the General Federation had no official bar to the admission of African American women's clubs, and some predominantly white clubs outside the South admitted black members. Yet, most white club women believed that, if the Woman's Era Club had been admitted to the GFWC, the southern delegates would have withdrawn their state federations from the national

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹"Federation Matter," Georgian and New Era, 30 June 1900, 7.

organization. The Southern Woman, formally the Georgian and New Era, asserted that the Georgia delegates, who were leading the southern delegates, would have left the biennial not only if the Woman's Era had been admitted but also if the issue had even been discussed on the convention floor.⁴⁰ The decision to table the matter and not have it discussed on the floor, although made by an Executive Board representing white club women from across the nation, was made in deference to the demands of southern white club women. With this decision, the General Federation decided to maintain its national integrity which was being challenged by the threat of southern withdrawal rather than its moral integrity which was being questioned by those who believed that the organization should not capitulate to racism and hypocrisy.

Although the only clear sectional divide over seating Ruffin as a member of the Woman's Era Club was between southern and non-southern club women, the racial debate generated was closely intertwined with the issue of national unity within the Federation. Because southern white club women had led the fight against the admission of black clubs to the Federation and because Rebecca Lowe was

⁴⁰"A Word From Georgia," Southern Woman, 25 May 1901, 6.

a southerner, southern white club women were called upon nationally to justify the Federation's actions. Rebecca Lowe's immediate response was one that southern white club women, and others who supported the South's position, would expound, with subtle variations, for the next two years. Lowe argued that Josephine Ruffin, and by extension all African American club women, should stay in their own clubs where they could do more good for blacks than they could as members of predominately white clubs. On 9 June 1900, at the height of the controversy, Lowe was quoted as saying

Mrs. Ruffin belongs among her own people. Among them she could be a leader and could do much good, but among us she can create nothing but trouble.... Among us [Ruffin] can never be more than what she now is... she should put her education and her talents to good use as a colored woman among colored women.⁴¹

Not only does Lowe's response represent the constant refrain of white club women who agreed with the southern position, but it also represents Lowe's personal inability to recognize publicly Ruffin's already considerable achievements as an African American woman, something which

⁴¹"May Take Color Line To Court," Chicago Tribune, 10 June 1900, 3.

Lowe, according to Ruffin, had complimented her on when they first met.⁴²

Yet, by expecting national recognition at the biennial, Ruffin, in Lowe's opinion, had stepped out of her place. Lowe continued this part of the defense:

In the South I have done considerable to assist in establishing kindergartens for colored children, and the colored women who have the matter directly in charge are all good friends of mine. I associate with [black women] in a business way, but of course they would not think of sitting beside me at a convention.... It is the 'high caste' negroes who bring about all the ill feeling. The ordinary colored woman understands her position thoroughly....⁴³

Ironically, Ruffin, too, was involved in establishing kindergartens for black children in Georgia. Ruffin was a member of the Georgia Educational League, an interracial organization of Georgia and Massachusetts club women dedicated to establishing and supporting kindergartens for black children in Georgia. The League was organized in response to an appeal, published in Boston newspapers, by southern women asking for funds to help open kindergartens

⁴²For biographical information on Ruffin see Salem, To Better Our World; Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984); Chicago Tribune, 11 June 1900, 7.

⁴³"May Take Color Line to Court," Chicago Tribune, 10 June 1900, 5.

for black children. According to one account, Ruffin organized the Woman's Era Club to aid the work of the Georgia Educational League, and the club contributed twenty dollars a month for the support of a kindergarten in Georgia.⁴⁴

Although Lowe quoted an African American minister as saying, Ruffin is "not for us," other African Americans, especially black club women, supported Ruffin's actions using the same rhetoric of progress and education that southern white women used to justify their own participation in club life. The President of the Phyllis Wheatly club in Milwaukee pointed out that black women's admission to the GFWC was not a question of social equality but one of principle. "It is most unjust," she said, "to draw the line against our delegates...we should have a chance to work with the white women's clubs in all that makes for advancement."⁴⁵ Mrs. Sheldon M. Minor, a Kentucky Senate employee, reiterated the point by saying people misunderstood the attitude of black women. They did not, she insisted, want social equality but rather

⁴⁴"Color Line at Biennial," New York Daily Tribune, 10 June 1900, 6; Salem, To Better Our World, 16.

⁴⁵"Side Lights on the General Federation," Louisville Courier Journal, 10 June 1900, 3.

"recognition in matters of progress and education."⁴⁶
Anticipating and responding to arguments linking social equality to sexuality, Mrs. Minor said she opposed interracial marriage but insisted that "in lines of education and progress the color line should not be drawn, but all women should work harmoniously together."⁴⁷ In Chicago, an African American minister challenged the GFWC to live up to its more feminist goals; he argued that women's clubs were not social affairs but rather institutions that played an important role in practical development, especially the development of the home.⁴⁸

African Americans were not the only ones who protested the injustice of the Federation's action. In a pointed editorial, the Chicago Tribune attacked the hypocrisy of the Federation's closing resolutions that proclaimed sympathy for "all who have wrought with sorrow-laden hearts." The Tribune responded:

These are fine words; but they have to be taken in light of the one distinguishing fact of the convention—that the one colored woman ...was refused admission because she belongs, in part at least, to a particular race;

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸"Work of Club Women," Chicago Daily News, 6 June 1900, 11.

which in our country numbers eight millions of people, many of them aspiring and bravely struggling upwards in face of almost infinite odds of circumstances against them.⁴⁹

Quoting Lowe's closing remark that "every woman... comes to the Biennial convention with the hope of carrying away with her some individual thought," the Tribune declared, "the one predominant individual thought" that American club women would carry away with them in this "final year of the century" would be that "the federated white-faced women of the clubs have not had the courage to recognize their sisters of the colored race and to this extent have stamped with insincerity their own protestations of sympathy 'for all who have wrought with sorrow-laden hearts'."⁵⁰

During the biennial, Mrs. J. K. Ottley, a Georgia delegate, argued that southern white women traditionally served as the friends, benefactors, and protectors of blacks. This argument would be repeated often. In May 1901, the Southern Woman printed an article entitled "The One Unswerving Friend to the Negro Race." The writer employed most of the standard rhetoric of dominant southern white racial ideology, but with a specifically gendered

⁴⁹"What the Federation Did," Chicago Tribune, 10 June 1900, 36.

⁵⁰Ibid.

focus which allowed her to imply that the treatment of African Americans by southern white women was superior even to that given them by southern white men. The writer argued that "from the arrival of the first cargo of Africans until today, [the white mistress] has been the one to whom [blacks] have applied in every emergency."⁵¹ Although she granted that there may have been unjust masters, she denied that there were ever "unreasonable, unjust" mistresses. As proof, she recalled the attachment of black slaves for their white masters during the Civil War, an attachment, she argued, that still existed. Finally, she declared, "it is this attachment, existing in both races for generations which causes the Southern [white] club woman to be able to give efficient aid to colored club women in their not easy task of uplifting the race."⁵²

By 1901, many white club women had begun to repeat this argument. The May and June issues of the Southern Woman are replete with articles written by white club women arguing that since southern white women "know the negro" better than anyone else, members of the General Federation

⁵¹"The One Unswerving Friend of the Negro Race," Southern Woman, 25 May 1901, 1.

⁵²Ibid.

should defer to their perception of the dangers of admitting African American club women to the organization.

In May 1901, in an attempt to avoid total capitulation to southern white women's demands to change the Federation's By-Laws to limit membership to "white women only," members of the Massachusetts Federation's Executive Board submitted resolutions to the GFWC Executive Board to allow state federations to determine their own membership. Although the Georgia executive officers expressed their appreciation for the "amicability" of the Massachusetts attempt "to devise some plan by which may be preserved the integrity of the Federation," they still objected. Since seven southern delegations had called for a national organization composed of white women only, the Georgians insisted that they could support no plan that would fall short of that goal.⁵³

Interestingly, while the leaders of the Georgia club women were protesting the Massachusetts resolutions, Kentucky's white club women were engaged in a rare direct confrontation over the issue in the South. The Kentucky debate, like the national debate, demonstrates that a vocal minority could cause considerable tension and disruption over an issue that many white club women believed unworthy

⁵³Ibid.

of serious discussion. During the annual convention of the Kentucky State Federation of Women's Clubs, a committee was assigned to write a preamble to a resolution protesting the admission of African American women's clubs to the General Federation. The Board of Directors of the Kentucky State Federation had already passed the resolution. Yet, instead of writing the anticipated preamble, the committee split, presenting both a majority and a minority report to the convention. The minority report concluded that "definite action" on the proposed resolution would be "ill-advised" and recommended that the matter be tabled. The majority report insisted that action be taken immediately. Objections were raised from the floor that the committee had failed in its duties and, according to the Courier Journal, "an animated discussion followed which continued for nearly two hours."⁵⁴ As was the case in the 1900 national biennial, the debate in Kentucky erupted because a minority of women objected to the General Federation bending itself to accommodate the demands of the majority of southern white club women, who themselves were a minority of federation members. In Kentucky, at least three delegates publicly objected to the official exclusion of African American clubs, citing the injustice of the

⁵⁴"Barred Out," Courier Journal 7 June 1901, 2.

action, their unwillingness to have Kentucky go on record as "opposed to true progress," and Kentucky's position as middle ground between the North and the South. One delegate, Mrs. Patty Semple, explained that Kentucky's action would set a precedent for other states and suggested that a more "temperate" objection be made. Another club woman added that, if the state federation formally approved limiting membership to white women only, Kentucky would be "putting herself side by side with Georgia, the most extreme state [in] the federation."⁵⁵ Yet the majority opinion prevailed and the Kentucky State Federation of Women's Clubs adopted a resolution protesting the admission of black women's clubs to the General Federation. Its preamble, prepared by the Louisville Woman's Club, cited the integrity of the national Federation, the unfitness of African Americans to join the Federation, and the injury to African Americans that would be caused by forcing racial development on them prematurely.⁵⁶

In 1902, shortly before the Los Angeles biennial, the GFWC Executive Board approved an amendment that allowed state federations to review black women's clubs for

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶"Resolutions Received, From Woman's Club, Louisville, Ky.," Southern Woman, 8 June 1901.

membership but which effectively barred them from membership in the General Federation, even if the state review were favorable. The plan required that all individual clubs applying for membership in the General Federation be approved by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors.⁵⁷ Although this plan avoided amending the Federation's constitution to insert the words "clubs desiring to join the GFWC must be composed of white women," it nevertheless satisfied southern white demands that the Federation remain an organization for white women only.

This debate over the admission of black women's clubs to the General Federation of Women's Clubs has received only brief attention by historians of American club women, partly because historians recognize that few white women were free from the prevailing racist assumptions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However accurate this may be, in the case of the "color line" debate within the General Federation of Women's Clubs, one must remember that a vocal minority of white women did object to the Executive Board's attempt to rescind the membership of the Woman's Era Club, and that, at least initially, they objected to the southern attempt to officially bar all African American women's clubs from

⁵⁷Blair, Clubwoman, 110.

membership in the Federation. The southern delegations' success demonstrates the strength of southern leadership within the Federation, but it also shows that the majority of the Federation's members believed that a national organization composed of white women only was preferable to a sectional one composed of both black and white women. The willingness of southern white club women to destroy the national identity of the General Federation of Women's Clubs proves that they considered racial solidarity far more important than gender solidarity. And, although the official motto of the General Federation was "Unity in Diversity," the willingness of the majority of the members of the Federation to support or at least not to challenge southern demands proved that they chose to define "unity" as racial and "diversity" as sectional.

Chapter 6:
(White) Woman Suffrage: Prohibition and Politics

In 1881 the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union officially endorsed woman's suffrage. However, Frances Willard, who had been instrumental in getting the organization to endorse woman's suffrage, was quick to reassure women, especially southern white women, that they did not have to actively advocate woman suffrage or create franchise departments.¹ In 1883, the national convention declined to support a resolution passed by the resolutions committee recommending that the WCTU petition the United States Congress for the passage of the sixteenth amendment. According to the convention records, although "almost every delegate present" believed woman suffrage was the best way to pass prohibition, they tabled the resolution deciding instead to "leave the matter to the several states."² Although the WCTU claimed not to be a political organization, prohibition could only be achieved through political means. Therefore, woman's suffrage became an issue that southern white WCTU state and local chapters could not avoid.

¹Minutes, National WCTU, 1886, 85.

²"Report of Annual Convention," Union Signal, 8 November 1883, 4.

As Willard made clear, individual state and local chapters did not have to follow the lead of the national WCTU and create franchise departments; nevertheless, some white southern temperance leaders believed that the very existence of the national suffrage plank hurt the temperance movement in the South.³ Southern white male political and church leaders were notoriously opposed to woman suffrage and the hint that a southern white woman's organization supported woman suffrage could severely damage the public image as well as the usefulness of the organization. In 1887, the corresponding secretary for the South Carolina WCTU reported to the national convention delegates that the state's work had virtually come to a stand still in the early spring because the organization was accused of "advocating or endorsing" woman suffrage.⁴ In 1888, the Georgia State WCTU convention delegates believed it necessary to "declare the principles of states rights" because the idea had become "so wide spread...that the organization had espoused the cause of 'woman suffrage.'"⁵

³"Tennessee," Union Signal, 6 Sept 1888, 11.

⁴Minutes, National WCTU, 104.

⁵Lulu Barnes Ansley, The History of the Georgia Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1883-1907 (Columbus: Gilbert Printing, 1914), 115.

The editor of the Nashville Tennessee Christian Advocate, O. P. Fitzgerald, wrote Frances Willard in October and urged her to downplay the suffrage issue in the upcoming 1887 national WCTU convention in Nashville. Believing that he was speaking for ninety nine of one hundred women in Nashville, Fitzgerald told Willard that the people of Nashville "are not ready for woman suffrage and its agitation just now would handicap prohibition."⁶ At the Nashville convention, Tennessee, along with Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana made no report to the national Department of Franchise and the majority of southern state chapters, according to the national corresponding secretary, "responded courteously and kindly, and report a growth in sentiment...but they think the time has not yet fully come for public and aggressive work."⁷ Given the reluctance to approach the issue among many white southern temperance workers or the outright hostility of others, advocates of woman suffrage sometimes employed indirect means to get their message out in the southern states.

In 1888, Laura Clay, the driving force behind the Kentucky suffrage movement, a member of the WCTU and an

⁶O. P. Fitzgerald to Frances Willard, Historical Files of the National Headquarters, 10 October 1887, r. 14, f. 980-981.

⁷Minutes, National WCTU, 1887, xix.

active participant in the national woman suffrage movement, attempted to introduce the question of woman suffrage to Kentuckians by way of temperance. Clay and Henrietta Chenault invited Zeralda Wallace, head of the WCTU Franchise Department to tour Kentucky. Wallace, who had been born in Bourbon County, realized that selling the woman suffrage question to white southerners would be difficult. Therefore, Wallace suggested to the chapters that agreed to sponsor her visit, that her subject be advertised as "Woman v. the Saloon" because she argued, "it takes the broadest ground for woman suffrage and from that standpoint I can reach more people and disabuse the public mind of prejudice better than from any other."⁸ Although Wallace made clear that her speech would place the suffrage issue within a larger perspective (she also linked the issue to social purity), many local WCTU chapters greeted her potential visit with tempered enthusiasm or outright rejection.

Mrs. C. C. Young of Ianbelle, Kentucky, responded to an inquiry concerning the possibility of Wallace speaking to her WCTU chapter with a direct and blunt, "I do not think Mrs. Wallace would have an audience, especially as

⁸Zeralda Wallace to "Dear Madame," 30 January 1888, Clay Papers; Zeralda Wallace to Laura Clay, 6 February 1888, Clay Papers.

our people are not much interested in the subject of the lecture."⁹ The response from the Ellenton WCTU was likewise short and to the point: "[I] can do nothing toward arranging a lecture for Mrs. Wallace....there are no friends of the movement in our town."¹⁰ When Emma Curry referred the matter of Wallace's visit to her local WCTU chapter, she discovered that her colleagues had already decided not to have Wallace visit. Curry's colleagues had passed a resolution declaring that they were "fighting in the temperance cause" and that temperance must be their "first thought." Additionally, like suffragists in South Carolina and Georgia, Curry's temperance chapter believed that being identified with the issue of woman suffrage would harm their movement.¹¹

Even the positive responses to Wallace's Kentucky visit were not always encouraging. Fannie Harrison, president of the Fayette County Equal Rights Association, responded to Clay, "it would give me pleasure to hear Mrs.

⁹Mrs. Young to Henrietta Chenault, 31 March 1888, Clay Papers.

¹⁰[Aleutian, Kentucky] to Henrietta Chenault, 9 May 1888, Clay Papers.

¹¹Ibid; see also, Minutes, National WCTU, 1887, 104; Barnes, History of Georgia WCTU, 115; "Tennessee," Union Signal, 6 September 1888, 11; O. P. Fitzgerald to Frances Willard, 10 October 1887, Historical Files of the National Headquarters, r., 14, f., 980-81.

Wallace," and she volunteered to work to bring Wallace to Lebanon, Kentucky. However she averred that "being southerners it is hard for us to advance out of the old routines," and she admitted that she knew only two other women in the town who supported woman suffrage.¹² Mrs. Lucy Winslow of Carrollton believed that Wallace would "no doubt" draw an audience in Carrollton; however, not because of support for woman suffrage in the town but rather because of the "novelty of the subject."¹³ The woman suffrage question even seemed to strain traditional notions of southern hospitality. Lucy Winslow, who only knew two women besides herself who supported woman suffrage in Lebanon, warned Clay that since she (Winslow) would be out of town during Wallace's visit, Wallace would have to entertain herself, and Kate Whitefield of Paducah, who initially doubted that Wallace could draw a sufficient crowd to make her visit worthwhile, admitted, after arranging the visit, that although "our people on a whole

¹²Fannie Harrison to Laura Clay, 1 September 1888, Clay Papers.

¹³Lucy Winslow to Henrietta Chenault, 5 April 1888, Clay Papers.

are hospitably inclined," she did not know who to ask to "entertain a female suffragist."¹⁴

However reluctantly, WCTU members sometimes did provide southern suffragists a network through which they could work to get their message to the general public. Laura Clay, probably the best known and most respected southern suffragist, used this network personally. She wrote numerous letters to her southern white WCTU colleagues asking for help in advocating the suffrage cause. In 1892, Clay wrote M. M. Snell, former corresponding secretary of the Mississippi WCTU and national evangelist for the WCTU, asking her to write and advocate on behalf of equal rights for women. Although Snell professed her commitment to the cause ("I too make equal rights a part of my religion."), she declined to actively organize, citing her other commitments. She did, however, agree to work to continue to expand the network of southern white suffragists: "I will promulgate the principle of equal rights as I go throughout the state,

¹⁴"K. W." [Kate Whitefield] to H. B. Chenualt, 20 April 1888, Clay Papers; Kate Whitefield to H. B. Chenualt, 30 April, 1888, Clay Papers.

will also sound around and give you [a] list...of the suffragist I discover in the different places."¹⁵

Part of the difficulty white suffragists faced in the South was that the issue of woman suffrage invariably conjured the specter of black suffrage. Articles and editorials in the Mississippi White Ribbon provide an excellent example of how white woman suffrage and black male suffrage were co-joined in the minds of many white southerners before the passage of the nineteenth amendment. The rhetoric of the articles in the Mississippi White Ribbon also illustrate the ways in which white woman suffrage was used to mark race, class, gender and political status in the New South.

As early as 1884, Sallie Chapin introduced the rhetoric that would characterize much of white southern WCTU suffrage discourse. Chapin, speaking at the second annual state convention of the Louisiana WCTU, noted that she had been in Louisiana during the last election and had noticed that "the negroes went to the polls stupidly drunk, or like driven cattle."¹⁶ This trope of the "drunken negro

¹⁵M. M. Snell to Laura Clay, 24 March 1892, Clay Papers.

¹⁶"Louisiana, 2nd Convention," Union Signal, 3 April 1884, 12; see also, "South Carolina," Union Signal, 22 May 1884, 10.

vote" controlled by (white) "whiskey men" consistently appeared in the pages of the Mississippi White Ribbon throughout the eighteen eighties and early eighteen nineties.

The antiblack rhetoric of the Mississippi White Ribbon highlighted gender, class, and race distinctions in the New South. This rhetoric, though, was not only directed at southern black males, who technically had been enfranchised under the Fifteenth Amendment, but also at elite white men, white saloon owners, and white Republicans who opposed prohibition. Articles and editorials in the Mississippi White Ribbon relentlessly depicted "drunken, ignorant black men" controlled by socially irresponsible wealthy white men, ruthless white saloon owners, and racially traitorous white Republicans fastening the liquor traffic on well educated, socially responsible, racially loyal middle class white men and women.¹⁷ A short editorial and a poem from

¹⁷For examples see, "Louisiana, 2nd Convention, Union Signal, 3 April 1884, 12; "South Carolina," Union Signal, 22 May 1884, 10; "Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, September 1888, 1, 6; "Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, November 1888, 1; "Alabama WCTU Convention," Mississippi White Ribbon, December 1888, 1, 4; "Reports From Local Unions," Mississippi White Ribbon, January 1889, 1, 4; "Presidential Address," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 April 1889, 1; "Educational Qualifications for Suffrage," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 July 1889, 4; "The Greenville Election," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 December 1889, 4; "Tactics of the Enemy," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1890, 6; "Who are the Enemies of a

the September 1888 Mississippi White Ribbon illustrates this point:

Lauderdale County lost prohibition by 800 votes. The negroes went solidly for whiskey. The white vote was "dry" by a large majority. The ignorant, non-taxpaying masses fastened the rum curse on the educated, religious property holding people of the state. The only remedy is to elect no man to office who favor the negro vote for the saloon. If public sentiment won't have Republican rule over us, why doesn't it operate likewise on whiskey rule?¹⁸

And from the same issue a poem entitled "Who Killed Local Option":

Who killed Local Option?
I, said the saloon,
I killed her soon.
I killed Local Option
With the Negro Option.
Who'll break the law?
I'll monkey with that saw,
I, the saloon;
I, of the privileged class;
I'll not let it pass
I, the saloon.
Who'll control the judge
I'll not let him budge,
I, the saloon,
Who owns Mississippi?
I that sell beer

Restricted Ballot?" Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 June 1890, 4; "Local Option As It Is," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 January 1890, 2; "The Duty of the Hour: Proclamation from the Prohibition Executive Committee of Mississippi. Extremity in Opportunity," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1890, 2.

¹⁸"Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, September 1888, 1.

I own it here
I, the saloon.¹⁹

The reprint of this poem ended with the editor of the Mississippi White Ribbon asking: "Voters, shall this 'privileged class' defy the law, manipulate our elections, and kill Mississippi?... How will you answer it, Mississippians?"²⁰

These two pieces obviously fix the blame for defeat of prohibition on enfranchised black males. To suggest, however, that black men were capable of making their own decisions about prohibition legislation would have given black men, who, along with black women, were consistently portrayed as uneducated and childlike, too much power and agency in the post-emancipation South. Therefore, black behavior, which was always in need of white control, was portrayed as directed by (white) men who favored prohibition: "[In] Lee County...Whiskey men brought up the negroes solidly, and marched them to the polls."²¹ Interestingly, these (white) "whiskey men" seemed

¹⁹Ibid, 6.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹"Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, September 1888, 1.

differentiated from white voters: "[the] white vote was largely in majority for prohibition."²²

Two months later, the Mississippi White Ribbon reported a story suggesting a conspiracy between (white) "whiskey men" (in this case saloon owners) and enfranchised black men. The editor reported that it had come to the attention of the newspaper that in towns where the "majority of the white population" favored prohibition, shortly before local option elections, "saloon men buy up land just within the corporation, subdivide it into small lots, and ostensibly donate them to negro men on condition that they settle at once upon them." The result of this subterfuge was that "On the day of the election...there our colored brother is, not really owing a cents worth of real

²²Ibid; The White Mississippi White Ribbon also published an editorial which asserted that in a local option election in Greenville, Mississippi, Jews united with the "saloon element" to try to defeat prohibition but withdrew their opposition at the last moment when they saw that the "best citizens" were united and would not be "driven to the wall." The article warned: "Make a note...you American women who spend all your money in Jew stores-The Jew In Every Election is Always For the Saloon, and spend the money freely which you put into their pockets, to defeat you for a moral government in your cities and states....and they are most active agents in 'setting black heels on white necks' for the purpose....," "The Greenville Election," Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 December 1889, 4.

estate, voting in the saloon on property holders who don't want it."²³

According to the articles and editorials in the Mississippi White Ribbon, the solution to the enfranchised "negro problem" was for the upcoming Mississippi Constitutional Convention to restrict suffrage by mandating an educational qualification and a two dollar poll tax as requirements for voting. The Mississippi White Ribbon also advocated that "good citizens" should vote for no man to go to the convention who was known to "mass and wield the ignorant, vicious, negro vote."²⁴

For the editor of the Mississippi White Ribbon and many of its contributors restricting suffrage by adding property and/or educational qualifications would take the black male vote, which they often blamed for defeating

²³"Editorial Notes," Mississippi White Ribbon, November 1888, 1.

²⁴"Southern Woman's Word For Southern Men," Mississippi White Ribbon, January 1889, 4; "Tactics of the Enemy," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1890, 6; see also, "Educational Qualifications For Suffrage," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 July 1889, 4; [Untitled], Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 December 1889, 2; "The Constitutional Convention," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 March 1890, 2; "The Duty of the Hour. Proclamation from the Prohibition Executive Committee of Mississippi. Extremity in Opportunity," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1890, 2; "Who Are the Enemies of a Restricted Ballot?" Mississippi White Ribbon, 30 June 1890, 4.

prohibition, out of southern politics. Not only would an educational and/or property qualification solve the problem of the "drunken, vicious, negro vote," it would also prevent southern white men from having to resort to illegal methods to keep southern black men from exercising their right to the vote. This solution, therefore, held the additional benefit of saving southern white men from having to "corrupt the ballot box" themselves by illegally keeping black men from voting.²⁵

In the 1890's, leading white southern suffragists convinced the leadership of the National American Woman Suffrage Association that the South was a fertile ground for the pursuit of woman suffrage. Since southern white legislators were attempting to find ways to solve the problem of black male enfranchisement, woman suffrage, southern white suffragist argued, with an educational and/or property qualification would appeal to these lawmakers as a legal means to disfranchise the majority of black men while not enfranchising large numbers of black women.

²⁵"Southern Woman's Word For Southern Man," Mississippi White Ribbon, January 1889, 4; "Educational Qualifications for Suffrage," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 July 1889, 4; "The Duty of the Hour. Proclamation from the Prohibition Executive Committee of Mississippi. Extremity in Opportunity," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 June 1890, 2.

Southern white suffragists made this appeal to southern legislators, with the backing of the NAWSA, in South Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana, and Virginia.²⁶ These efforts were mostly unsuccessful, but leading white southern suffragists, such as Laura Clay and Kate Gordon, continued to believe that the South's white male lawmakers would turn to white educated middle class women to help them secure white supremacy and maintain political integrity at the ballot box.²⁷

In his biography of Laura Clay, Paul Fuller argues that Clay continued to support southern women's enfranchisement through state amendments because she believed that the federal government would eventually force the southern states to adhere to the Fifteenth Amendment. Thereby, southern state legislators would be forced to turn to the votes of white women to maintain white supremacy in the New South. Fuller argues that Clay believed that the United States Supreme Court would declare unconstitutional the various subterfuges that southern legislatures had employed to keep black males from voting. Fuller concludes that "In the face of much evidence to the contrary, Clay

²⁶Majorie Spruill Wheeler, New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 115-118.

²⁷Ibid., 120.

continued to believe that the Constitution was the law of the land."²⁸ Clay's notion of the integrity of the political process and the role of southern white woman's suffrage as essential to that integrity in the South is echoed in the pages of the Mississippi White Ribbon.

In urging an educational and/or a property qualification for voting, an editorial in the Mississippi White Ribbon accused southern white male politicians of setting a bad example for young southern white men when they resorted to illegal means to disfranchise black male voters in the state's elections. The editorial entitled, "Educational Qualification for Suffrage," stated forthrightly that "it is a serious menace to the integrity of the state to educate its young men to falsify election returns, and a degradation to any people to learn to believe it right to do evil that good may come."²⁹ Another article, "Southern Woman's Words for Southern Men," made much the same point:

Why should the illegal suppression of any vote exist in the states which each have the power to specify the qualifications for the voter. In God's

²⁸Paul Fuller, Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 112.

²⁹"Educational Qualification For Suffrage," Mississippi White Ribbon, 15 July 1889, 4.

name let us decide for ourselves what this shall be and stop the iniquity of ballot box fraud; that our sons may grow up with some conception, at least, of political integrity.³⁰

Questions of political integrity, white supremacy and the role of white woman's suffrage were intertwined in the southern suffrage movement until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Most leaders of the southern white suffragists were white supremacists.³¹ And like most southern white progressives they linked the desire to

³⁰"Southern Woman's Word For Southern Men," Mississippi White Ribbon, January 1889, 4.

³¹See Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 102-112; Elna C. Green emphasizes that there was a range of beliefs among southern white suffragists on the race issue, "from the virulent racism of Kate Gordon to the more genteel racism of Laura Clay....to the racial liberalism of Mary Johnston." Although it is no doubt the case that southern white suffragists, like most individuals, represented a range of opinions and beliefs, it seems clear that most believed in the superiority of white people over black people, and the necessity of maintaining a white controlled government and society in the New South. Green also emphasizes that the extreme negrophobic positions of leaders like Kate Gordon did not represent the majority of southern suffragists and that the majority of southern suffragists "avoided racism as the major argument in behalf of their enfranchisement." However she does make a distinction between the idea of "white supremacy" in government and "white monopoly" of government and she states, "Distinguishing between 'white supremacy' and 'white monopoly' helps to explain why (white) suffragists failed to convince southern legislators to enfranchise them when they claimed to support white supremacy." See, Elna C. Green, Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xiii, 92-94, 205, footnote, number 4.

maintain white supremacy with the desire to "clean up" southern politics by eliminating the "negro" from the southern political process.³²

In 1906, the issues of white supremacy, the integrity of the political process, and southern regionalism were highlighted when Belle Kearney issued a call for a gathering of southern (white) suffragists to meet at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. Kearney, without the knowledge or approval of the NAWSA leadership, called for a conference of southern (white) suffragists to advocate the enfranchisement of southern (white) women as a "solution to the race problem."³³ Kearney eventually sought support and approval of the conference from the NAWSA, which put Anna Howard Shaw, the president of the NAWSA, in the awkward position of having to decide whether to support a southern conference advocating woman suffrage or adhere to the association's stated principles and not "ally with any movement which advocated the exclusion of any race or class

³²Dewey W. Grantham, Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 112-127.

³³Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 121. See also select correspondence in Clay Papers, Anna Shaw to Laura Clay, 7 November 1906; Laura Clay to Anna Shaw, 12 November 1906; Anna Shaw to Belle Kearney, 15 November 1906; Laura Clay to Harriet Taylor Upton, 19 November 1906.

from the right of suffrage."³⁴ Shaw, displeased with Kearney, rebuked her for having potentially put the national association at odds with southern (white) suffragists:

I was very much surprised...to learn that you had called this conference without hearing from me as to the attitude of the National Suffrage Association.... Such a movement, especially as a distinct movement of Southern women apart from the existing National Suffrage Association doesn't seem necessary since the South is well represented upon our National Board by...Clay and Gordon.³⁵

Shaw concluded by assuring Kearney that had she consulted with the two southerners on the national board they would have been happy to co-operate with her "along the lines which are in accord with the national character of...an organization as ours."³⁶ Shaw was obviously worried that Kearney's proposal would put the National American Woman Suffrage Association in a bad light:

It would put us in a false position to make it seem to the world that our

³⁴Anna Shaw to Belle Kearney, 15 November 1906, Clay Papers.

³⁵Ibid. Laura Clay was Auditor of the NAWSA from 1896 to 1910 and Kate Gordon of Louisiana was Corresponding Secretary of the NAWSA from 1901 to 1909 and served a term as a Vice President in 1910; see Kraditor, Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 173.

³⁶Ibid.

purpose in organizing the suffrage movement in the South is to secure the prominence of one race over another.³⁷

Kearney's call for a southern conference put Shaw, as national president, in a difficult position. She wanted to distance the national association from the conference, but she seemed also to want to tacitly support the effort because it was a chance to further the movement in the South and she wanted to keep the southern suffragists from forming a separate organization.³⁸ In a letter to the Business Committee of the NAWSA, Shaw offered her solution to the dilemma. She disclaimed, once again, the premise under which the southern conference was called, but expressed her opinion that Laura Clay should attend the conference not as a representative of the NAWSA, although Clay was on the national board, but rather to keep the southern suffragists from "making some rash movement if led by Miss Kearney."³⁹ On the same day, Shaw wrote to Clay, who had already accepted Kearney's invitation to the conference, expressing her gratitude that Clay had decided to attend the conference but also expressing her fear that

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Anna Howard Shaw to Laura Clay, 15 November 1906, Clay Papers.

³⁹Anna Shaw to Business Committee, 15 November 1906,, Clay Papers.

Kearney would use Clay's attendance as a way "to advertise that she has the sanction of the National Association because of the presence of some of the National Board."⁴⁰

Shaw told Clay: "To my mind it is an unfortunate thing whichever you decideUnfortunate if you go and unfortunate if you don't. I only wish we had taken the initiative in such a move as this...."⁴¹

Part of Shaw's apprehension about the southern conference revolved around the issue of political integrity--she did not want the national associated with an overtly racist campaign that "advocated the exclusion of any race or class from the right of suffrage."⁴² However, Laura Clay recognized that Shaw's concern may have been disingenuous at best and possibly hypocritical. In a letter to Harriet Taylor Upton, Clay explained that she did not have the same misgivings about the conference as did Shaw. Clay did not think that the conference was as important as Shaw seemed to think, nor did she see any danger in the southern women forming an independent

⁴⁰Anna Howard Shaw to Laura Clay, 15 November 1906, Clay Papers.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Anna Howard Shaw to Belle Kearney, 15 November 1906, Clay Papers.

association. Neither did Clay think Kearney's call represented a "departure from the policy of the NAWSA":

The National has always recognized the usefulness of woman suffrage as a counterbalance to the foreign vote and as a means of legally preserving white supremacy in the South....In the campaign in South Carolina we...never hesitated to show that the white women's vote would give the supremacy to the white race. And we also freely use that same argument in relation to the native born and the foreign born vote.⁴³

Clay recalled that Henry Blackwell had initially proposed that the South should adopt woman suffrage with an educational qualification as a counter to the southern black male vote.⁴⁴ Clay's letter to Upton highlights the fact that in the past the National Association had bent its principles to attract southern whites into the movement.⁴⁵ Shaw's attempt to distance the NAWSA from the 1906 southern conference seems to have been based more on public image

⁴³Laura Clay to Harriet Taylor Upton, 19 November 1906, Clay Papers.

⁴⁴Henry Blackwell, "A Solution to the Southern Question" (Boston: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1890).

⁴⁵In 1903 at the National Convention in New Orleans, black women were excluded from the conference. Belle Kearney gave a highly racialized speech which was applauded by the Association and the delegates also adopted a policy of "states' rights," which allowed southern white women to exclude southern black women from membership in their state chapters. See, Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 118.

than on the principle that the National American Woman Suffrage Association believed in the "justice of suffrage" as an abstract principle.

The southern conference met December 19 to 20 in Memphis, Tennessee. Laura Clay was elected chair of the conference and discussions on various aspects of the suffrage question were led by Kearney, Clay, Lide Meriwether, and Jennie Sibley of Georgia.⁴⁶ The delegates issued a public "Statement of Purpose" in which they asked for the vote as a solution to "the race problem," to low wages of wage earning women, and to insure against child labor.⁴⁷ And as Anna Howard Shaw had feared, they also formed a separate organization called the Conference of Southern Women Suffragists. However, the organization languished as southern legislators continued to refuse to grant educated middle class white women the suffrage. Consequently, southern state suffrage organizations entered a period of inactivity that lasted through the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 5:596.

⁴⁷"Statement of Purpose," Clay Papers.

⁴⁸Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 20-22; Green, Southern Strategies, 12-13.

The woman suffrage movement was a particularly vexed reform for southern white women. Conservative white southerners, both male and female, were vehemently opposed to woman suffrage. The woman suffrage movement with its demand for political inclusion directly contradicted the ideal of the southern white lady and the notion that women, particularly southern white women were too morally superior and pure to wade into the corrupt business of male politics. Cleaning up corruption in politics, however, became an issue on which southern white suffragists demanded the ballot. They insisted that the subterfuges southern white males employed to keep southern black males from voting not only corrupted the political process but also degraded white southerners generally, particularly young southern white men. Southern white suffragists also advocated the ballot on the basis that the votes of middle class educated white women could help ensure white political dominance in the New South. Although the overt appeal to white supremacy brought some southern white suffragists in conflict with the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1906, southern white suffragist like Laura Clay pointed out that the NAWSA had already endorsed the idea of southern white supremacy in its initial efforts to recruit white southerners into the

suffrage movement and by its willingness to advocate the vote for educated white Anglo Saxon Protestant women as a solution to the "foreign vote" in the North. Although only four southern states-Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Texas-ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, southern white suffragists worked hard with their non-southern allies to secure southern white women a legitimate place in the public political arena.

Conclusion

During the Progressive Era, middle class southern white women entered a new phase of public activity. Southern white women were aggressively recruited by the leadership of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National American Woman Suffrage Association, three of the most influential women's voluntary associations in the nation. Each believed the inclusion of southern white women vital to its identification and success as a national organization of American women; consequently, by the beginning of the twentieth century, southern white women had achieved positions of leadership in the WCTU, the GFWC and the NAWSA.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the South continued to adjust to the changes wrought by the Civil War and its aftermath, particularly emancipation. Like many middle class southern whites, southern white female reformers believed their region to be facing dangerous threats from an unstable political, racial, and social order. As members of national associations, southern white women gained access to national networks of propaganda. They used these networks--newspapers, speaking tours, convention meeting--to

publicly outline their vision of the proper roles of middle class white women, middle class white men, and freed blacks in creating and maintaining social and civic order in the post-emancipation South. Participation in the WCTU, the GFWC, and the NAWSA allowed southern white women to proclaim a new day of national and regional activism. However, they often found themselves on the defensive, under attack both from within their region and their organizations.

Within the South, conservative southern white males frequently denounced white women's participation in public political activities. To counter these attacks, southern white leaders of the WCTU and the GFWC constructed a vision of useful citizenship for white women based on their domestic activities as wives, mothers, and homekeepers. Southern leaders of the NAWSA, less concerned with appearing to adhere to traditional gender roles, argued the necessity of public activity, indeed, fully enfranchised citizenship, for middle class white women based on racial and educational privilege. When southern white club women perceived their identification as racially privileged white southern women under attack, they constructed a vision of national gender solidarity for white women only.

Although, some southern chapters of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the General Federation of Women's Clubs never officially endorsed woman's suffrage, politics continually haunted their efforts at social and civic reform. In a region where politics was always about race, many southern white female reformers attempted, at least initially, to avoid the issue by publicly disavowing any desire to vote. Yet from southern white women's public discussions of and participation in political events, it is evident that as white and middle class, they considered themselves deserving of recognized, if not, enfranchised citizenship.

Southern white members of the NAWSA worked directly to obtain legitimate citizenship by demanding the right to vote. However, much of the activity of the members of the WCTU and the GFWC can be analyzed as an effort by these women to construct a claim to legitimate white citizenship outside the formal bounds of the ballot box. They wrote editorials, circulated petitions and made speeches to demand the legislative enactment of their reform agendas. Often, for white leaders of the WCTU and the NAWSA, this was simultaneous with the demand to restrict the political power of southern African American male voters. By demanding restrictions on the "ignorant, vicious, negro

vote," southern white female reformers publicly demonstrated their commitment to white supremacy. Furthermore, by restricting the people allowed to vote, southern white female reformers could increase their own political influence by limiting their appeals to middle class white males who, they believed, shared a similar political and social ethos.

Regardless of whether southern chapters of the WCTU and the GFWC endorsed woman suffrage, their activities indicate that they, like their NAWSA counterparts, expected to be considered an integral part of the formation of a New South order. Southern white female reformers expected not only that their state and local political officials would listen to them (respectfully) but also that, as white and middle class, those representatives were obliged to address their concerns.

During the Progressive Era, middle class southern white women participated in a national effort of women to expand the boundaries of the public sphere. Their goal was to move the nineteenth century private sphere into the public domain, thereby, claiming the responsibilities of valued, if not enfranchised, citizenship. For southern white women, this meant constructing a definition of useful citizenship that was white, educated, and morally

responsive to the needs of women and children. Using this definition, middle class southern white female reformers, like all reformers, attempted to create a society reflecting their values and commitments--a society that recognized the value of white women's participation in maintaining white supremacy, middle class dominance, and domestic order in a post Civil War New South.

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Elvira Moffit Papers

Elsie G. Riddick Papers

Durham, North Carolina

Duke University Library

John Emory Bryant Papers
William Johnston Cocke Papers
Hemphill Family Papers
Louisa Poppenheim Papers
Missori Stokes Papers

Jackson, Mississippi
Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Belle Kearney Papers
Richard Aubrey McLemore Collection
Mrs. Dunbar Rowland Papers
Lily Wilkerson Thompson Papers

Lexington, Kentucky
Margaret I. King Library
Madeline McDowell Breckinridge Papers
Laura Clay Papers
Lindley Family Papers
Wilson Papers

Nashville, Tennessee
Tennessee State Archives
Bettie M. Donelson Papers
Susan M. Hawkins Scrapbooks
Frances Overall Papers
Anne Rankin Papers

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