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Insiders: Louisiana journalists Sallie Rhett Roman, Helen Grey Gilkison, Iris Turner Kelso

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INSIDERS: LOUISIANA JOURNALISTS
SALLIE RHETT ROMAN,
HELEN GREY GILKISON,
IRIS TURNER KELSO

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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By
Angie Pitts Juban
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Abstract

Sallie Rhett Roman, Helen Grey Gilkison and Iris Turner Kelso were three women journalists in Louisiana, active in consecutive time periods from 1891 to 1996. Their work brings up five particular questions. First, Why did these women start working and how did they negotiate public employment? Second, how did they balance the relationship between work and home since they did find employment outside of the home? Third, how did they fit into their contemporary image of women and journalists? Fourth, how did they use written language to portray a particular voice to the reader for a particular purpose? Fifth, did they choose to cover specifically male or female topics in their articles?

Answering these questions reveals that these three women challenged traditional roles for women in different ways. Sallie Rhett Roman, wrote from 1891 to 1909, had to negotiate much more strict societal norms for women and portrayed herself as a male writer to her audience. Helen Grey Gilkison, active from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, did not mask her gender but encouraged the idea that she was a member of the political social club with political access. Iris Turner Kelso, working after World War II, portrayed herself as having access to politicians and political events, but only as a way to suggest that she could provide the reader the “straight scoop.” Each woman in her own way created an image of herself as an insider in the political process.

By relying on the image of “insider,” these women did not overtly challenge the political or social system but rather supported it. Kelso was the only one who criticized

those in politics and even she did not promote significant change in the political systems of New Orleans or the state of Louisiana.

Introduction

Sallie Rhett Roman, Helen Grey Gilkison and Iris Turner Kelso wrote for newspapers in Louisiana. Each woman lived in a time with limited public roles for women. Sallie Rhett Roman first published her work in the Times-Democrat in the 1890s, Helen Grey Gilkison worked for various newspapers beginning in the 1930s, and Iris Turner Kelso wrote first in Mississippi but then in Louisiana starting in 1950. The collective working careers of these three women cover over a hundred years of Louisiana history.

Though women began to enter the workforce out of necessity, their presence was not a part of the accepted social roles for women. Though this would change between Sallie Rhett Roman's and Iris Turner Kelso's career, women were still expected to marry, have children, and to work inside but not outside the home. Journalism, though primarily a male field, provided women with opportunities to expand their roles outside of the home. Initially writing articles directed toward women, female journalists and editors became important and powerful over time and now write about every topic, including economics and politics. Studies of women in journalism have most often taken a biographical approach. As early as 1936, Ishbel Ross published a book titled Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider. Ross examined women and their place in journalism by focusing on individual women from different areas of the country such as Nellie Bly and Dorethea Dix. Rather than a "scholarly study," Ross's book was a popular history that recreated a world that was exciting and captivating. Although she described the hardships suffered by newspaperwomen, Ross believed that

by 1936 women “no longer [had] to climb skyscrapers by a rope or wear false faces to get their stuff in papers.”¹

The final chapter of Ross’ book focused exclusively on southern women in journalism. Covering the entire South, Ross gave examples of women journalists from Tennessee to Texas. These women worked to gain acceptance in the newspaper world. Many were married. Not all of these women, though, were engaged in “serious journalism.” Many wrote for woman’s pages or wrote fashion columns. Although women were “still a negligible factor in the newspaper office” and were there only because of their own insistence, Ross concluded, they had begun to move into the area of public life and work.²

Fifty-two years after Ross published her descriptive work on women in journalism, Maureen Beasley and Kathryn T. Theus edited a study done by the University of Maryland’s College of Journalism, The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions. It found that by 1977 the number of women students in journalism school surpassed that of men and explored how the gender shift occurred and how it affected the profession.³ The increase in the number of women in journalism schools showed that women had been gaining access to the public arena of the news media from 1936 until today.

¹ Ishbel Ross, Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Outsider (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), 14.

² *Ibid.*, 600.

³ Maureen Beasley and Kathryn T. Theus, eds., The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions (Landham: University Press of America, 1988), 88 – 89.

Roman, Gilkison, and Kelso were part of the increase in the number of female journalists, their careers, however, are not to be considered representative of the entire population of women entering the journalism from 1890 through 1996. But their careers do raise many questions about how women entered journalism and how they challenged established roles of women. Five will be considered here. First, why did these women start working? How did they negotiate their way into public employment? Second, how did these women balance the relationship between home and work? Third, how did they fit into the reigning conceptions of women in journalism? These three topics are about the women themselves rather than their writing. The last two focus on their work. How did these women create a “voice” that influenced their audience and portrayed a particular image to their readers? What issues did these women write about?⁴ Did they choose subjects traditionally reserved for women or did they venture into more “masculine” topics? These last two questions deal with the approach that Roman, Gilkison and Kelso took to obtain access to the public world of journalism. Each woman grappled with different societal stereotypes and expectations since each lived and worked in succeeding years. Consequently, each woman took different steps to portray themselves as an insider. The definition of an insider changed for each woman, much like the established societal expectations for women changed over time.

Sallie Rhett Roman created her identity as an insider by masking her gender. She wrote under an ambiguous name that protected her and her family from public criticism. Another element in her identity was class. In her articles she supported the ruling elite and the established policy of the newspaper’s editor. Helen Grey Gilkison did not mask

⁴ J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3d ed, (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 572. Voice is the concept that a writer will take on the identity of another individual or type of individual if it is useful to elicit a desired response from the reader.

her gender but actually cultivated such close relationships to the state administration that she was an insider. She wrote about the state government in newspaper articles at the same time she was promoting state departments and policies for the state through public relations writing. What today seems an obvious conflict of interest was less of a problem in the 1930s and 1940s, since it was not unusual for political reporters to do freelance work for the state. Iris Turner Kelso's insider status was dramatically different from Roman's and Gilkison's. She neither masked her gender nor was tainted by her close relationship to the state. Journalism had begun to value objectivity and that professional norm became an element of her identity. Yet Kelso still presented herself in her articles as a journalist who had the inside information, but one that because of her journalistic integrity was able to maintain her objectivity. For that reason her opinions were even more reliable for her readers.

Chapter 1

Sallie Rhett Roman: Masked Gender

A war bride, Sallie Rhett Roman moved from South Carolina to Louisiana in 1863, during the Civil War.¹ She left the home of her father, fire-eater Robert Barnwell Rhett, to marry Alfred Roman, a lawyer and planter from South Louisiana. At the age of nineteen, she became her husband's second wife and stepmother to his children.² Sallie Roman could not have known the new roles that would present themselves to her throughout her life. From 1891 to 1909, Roman wrote editorial articles for the Times-Democrat. It was unusual for a woman in the nineteenth century, especially an upper class woman, to work outside the home. In her articles, she masked her gender by use of a distinctive voice and then created a fictional persona. She almost always took on a male persona. As a "man," she belonged in the group which publicly discussed and made decisions about such topics as politics and the economy. This image of an insider made her more acceptable to the reading public and provided a source of authority for her as an author.

The subjects that she covered women, economics, national legislation that affected Louisiana, the role of the press, and education also sustained the mental image of her as a man. One topic that was absent from her repertoire was the issue of black white

¹ Eliza Ripley, Social Life in New Orleans: Being Recollections of My Girlhood (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1912), 267, 268. Though not a description of Sallie Roman's wedding, Ripley described a wedding during the Civil War, which should shed light on the scene in South Carolina. During the "scene of confusion beyond words to express," many items previously necessary for a proper wedding were not used for, "they were of the past, as completely as a thousand of the necessities we had learned to do without."

² Nancy Dixon, Fortune and Misery: Sallie Rhett Roman of New Orleans: A Biographical Portrait and Selected Fiction, 1891 – 1920 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 13. Alfred Roman's first wife, Felicie, family owned and ran Valcour Aime plantation. Roman later worked on his first father-in-law's plantation. Ripley, Social Life in Old New Orleans, 187, 190.

relations in New Orleans and Louisiana during her career. To ignore such a major public issue of her time seems surprising. Certainly she supported the three basic Bourbon tenets, white supremacy, conservative taxation and home rule. E. A. Burke, the founding editor of the Times-Democrat had established the same tenets as the policy of his paper so perhaps she did not feel the need to address the topic.³

Sallie Rhett Roman came from the elite whose policies and positions she would support. She and her husband, Alfred Roman, came from the same economic class and their fathers lived similar lives. Both were politically involved and large landholders. Robert Barnwell Rhett's close ties to John C. Calhoun and his work editing the Charleston Mercury allowed him to be active in the political debates of the day in South Carolina. Rhett devoted much of his time to editing his newspaper, but after the crisis of 1850, Rhett's son, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr., became editor of the Mercury. One important function of newspaper editors was to reflect the views of the elite of an area. In fact, Rhett's beliefs and attitudes about the South reflected those of the very powerful John C. Calhoun and therefore of South Carolina's state leadership.⁴

The Rhett's family background paralleled the Roman's family background. The Roman's had long been active in politics. Andre Bienvenu Roman, Alfred Roman's father, held the distinction of being the first Creole governor of Louisiana and the first governor to serve two terms.⁵ His political career began in 1818 with his election to the

³ Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 21.

⁴Carl A. Osthaus, Partisans of the Southern Press: Editorial Spokesmen of the Nineteenth Century (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 7. According to Osthaus, newspaper editors perform three functions as a narrator of events, as an advocate of his political beliefs and as an indicator of the views of the elite of a community.

⁵Carl A. Brasseaux, Acadian to Cajun, Transformation of a People, 1803 – 1877 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 4. Carl A. Brasseaux defines Creole as “descendants of European settlers in Louisiana,” who, “generally sought to recreate in Louisiana a romanticized vision of feudalistic France, with themselves as the New World aristocracy.”

Louisiana House of Representatives, where he remained until 1830.⁶ During his political career, Representative and then Governor Roman contributed to Louisiana's infrastructure and culture, including the establishment of the Experimental Farm at Audubon Park in New Orleans.⁷ Along with his political success, André Roman also succeeded financially, as evidenced by the Roman family's ownership of a large sugar plantation with 369 slaves.⁸ Sallie and Alfred Roman grew up in families that participated in state government.

When they moved to Louisiana in 1863, the Romans settled in Saint James Parish, more specifically in Vacherie, Louisiana, on the Roman family's sugar plantation. Their difficulties in reviving the family plantation, because of almost constant Union occupation in the sugar producing areas of Louisiana and the lack of laborers on the plantation after the 1863 emancipation of slaves, caused Alfred Roman to return to the occupation of his training, the law, in 1870.⁹

With the election of Bourbon Governor Francis T. Nicholls, the Romans lot improved.¹⁰ Nicholls appointed Alfred Roman clerk of the State Supreme Court in 1877. Roman found further favor in the political system when Governor Louis Alfred Wiltz, who came to office at the end of Nicholls' shortened term, appointed him a judge of the criminal court, a position he held for eight years through the governorship of Samuel

⁶ Miriam G. Reeves, The Governors of Louisiana (Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 1998), 51.

⁷ S. Rhett Roman, "The Home of a Great Creole," Times-Democrat, 19 June 1892, 14.

⁸ Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 9. Roman's sugar plantation was named Cabanocey, which means, "mallards roost" in Choctaw.

⁹ Bennett H. Wall, Light Townsend Cummins, and Judith Kelleher Schafer, eds. Louisiana: A History, 3rd ed., (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1990), 184.; Nancy Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 10. Alfred Roman studied at Jefferson College in St. James Parish though he did not complete his degree, at age twenty-one he was admitted to the bar.

¹⁰ Wall, eds., Louisiana: A History, 205 – 206. "Although an imprecise term, 'Bourbon' referred to the white oligarchs who regained power across the South (especially in Louisiana) at the end of Reconstruction; their political roots were in the antebellum South . . . they sought to maintain white supremacy . . . Bourbon fiscal and tax policy was intensely conservative."

McEnergy. This good fortune prompted the Romans to move to New Orleans, where they eventually settled at 92 Esplanade in the French Quarter.¹¹ But their good fortune did not last through the second election of Nicholls as governor. A disagreement between Alfred Roman and the newly reelected governor, who took office in 1888, caused Roman to lose his post as judge of the criminal court and forced him to return to private practice.¹² Roman's private practice did not develop into a profitable enterprise; the family began to sell their possessions in order to pay their bills and purchase necessities.¹³ They needed to generate additional income for the family.

In early January 1891, Sallie Roman began to write editorials for the Times-Democrat, a New Orleans newspaper.¹⁴ Although financial difficulties may have been the primary impetus for Sallie Roman's entrance into "a public, political realm that ordinarily excluded women," her family background, specifically her father's involvement in the politics of South Carolina, had encouraged her interest in politics and had heightened awareness of the world outside of her home. Even as she undertook her new job, she continued to run her household.¹⁵ With ten children, Sallie and Alfred Roman's house on the edge of the French Quarter must have been a loud and busy

¹¹ Soards' New Orleans City Directory, for 1878 (New Orleans: L. Soards' and Co. Publisher, 1878), 586.; Soards' New Orleans City Directory, for 1879 (New Orleans: L. Soards' and Co. Publisher, 1879), 571.; Soards' New Orleans City Directory, for 1880 (New Orleans: L. Soards' and Co. Publisher, 1880), 637. The Roman family lived on Josephine in 1878, moved to North Rampart in 1879 and finally to Esplanade Avenue in 1880.

¹² The split between Nichols and Alfred Roman may have been based on their diverging support of the Louisiana Lottery Company. Nichols had always fought the power and control of this gambling enterprise while it seems that the Romans may have begun to support it and the Secretary of the Treasury E. A. Burke. Burke owned and edited the Times-Democrat, the newspaper for which Roman's wife wrote editorial and fiction articles. Burke's paper adamantly supported the Louisiana Lottery Company.

¹³ Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 16, 17.

¹⁴ Sallie Roman also wrote in the genre of fiction. Her first fictional story published in the Times-Democrat, appeared in November 1892. In fact, Roman produced much more fiction than non-fiction editorial articles in the New Orleans paper.

¹⁵ Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 20.

place.¹⁶ Sallie Roman knew the balancing act between the daily tasks of home and work. Like most upper-class women of the antebellum and postbellum era, she took time from her busy schedule to read and write about current events as well as fiction.¹⁷ Where these stolen personal moments were purely pleasure for most women, Sallie Roman's time served both a personal and financial purpose.

The late nineteenth century South had strict guidelines for who and what men and women were to be, both individually and in relation to each other. The roles for women were based on the idea of a southern lady. She was a white woman whose gender characteristics were complementary to the roles of men. If she was frail he was strong. Another element of these roles was the polarity of the characteristics within the woman. She was supposed to be physically frail yet morally strong. It was from this morality that women garnered their authority in larger society. Sallie Roman manipulated this role, through her male persona, in order to survive.¹⁸ Though she wrote her first editorial article in 1891, it was not until 1893 that she signed her articles with anything more than her initials, S. R. Publishing under a pseudonym was not an unusual practice for male or female journalists at the time. For Sallie Roman, the use of an alternate or at least ambiguous identity served two functions. First, it protected her identity as a woman. Competition, consideration of money over morality, taxes and the federal government's

¹⁶ The French Quarter is an area of New Orleans that is considered the heart of the city.

¹⁷ Drew Gilpen Faust, Mother's of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 167, 178. Faust deals with women and their use of reading and writing during the Civil War. She addresses the cultural acceptance of women writers since it, "seemed consistent with many of the ideals of domesticity." These same cultural concerns of women and their activities outside of the home remained a part of Sallie Roman's world.

¹⁸ Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830 – 1930 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970), 230. Sallie Roman's manipulation of her image expressed itself in her carefully guarding her identity throughout her career. At the beginning using her initials to sign her articles and later signing S. Rhett Roman, portraying a male persona. She falls succinctly into the group of women that Scott speaks of "who had the capacity, the health and energy and fortitude to seize opportunity, the culture now provided not one pattern but many."

involvement in the state were all topics of her editorials during those three years, and all topics that were considered masculine concerns. Second, her ambiguous name protected her husband's identity. Alfred Roman's once illustrious family wealth was now gone, and the fact that his wife found work outside of her home did not fit into the parameters of the strong protective male or the subservient protected southern lady.¹⁹ The practice of signing her articles with just initials stopped after the death of her husband in 1892. After she dropped S. R. she signed her articles in an equally ambiguous manner, S. Rhett Roman, a name that could easily be a man's. After two years of writing only editorials, Roman also began to write fiction for the Times-Democrat. Even when she shifted into this genre of writing that was more acceptable for women, she continued to sign S. Rhett Roman. Her policy of ambiguity was also preserved when responding to a letter from a reader who assumed that she was male; neither she nor the paper corrected the assumption.

Just as Sallie Roman chose to use an ambiguous name in her articles, she used another technique writers and journalists use to portray a desired identity, voice. Voice is the use of language to project a particular image of the author. One way that Sallie Roman expressed a male persona was by portraying herself as male in her articles. Her character was often in male dominated situations, for example, in the library with cigars and cognac or on a hunting expedition in the Canadian Northwest.²⁰ As described in her articles, these fictional situations were also intimate settings where access would have only been granted to an insider. Consistent portrayal of male characters led her readers

¹⁹ Ibid., 17. Scott quotes George Fitzhugh's statement about the role of women. He states that, "... in truth, women; like children, has but one right and that is the right to protection."

²⁰ S. Rhett Roman, "The Press and Reform," Times-Democrat, 13 August 1893, 9.; S. Rhett Roman, "Canada in the Northwest," Times-Democrat, 15 September 1895, 18.

to assume that the author was male.²¹ Another approach that reinforced her male persona was Roman's avoidance of a gossipy or a familiar tone in her writing. Finally, Roman's choice of subject matter contributed to her male persona. Sallie Roman never chose to address any household issues in her editorial articles. Instead, they focused on women, economics, national legislation, the role of the press, and education -- all discussed from a male perspective.

Of the seventy-seven editorials that Sallie Roman wrote for the Times-Democrat from 1891 to 1909, only five of them dealt specifically with women as a subject matter. The small number of articles about women tended to mock them or portray a very serious woman who was outside of the acceptable gender role. For example, in an article entitled "Discussion and Elucidation" a group of upper-class women began a discussion of whether "life, as led some fifty years ago by the cultured portion of society was more picturesque in its details and surroundings than that of the present day." Of the women in attendance, most agreed with the proposition and only one disagreed. The woman who disagreed with the rest of the group based her position on an analysis of the facts. The method that the main character used to persuade was also the way Roman addressed issues in her articles. She argued that in order to decide if the proposition was true the group must "have a distinct understanding of the meaning of those words, which explain the matter under discussion." A clear definition was needed because "it [was] the ambiguity of expression which created legal conflicts"²² Politics, and the workings of government were not supposed to be the prime concern of women in the nineteenth century. Although the comment about legislation and the importance of specific

²¹ Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 22. Fan mail Roman received for her articles in the Times-Democrat were addressed, "Dear Sir."

²² S. Rhett Roman, "Discussion and Elucidation," Times-Democrat, 7 January 1894, 18.

definitions was an aside within the article, it was an important element, since it set the dissenter further apart from the group. In another article about women, Roman wrote in the first person, as a male character about a conversation between two men about Clara Mayberry, a woman who is smart in science and math but had ill-fitting clothes.²³ Sallie Roman seemed to be indicating that although it was perfectly acceptable for a woman to gain as much education and knowledge as she could, she should still wear socially appropriate attire. In addition to writing rarely about women, Roman also clothed herself with the socially appropriate male gender in her articles, of addressing very masculine subjects. One of the topics that Roman addressed that was traditionally reserved for men was economics. One of the most prominent economic issues she was interested in was trade. She challenged the trade structure that had been established during the nineteenth century. The southern and the northwestern sections of the United States traded almost exclusively with the northeastern section of the country. The South, according to Roman, suffered from this established trade pattern. She thoroughly discussed the mutual financial interests of each section, since mutual interests acted as the strongest bond between groups of people. In fact, the “history of the world . . . shows how bitterly inimical races will live in peaceful juxtaposition to each other, because the moneyed advantage which they draw from their interchange of trade and their commercial relations binds them indissolubly together and is stronger than their national antipathies.”²⁴

After establishing for her reader that even groups in conflict would remain at peace for advantageous trade, she began to describe the similarities between the southern and western sections of the country. Not only were these two sections involved in similar

²³ S. Rhett Roman, “A German’s View on Feminine Education,” Times – Democrat, 14 October 1894, 21.

²⁴ S. Rhett Roman, “Mutuality of Interests,” Times – Democrat, 10 September 1893, 17.

enterprises, especially agriculture, both had unjust trade “agreements” with the East. Once the problem, exploitation of the South and the West by the East, had been clearly laid out, Sallie Roman described several solutions. The two disadvantaged sections should establish trading relationships with different trading partners, which would be more advantageous. Use of the southern ports would be cheaper for the South than use of eastern ports, and there were new markets in Central and South America, which were close to southern ports, especially the port of New Orleans.²⁵ In each article dealing with trade, Roman’s suggested that the South would develop trade relationships that worked to its own advantage it would be more economically prosperous.

In later years Sallie Roman still wrote about trade issues, and often quoted outside authorities to legitimize her argument. The first outside source was an article by George B. Cowan, in which he described the reasons the South had prospered more slowly than the West and the East. He portrayed both the East and the West as having weakened the South’s growth potential. If the South’s great resources were paired with what Cowan called “judicious tariff laws” the result would be “a magnificent future. One of unprecedented wealth and power.”²⁶ These statements supported Sallie Roman’s arguments. Another outside authority in Sallie Roman’s articles was George H. Cliff, who wrote a treatise on the industrial South, concluding that the South should establish trade with new markets, especially due to the natural harbors on its shoreline.²⁷ These outside sources, which Roman used to reinforce her argument, were written by males

²⁵ S. Rhett Roman, “Western Trade,” Times – Democrat, 26 November 1893, 21.

²⁶ S. Rhett Roman, “Southern Slant,” Times - Democrat, 31 March 1895, 18.

²⁷ S. Rhett Roman, “The Future of Export Trade in the South,” Times - Democrat, 21 April 1895,

who were knowledgeable about politics and economics, a group of which Roman wanted her readers to believe that she was a part.

Another way Roman suggested to increase economic growth within the southern region was through immigration. The enormous numbers of immigrants, more than 6.3 million between 1877 and 1890, that flooded the East coast of the United States, were potential citizens and developers of Louisiana's resources and formed a part of the Roman's plan to increase the South's economic prosperity.²⁸

“In order to effect a rapid development of the resources possessed by the States of the South and most notably by Louisiana, strong efforts in three directions are necessary. First to obtain immediate immigration with which to fill up the sparsely populated sections of the country and develop their immense mining and agricultural resources; next, the establishment of factories which would absorb the raw materials produced in such close proximity, this affording the mill owner certain advantages for an economical output, with which he could successfully compete against the product of other mills in the markets of the world; and lastly the opening to southern enterprise and capital by direct and short communications those unlimited markets lying to the South and Southwest of the United States, for the immense superiority, of greater cheapness both in manufacture and export, by reason of the shorter route to be traversed, would clearly create a splendid export trade to this section, which would soon build up a corresponding prosperity.”²⁹

Roman suggested that not just any immigrants would increase prosperity in Louisiana, but “farmers, mechanics, and farm operatives of a class of honest poverty.”³⁰ This “class of honest poverty” came from a specific region of the world: Europe.³¹ By suggesting that a better class of people came from Europe, she emphasized a culture with which her readers were familiar since many of them were descendants of French ancestors. Roman also may have sought to calm any concerns about immigration in general. As early as

²⁸ Mark Walgren Summers, The Gilded Age or, The Hazard of New Functions (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977), 106.

²⁹ S. Rhett Roman, “The Southern Immigration Congress,” Times – Democrat, 12 April 1895, 18.

³⁰ S. Rhett Roman, “Immigration,” Times – Democrat, 3 May 1891, 12.

³¹ S. Rhett Roman, “Farming in the Parish of St. Tammany,” Times – Democrat, 21 September 1891, 14.

1880, immigrants with less familiar cultures and religions began to flood the shores of the United States. Many believed that these people with alien languages and religions did not share the same “widely held values and understanding of American traditions.”³²

Sallie Roman was not suggesting the introduction of an alien culture to the population of Louisiana, but advocated bringing in a people who were similar to her readers.

The same article that described which groups of immigrants were best suited to Louisiana’s population also served another function; it worked as a marketing tool to sell Louisiana as a place with ample resources and abundant opportunity. Sallie Roman listed various parishes’ assets and benefits much like a recruiter would paint a “perfect” picture of a company. St. Tammany’s resources were spelled out: a railroad for sending crops to New Orleans, a healthy climate, water and light soil for easy cultivation. Even its political officials, she wrote, “have ability and high moral endowments.”³³ The sales pitch continued in other articles. Besides using her articles as a vehicle to promote Louisiana’s resources, Roman suggested expositions or fairs as one type of venue that would introduce the rest of the country to the vast resources held in the pelican state.³⁴ In 1892, she promoted the World’s Fair that was to be held in Chicago, Illinois, the next year. The advantage of a fair of this nature was its usefulness as a setting to advertise a place or industry. She suggested “at the World’s Fair the state of Louisiana should present herself in the most advantageous and attractive guise.”³⁵ Sallie Roman saw the Atlanta Exposition as another opportunity to promote Louisiana. It “present[ed] to the

³² Summers, *The Gilded Age*, 106, 115.

³³ S. Rhett Roman, “Farming in the Parish of St. Tammany,” 14.

³⁴ S. Rhett Roman, “The Southern Immigration Congress,” 18.

³⁵ S. Rhett Roman, “Louisiana at the World’s Fair,” *Times – Democrat*, 8 May 1892, 14.

States of the South a most opportune occasion to show to the other sections of the country and to the world, all their mighty resources and splendid advantages.”³⁶

Men dominated politics in the late nineteenth century, but Roman addressed how certain legislation being passed in Congress would affect Louisiana. In addition to her concern about specific legislation, she described a very specific role for politicians, one that concerned itself more with practicality than ethics. Her male persona was important here since it was accepted that women’s authority was derived from their morality.³⁷ She did not approach this subject from the basis of female authority, morality, but from her concerns over money, which was considered a male matter. Roman’s response to the debate over the Louisiana Lottery Company provided an excellent example of her appeal. The Louisiana Lottery was a gambling company based in New Orleans but with northern owners who had a deep involvement in Louisiana politics.³⁸ Originally granted a twenty-five year charter in 1868, the Lottery made between twenty and thirty million dollars a year from the sale of lottery tickets nationwide. Despite the high profits made by the Louisiana Lottery Company, in 1877 the state received only forty thousand dollars from it.³⁹ To protect it’s operations, the Lottery gave bribes to state politicians and “became the most corrupting influence in an already corrupt state.” Opposition forces attempted to bring an end to the Lottery’s influence during a constitutional convention in 1879, but failed; and its charter was extended another twenty-five years.⁴⁰ Governor Francis Nicholls fought the Lottery recharter in his second term as governor and vetoed an

³⁶ S. Rhett Roman, “Louisiana Day at the Atlanta Exposition,” 22 September 1895, 19.

³⁷ Anastasia Sims, The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women’s Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880 – 1930 (Columbia: Univeristy of South Carolina Press, 1997), 53.

³⁸ Wall, eds. Louisiana: A History (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1990), 210.

³⁹ William Ivy Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877 – 1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969), 26.

⁴⁰ Wall, eds. Louisiana: A History, 210, 214.

extension of the charter in 1890. Nonetheless, he could not stop a referendum in 1892 over the recharter of the lottery.

During the conflict over the Lottery, opposing political factions, one anti-lottery and one pro-lottery, ran entire political campaigns on this issue. Sallie Roman supported the Louisiana Lottery Company and its recharter. This support was also the official position of the Times-Democrat and its editor, Edward A. Burke.⁴¹ During 1891, Sallie Roman spent much newspaper ink on the subject of the Lottery. In preparation for the 1892 referendum on the extension of the Lottery charter, she wrote nine articles on the topic. Presenting her justification for extension of the charter, she listed money as the most important reason.⁴² In order to entice the government of Louisiana to extend its charter, the Lottery proposed giving the state 1.25 million dollars annually.⁴³ That figure far surpassed the meager forty thousand dollars previously received by the state. According to Roman there were two ways that governments raise money, taxing their citizens or taxing companies within their borders. Sallie Roman presented the Lottery revenue as a better alternative to individual taxes. She stated that the “real though not ostensible cause of the attempted withdrawal of this section from the union,” was that the, “Southern States object[ed] to unjust taxation” and this “was correct and justifiable.”⁴⁴ By emphasizing the practical needs of the state, for example the levees, Roman placed the development of state infrastructure above the morality of political decisions.⁴⁵

Rhett also opposed federal legislation that threatened the Lottery’s use of the mails. She believed this anti-lottery statute was being forced through both houses of

⁴¹ Ibid, 26.

⁴² S. Rhett Roman, “Material Interests and Morality,” Times-Democrat, 8 March 1891, 12.

⁴³ Wall, eds. Louisiana A History, 217.

⁴⁴ S. Rhett Roman, “Taxation,” Times-Democrat, 9 August 1891, 16.

⁴⁵ S. Rhett Roman, “Expediency,” Times-Democrat, 23 August 1891, 13.

Congress at the last minute and that it would directly injure the Louisiana Lottery Company. She was concerned that the federal government was trying to gain too much control over the affairs of the state of Louisiana and would restrict other companies from using the mail in their endeavors as well.⁴⁶ The Lottery left Louisiana before the 1892 elections, which were to provide the voting population a chance to extend the lottery's charter, when a 1890 federal statute made sending lottery tickets through the United States mail illegal.⁴⁷ In 1892 the statute was brought before the United States Supreme Court to challenge the constitutionality of arrests made by the authority of that law. In United States Supreme Court Decision *Ex parte Rapier*, Chief Justice Melville Fuller wrote the opinion of the court upholding the law.⁴⁸

Roman addressed another piece of national legislation in her articles, the anti-option bill. The bill would have altered the future of commodities trading. Since Louisiana was a huge crop producing state, the impact would have been devastating. The bill, introduced in the last session of the Fifty-Second Congress, would have "levee[d] a prohibitive tax on sales of cotton and grain not actually owned by the seller."⁴⁹ As it passed through the legislative and judicial review process, Roman wrote six articles arguing against this bill. She offered three main arguments: that this legislation would hinder personal liberty, that it would damage the farmer and the economy, and that the role of government was not to legislate morality but to encourage business. Sallie Roman argued that personal freedom or liberty was the basis of the United States of America.

⁴⁶ S. Rhett Roman, "Restrictive Legislation," *Times-Democrat*, 20 September 1891, 12.

⁴⁷ *United States Statutes at Large*. Act of September 19, 1890, ch. 908, § 1, 26 Stat. 465. The current United States Code citation is 18 USC 1302.

⁴⁸ *In re Rapier*, 43 U. S. 110, 12 SCt. 375 (1892).

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers and the American State, 1877 – 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 304.

By embracing “the fundamental idea upon which rested the autonomy of the States. . . freedom of thought, word and of action, under just legal restraint to prevent injury to others,” the founders also encouraged commercial enterprise.⁵⁰ In fact, Sallie Roman stated that the agreement among the colonies was “strictly for commercial purposes and advantages.” Although Sallie Roman exalted the ideals of freedom of thought, word, and action, she stated that the purpose of all that freedom was increased prosperity of business interests. This position supported the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, which would have been damaged severely by this bill.

Sallie Roman was concerned because she thought the results of the anti-option bill would hinder the farmer financially. In one article she offered an example of the faulty decision-making that might result from passing an anti-option bill. Hoping to raise the price of cotton in the next growing season, a group of cotton planters might form an alliance with the federal government to regulate the number of acres of land that could be planted in future years. Roman’s reason why this cooperative effort with the government would be dangerous was the potential increase of arbitrary power gained by the governmental agency. She paraphrased Herbert Spencer, stating that a similar situation could lead to a “network of oppressive laws, rules and regulations,” which “is cast over all freedom of action.”⁵¹

Besides the danger of the increased bureaucracy Sallie Roman challenged the idea that the planters had produced too much cotton. Overproduction was not, according to her, the source of the problem. Rather it was a lack of new markets and bad financial policy. Her solutions for these problems included a modified free trade policy and

⁵⁰ S. Rhett Roman, “Freedom as Understood in the United States Today,” Times-Democrat, 13 January 1895, 16.

⁵¹ S. Rhett Roman, “The Anti-Option Bill,” Times-Democrat, 5 June 1892, 14.

extension of the cotton trade to new areas of the country and other countries.⁵² This argument resembled the one she made when she discussed trading in the South.

According to Sallie Roman, without extending into new markets, including Central and South America, this problem of “overproduction” and a crowded marketplace would continue.⁵³

After defending personal liberty and challenging the economic viability of the anti-option law, Roman complained that the objective of the Hatch anti-option bill was to “effect a moral reform, and its aim is to eliminate by congressional enactment that element of speculation” that all trade involves.⁵⁴ The attempt by Congress to remove all immorality from business, especially trade was impossible and impractical. The motive of Congress was similar to its motive in the anti-lottery postal law, attempting to force a business or commercial enterprise to act morally. Sallie Roman argued that the role of government was not to look after the morality of the state but that those in public office should always “advance the prosperity of the State.”⁵⁵

In addition to writing about economics and legislation, Sallie Roman expressed her opinions about the press. She portrayed the press as a mirror in which the public could see the reality of the political situation. Many in the Roman family worked, at one time or another, for newspapers.⁵⁶ Like her father, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Sallie Roman

⁵² Ibid, 14.

⁵³ S. Rhett Roman, “The Rising Tide,” Times-Democrat, 14 February 1892.; S. Rhett Roman, “Legislative Curios and Bric-a-Brac,” Times-Democrat, 5 February 1893, 24.

⁵⁴ S. Rhett Roman, “The Anti-Option Bill,” 14.

⁵⁵ S. Rhett Roman, “Material Interests and Morality,” Times-Democrat, 8 March 1891, 12.

⁵⁶ Dixon, Fortune and Misery, 17, 18. Roman’s father and brother, Robert, both worked for the Charlotte Mercury. Robert also edited the Picayune, a New Orleans paper, for a year and the Journal of Commerce, a paper from Charleston, for two years. Roman’s husband, Alfred, was the assistant editor of L’Abeille in New Orleans at one time. And his son Andre edited both L’Abeille and the Courier de la Louisiane.

understood the role of the press to provide constructive criticism.⁵⁷ Criticism of the political process trained the public and brought progress to communities. It was the "best and truest educator of the people of these States."⁵⁸ Besides educating the people, "the press [was] the voice of communities, and its importance and influence therefore [was] ever preponderating." The American press was a prime example of how a press should form "a protective phalanx . . . its fearless honesty and its capacity to speak well for the brains and energy of her people, and no surer way of impressing her many advantages and attractions upon an outside world naturally indifferent and suspicious, can be found than to hold their consideration through the State press." Not just Louisiana's press but all the "American dailies" fulfilled their purpose to "argue[s] a future of success and advancement for that country where it [was] established and maintained, for it present[ed] of a necessity a faithful reflex of the value of the citizens supporting" it.⁵⁹

Besides presenting the press as the most able educator of the public and the most appropriate advertiser of the South's resources, Sallie Roman also presented a defense of the press. In one 1893 article, she used an interesting technique to defend the state of the press. The narrator of this story was a man who attended a dinner party and began a conversation with a man named Dickson.⁶⁰ Dickson attacked the press for not exposing all unscrupulous activities in the arena of its responsibility. Sallie Roman's first person character then defended the press by saying that it was not responsible for the evil in the world. The press did not create corruption in either business or politics.

⁵⁷ Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 78.

⁵⁸ S. Rhett Roman, "Money," *Times-Democrat*, 26 July 1891, 12.

⁵⁹ S. Rhett Roman, "Advertising," *Times-Democrat*, 9 October 1892, 14. *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰ S. Rhett Roman, "The Press and Reform," *Times-Democrat*, 13 August 1893, 9. It is interesting to note that this article is also the first article when Sallie Roman changes her byline from S. R. to S. Rhett Roman.

Along with a press whose role was in part to educate, Roman also believed that further efforts to educate would improve the state. Better education would lead to increased power and wealth. Her focus on education was driven by her emphasis on economic development. Libraries could provide opportunities for enlightenment of the population. She suggested that the city of New Orleans establish free public libraries that were more accessible than the existing Howard Library.⁶¹ “Enlightenment means order, good morals, progress and wealth.”⁶²

The Chautauqua near Ruston, Louisiana, was another venue Sallie Roman offered as a means of encouraging education. Founded by a businessman and a minister on Lake Chautauqua in New York State in 1874, it initially trained Sunday school teachers but it eventually expanded its focus to offer other educational opportunities.⁶³ The idea spread and soon independent chautauqua’s sprung up in small rural areas across the United States. On September 4, 1890, Louisiana Chautauqua was established, near Ruston, Louisiana.

According to A. A. Gundy, one of the founders of Louisiana Chautauqua, the purpose was to arouse, inspire and organize “the course of public education and intellectual progress in Louisiana.”⁶⁴ It sought to provide better-trained teachers for the state and informative and entertaining lectures for the general population that would serve to increase their knowledge about a particular subject. The outcome of the Chautauqua, according to Roman, was more experiment stations, fairs, increased college attendance,

⁶¹ Howard Library is now the Howard-Tilton Library located at Tulane University.

⁶² S. Rhett Roman, “Enlightenment,” *Times-Democrat*, 28 August 1892, 14.

⁶³ Charlotte Canning, “What was Chautauqua,” *Traveling Culture: Circuit Chautauqua in the Twentieth Century*.” <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/traveling-culture/essay.htm>. Chautauqua was an institution that provided opportunities for adult education. Located in rural areas, the Chautauqua had informational lectures to enlighten and entertain that areas population.

⁶⁴ A. A. Gundy, *Louisiana Chautauqua Memorial* (1908) 4.

and an overall better educated public. All these steps of progress lead back to her focus the increase of the economic well-being of the state of Louisiana.⁶⁵ Even when she addressed a subject like education, that would have been considered an appropriate female, Roman considered not moral improvement but economic growth the most important result of increased education. This focus led the reader back to her masculine image.

Sallie Roman brought her personal experience into the editorials she wrote for the Times-Democrat, yet she did not limit herself to traditional “female” topics. She made ample use of the exposure she had as a child in her father’s politically charged world and addressed the complex topics of federal power, trade, and immigration. Entering the workforce out of financial necessity, she built a separation between her home life and her published work. Roman challenged women’s access to a particular area of restricted public space, opinion making about political and economic issues. Her covert entrance into the world of opinion was made possible by disguising her gender through her use of an ambiguous name, a masculine voice and persona as well as voice, her choices of subject matter. She presented herself to the reader as a man who therefore was able to contribute to the public discussion about serious and important matters. Though she did address two feminine subjects, women and education, she approached both in a decidedly male way. Roman’s editorial opinions mirrored the political positions of the power structure and did not challenge its power. Rather than making a frontal attack on the dominant culture, Roman disguised herself as a male insider whose opinions would be accepted by the public and advocated economic growth.

⁶⁵ Faye McKenzie Hutchinson, “The Louisiana Chautauqua: History and Program,” (M. A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1976), vi, 45, 54.

Chapter 2

Helen Grey Gilkison: Social Insider

Twenty years after S. Rhett Roman's last editorial article ran in the Times-Democrat, Helen Grey Gilkison entered the world of serious journalism, which Roman had negotiated over nineteen years. Each woman maneuvered through this arena in different ways, as it suited her needs, her time, and her opportunities. In the early twentieth century, the role of women remained very traditional and challenging this model was unusual. The role included being a nurturing caretaker of children, who if she did work before or during marriage, would have left the job market prior to having children.¹ As a journalist, Gilkison fell outside the social norm, for women in general, but remained firmly within the expectations for a female journalist. This can be seen by comparing her career with those outlined in an instructional book on journalism for women, published in 1926 and written by Genevieve Boughner, which described the nature of journalism for women. Gilkison wrote with a particular voice, or better, two particular voices. One was strictly informational; the second was chatty and accessible to her reader. These voices were a bridge between the reader and the political world. She did not try to disguise her sex, as S. Rhett Roman had. An insider in the world of Louisiana politics, not an objective observer, Gilkison wrote articles mainly about political figures and political events rather than an analysis of the consequences of those events. In her articles, Gilkison addressed four main subjects: the activities of the

¹ S. J. Kleinberg, Women in the United States, 1830 – 1945 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 127. Kleinberg argues that, “the state moved in to ensure that women would regard their home and family as their primary interests. . . as more women attended school the basis on which they worked altered: they stayed in the labor force longer, branched into white-collar occupations, and worked after marriage in greater numbers. Despite these changes, the perceptions of women as workers gave primacy to their gender, family status, and race rather than their abilities and wishes.”

Louisiana Legislature, new policies of the state, Louisiana's political society, and feature stories about politicians.

Gilkison was born on October 25, 1909, in Fulton, Kentucky. Later she moved with her family to Houma, Louisiana, where she attended grade school and high school. While in high school she won a Times-Picayune essay contest on the topic, "What Do Good Roads Mean?" In her essay she connected roads to the progress of particular civilizations. Using historical examples such as the Babylonian and the Roman empires, she emphasized the significance of roads as "not the only sign of civilization" but "one of its chief means for advancement." Shifting from an international to a local focus, Gilkison highlighted the Louisiana highway movement and the Louisiana Highway Commission and their efforts to create a comprehensive highway system. Just as the Roman roads helped to spread its civilization, so the Louisiana highway system worked to create better relationships between the citizens of Louisiana and to bring tourists to Louisiana and generate more revenue.² This winning article resulted in Gilkison being awarded four hundred dollars toward her tuition at Louisiana State University. Once there, she immediately began to pursue her interest in journalism through the school paper, The Reveille, and later through a journalism degree. During her four-year undergraduate career she wrote for a Baton Rouge city paper as well and various school publications, such as the Gumbo, the school yearbook. She was a member of Sigma Sigma Theta, a journalism sorority, and of the YWCA.³

With two other female journalism students, Margaret Stephenson and Cleo Taylor, Gilkison wrote a series of articles for the Baton Rouge city paper. In them they

² Newspaper clipping from "Manuscript Volumes," Box 4, Helen Gilkison Papers, Mss. 1901, 2175, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA..

³ "Helen Gilkison Dies Following a Lengthy Illness," Morning Advocate, 1 October 1948, 1, 8.

reported their adventures and often highlighted a particular event or person in Baton Rouge or the surrounding area. The Demon Reporters, the self-proclaimed name for the group, visited with such notables as Lyle Saxon, a writer from Louisiana, and Kent and Margaret Lighty, two travelers on a houseboat trip down the Mississippi River.⁴ The Lighty's published a book based on their trip in 1930 called Shanty-Boat.⁵ Another artist the Demon Reporters encountered was Alberta Kinsley, in New Orleans for Mardi Gras.⁶ The celebrity who may have encouraged Gilkison's interests in politics was Huey P. Long, who was governor at the time the three student writers interviewed him. Long charmed them, gave them a tour of the Governor's Mansion, and sang for them on the first anniversary of his election.⁷

After graduation, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism, Gilkison entered graduate school and completed her Master of Arts degree a year later.⁸ While in graduate school, Gilkison began working for the Lafayette Tribune, a weekly newspaper.⁹ However, in 1930 she acquired a job with the New Orleans States as a staff correspondent and a state capital correspondent. In addition to her work with the New Orleans newspaper, she began work with the United Press Association and the International News Service, both wire services, and she helped publish The Louisiana Forum, a state controlled newspaper that during the 1930's covered the Louisiana

⁴ Helen Gilkison, Margaret Stephenson, and Cleo Taylor, "Demon Reporters Guests at Floating River House," Morning Advocate, 3 January 1929, 1 & 2.

⁵ Kent and Margaret Lighty, Shanty-Boat (New York: The Century Company, 1930), 293.

⁶ Gilkison, Stephenson, and Taylor, "Demon Writers Marvel at Charm of Mardi Gras," Morning Advocate, 14 February 1928, 1, 2.

⁷ Gilkison, Stephenson, Taylor, "Governor Long Sings Tenor for Three Coeds," New Orleans States, 20 January 1929, 1, 6.

⁸ Louisiana State University, LSU Catalogue, vol. xxii (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1930), 103; Louisiana State University, LSU Catalogue, vol. xxiii (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1931), 228.; The LSU Catalogue from May 1931 lists Gilkison as a graduate with a Master's degree. Although her thesis cannot be found in the LSU Library, her papers include a manuscript that is designated as her unfinished thesis.

⁹ Vita in unfinished thesis, Box 1, Helen Gilkison Papers

legislature and government.¹⁰ After the death of Huey P. Long, Gilikson wrote for his administration's political newspaper the Louisiana Progress, during the administration of Governor Richard Leche. Her relationship with people in state government continued through various jobs with the state outside of newspaper journalism.¹¹ Gilkison had clearly developed access to the political arena, but this alone does not explain her entrance into and continuing work in the job market.

She developed a career in journalism because she never married. Although young women were expected to marry and be supported by their husbands, Gilkison remained single and took advantage of many career opportunities. An unmarried woman who worked for pay was more acceptable to the larger society than a woman who worked with a husband and children at home.¹² According to a family legend, Helen Gilkison chose to remain single. In fact, part of the Gilkison Family myth is that Fonville Winans, famous Baton Rouge photographer, pursued a relationship with her, but that she refused to marry him since she was a career woman.¹³ Whether Gilkison actively chose to remain unmarried in order to pursue a career or just never was presented with a proposal that appealed to her, the fact that she was single allowed her the flexibility to work. Without the additional pressure of keeping house and rearing children, Gilkison could remain in the job market and did so out of necessity for her own financial support.

¹⁰ Robert W. Desmond, Windows on the World: The Information Process in a Changing Society, 1900 – 1920 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980), 123 - 129. Louisiana Forum 5 June 1933

¹¹ "Helen Gilkison Dies," 1, 8. Polks Greater Baton Rouge City Directory (Dallas: R. L. Polk and Company Publishers, 1940), 212.

¹² Kleinberg, Women in the United States, 127.

¹³ Libby Falk Jones of Berea interviewed by author, 30 March 2001, interview notes, Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge. The Helen Gilkison Papers contains a postcard to Helen Gilkison from Fonville Winans that implies that he very much wanted to see her.

The career Gilkison chose was enjoying an explosion of popularity at the time she entered college.¹⁴ In fact, in 1926, only one year after she entered, Louisiana State University established a journalism curriculum that culminated in a bachelor's degree.¹⁵ The expansion of journalism, and an established tradition of women writers, resulted in women's increasing involvement in this profession.¹⁶

The same year Louisiana State University established its journalism program, Genevieve Jackson Boughner published her book, Women in Journalism: A Guide to the Opportunities and a Manual of the Techniques of Women's Work for Newspapers and Magazines. Boughner and her husband both taught journalism at the University of Wisconsin. Boughner wrote the book in an instructional style for women to use in order to further their interest in the field. But it can now be used as a model of what professionals considered appropriate roles for women in journalism. Boughner discusses the various functions of a reporter and emphasizes the importance of specialized techniques and abilities. Specializations such as the political writer, the syndicated writer, and the columnist provided more career opportunities. Boughner stated that a woman who did not acquire "knowledge of some particular subject whether fashions, politics, sports, interior decorating, or nursing, [was] just half preparing herself for this career."¹⁷

¹⁴ Maurine H. Beasley and Kathryn T. Theues, The New Majority: A Look At What The Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988) 11.

¹⁵ "Enrollment in Journalism Department Exceeds 100 Mark," The Reveille, 2 October 1926, 8.

¹⁶ Women had established a place within the world of writing; it was the subject of their work that remained under dispute. Women were expected to write about domestic issues and other topics that were considered appropriate.

¹⁷ Genevieve Jackson Boughner, Women In Journalism: A Guide to the Opportunities and a Manual of the Technique of Women's Work for Newspapers and Magazines (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1936), x.

The three areas of specialization pursued by Helen Gilkison were the political writer, the syndicated writer, and the columnist. Boughner described the function of a political writer in two ways: to give news or information and to interpret the information for the reader. During different times in her career, Gilkison performed both functions. Boughner also observed that “success in political writing often paves the way for important government positions, as well as positions of trust with state party organizations and with leading members of both branches of Congress.” Gilkison’s experience followed this pattern in the world of journalism. Her articles dealing mostly with political topics or events led to a series of long-standing professional relationships with political figures.¹⁸

Another specialty that Gilkison pursued was that of a syndicated writer. A syndicated writer gives the second rights of their work to a syndicate, which offers the material to different newspapers and magazines across a region.¹⁹ According to telegrams and letters in her papers, Gilkison sold information and articles about Louisiana events and people to these services. This practice of farming out services to several different companies or papers was not unusual during her time.²⁰ In her later years, Gilkison wrote a column, named the “Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy,” under her byline, which appeared in local weekly papers as well as in the infamous The Progress.²¹ Beginning with her student career, Gilkison was a columnist as described by Boughner.

¹⁸ Ibid, 247, 253.

¹⁹ Ibid, 308.

²⁰ John DeMers, “Maggie: The Life and Times of the Louisiana Newspaper Woman,” (M. A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1984), 70.

²¹ Elsie Boone Stallworth, “A Survey of the Louisiana Progresses of the 1930’s” (M. A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1948), 136. This newspaper went through a series of changes including the title and the publication schedule. In order to simplify this issue, the paper will be referred to as The Progress.

Her previously mentioned “Demon Reporter” articles were the type of human interest stories that did not give political opinions, but simply told stories or described events.

Obviously Gilkison’s career followed the pattern described in Boughner’s book, but how did her experience compare with that of her contemporary female journalists? In 1936, Ishbell Ross, a retired journalist herself, published the first history of women journalists.²² In her first chapter she described the difficulties women had attempting to achieve the coveted position of “front-page girl.” This woman had to show exceptional desire, ability, and accuracy. Women who exhibited these qualities and managed to attain success included Lorena Hickock and Anne O’Hare McCormick. Lorena Hickock found her success as a writer for the news service the Associated Press. Covering politics, Hickock succeeded even with the incredibly fast pace a wire reporter had to maintain. She “made it on sheer talent to the top of her profession, in the flagship New York bureau of the thoroughly respectable Associated Press.”²³ Helen Gilkison also gained a measure of success, but her achievements owed much to her ability to use political connections and networks to her advantage, not just her writing talent.

Along with her intentional efforts to build political networks, Gilkison also made intentional choices as to how she wanted to portray herself to her audience. She used two particular voices to relate to her audience. The first voice was strictly neutral, a relaying of the facts from a particular angle but without overt editorializing. The second featured a chatty telling of events, offered from the perspective of an insider, often covered as gossip. Since Helen Gilkison often had a byline accompanying her stories, she did not use either voice to disguise her sex. The informational voice tended to be used in her

²² Beasley and Jacobs, *A New Majority*, 13.

²³ Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickock: E. R.’s Friend* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 71.

reporting on the actions of the Louisiana legislature, in articles written as capital correspondent for a New Orleans paper, and when she wrote and edited the Louisiana Forum. Gilkison approached her articles on legislative bills with no informality. She named the authors of the bill, described the content of the bill, and explained how it would be implemented. She sounded much like a court stenographer, relaying information from the legislature to the public. The chatty voice was used in her syndicated column the “Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy” which took the form of a society column and told who visited the capitol and what events had occurred. Approaching the state capital with the familiarity of one who had spent years covering the events there, Gilkison effectively made the lives of the people who ran the Louisiana state government interesting and special.

Gilkison’s ability to gain political access promoted her efforts to be inside the political action, which would therefore advance her career. One of the most explosive situations, that both established and illustrated her political access, was the “Reveille Affair of 1934.”²⁴ During the height of Senator Huey P. Long’s influence and power in Louisiana, an incident on Louisiana State University’s campus brought national attention to the state capital and the state university. Helen Gilkison was involved in the scandal surrounding a mock election of an LSU student and football player, Abe Mickal, to the state senate in a mass meeting on campus. Long organized this event as a forum to ridicule J. Y. Sanders, Jr., an opponent of Long, who had previously held a “citizen’s mass meeting” to protest the election of Mrs. Bolivar E. Kemp, Sr. to her husband’s seat in the United States House of Representatives, which was held nine days after it was

²⁴ “Report on the Events Leading to the Dismissal of Seven Students from Louisiana State University on December 5, 1934,” “Reveille Affair of 1934,” Office of the President Records, RG# A0002, Louisiana State University Archives, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

announced. Congress had refused to seat either Kemp or Sanders, although he later won the seat. Gilkison phoned Jessie Cutrer, editor of The Reveille, the student newspaper, to ask that he sign a proclamation for the meeting to take place that day. Cutrer refused but the meeting took place as planned. A student, D. R. Norman, wrote an editorial letter, which was to be published in The Reveille, that criticized Long's burlesque election and the mockery made of the democratic process. Helen Gilkison received a copy of Norman's letter while at the Louisiana Senate. When Senator Long read it, he became furious over its criticism and his lack of control of the student paper at "his" university. Gilkison seized the opportunity and said, "Senator, if you had me out there this would not have happened." Long then had James M. Smith, President of Louisiana State University, appoint Gilkison to the journalism faculty with the additional responsibility of approving The Reveille content. She attempted to proofread The Reveille on November 19 in order to approve the November 20 issue, but met with opposition from the The Reveille staff.²⁵ Gilkison left the Ortleib Press office without reading the entire issue.²⁶

A meeting between the Louisiana State University administration and The Reveille staff on Monday, November 26, resulted in the resignation of a number of students from the paper. The Tuesday issue of The Reveille was not printed due to the lack of staff, which prompted a petition, signed by twenty-six journalism students, denouncing the censorship of student opinion in The Reveille. These students were suspended. Ultimately twenty-two of the twenty-six students who signed the petition were reinstated to the university. Sam Montague, David McGuire, Stanley Shlosman and

²⁵ "Report on the Events," 8, 10. According to D. R. McGuire's affidavit, Gilkison claimed to have had the authority to fire and hire Reveille Staff. There is some evidence, in the correspondence in her papers, that Gilkison lectured in journalism classes after her appointment to the faculty.

²⁶ The Reveille was printed at the Ortleib Press Building located in downtown Baton Rouge.

L. Rea Godbold remained suspended and were eventually expelled. Additionally three members of The Reveille staff who did not sign the petition, Jessie Cutrer, Carl Corbin and Cal Abraham were also expelled. The Reveille resumed printing with a new editor, Grace Williamson. Helen Gilkison was removed as censor for the Reveille and apparently did not remain on the faculty.²⁷ This event does illustrate Gilkison's access to the most central figure in Louisiana politics at the time, Huey P. Long, and her ambition to gain even further access to the power structure.

Long was not her only connection to politics. Gilkison was close to Harry D. Wilson, the Commissioner of Agriculture and his family and had a similar association with Bolivar E. Kemp, Jr., Attorney General in the late 1940s.²⁸ At the time of her death, she worked as a statistician in the Attorney General's office. Other state offices in which she was employed included the State Publicity Office, the State Tax Commission, the State Finance Department, and the State Auditor's Office.²⁹ In her short life, Helen Grey Gilkison worked in various levels of state government and wrote about them in various newspapers even as she remained on the state payroll. With her continuous access to state officials from the Governor on down, she developed an insider's mentality.

Helen Gilkison wrote many types of articles including those addressing Louisiana's legislative bills, new state policies, political society, and feature stories. The

²⁷ "Report of Events," 5. Gilkison claimed that Huey P. Long did not appoint her to any position and that she had never been asked to censor The Reveille, according to her own affidavit given to the newspaper.

²⁸ Photographs from Helen Gilkison's papers include several pictures of her with the Wilson family and with individuals in the Wilson family.

²⁹ Polks Greater Baton Rouge City Directory (Dallas: R. L. Polk and Company Publishers, 1940), 212.; Polks Greater Baton Rouge City Directory (Dallas: R. L. Polk and Company Publishers, 1942), 208.; Polks Greater Baton Rouge City Directory (Dallas: R. L. Polk and Company Publishers, 1943), 200.; "Helen Gilkison Dies," 1, 8.

first type of article was about the details and passage of Louisiana's house and senate bills. Since many of her articles ran without a byline, assigning authorship can be difficult. Her papers contained a scrapbook that noted when a particular bill was introduced in the legislature and then correlated these to small articles written about them. She often wrote about bills in different stages: a small article as they were introduced, a longer article laying out the details of these potential laws, and an article that described the outcome of the legislative process. For example, House Bill Number 33 introduced by Representative Peyton attempted to permit refinancing of Shreveport's city government through a nine hundred fifty thousand dollar bond issue. Gilkison's article simply stated that "the House Committee on municipal corporations today reported favorably the Peyton Bill providing for the refinancing of the city of Shreveport by a 950,000 dollar bond."³⁰

Another example of a bill that Gilkison detailed was House Bill Number 58. It levied taxes on dairy and bee products to raise funds to fight tick infestation in Louisiana livestock. During the 1930s, there was an outbreak of tick fever in the cattle population of Louisiana and surrounding states. In order to fight this epidemic, ranchers needed to implement the practices of dipping and vaccinating their herds.³¹ This bill, the Lester-LeTessier bill, was estimated to yield about four hundred thousand dollars a year through the tax. In the small article that reported the activity surrounding this bill, Gilkison described the renewed efforts of the opposition and described the sides as gearing up for

³⁰ Newspaper clippings from Manuscript Volumes, Box 4, "Relief for Shreveport: Bill for \$950,000 Bond Issue Favorably Reported" Helen Gilkison Papers

³¹ Jane Vidrine, "A Man Can Stand, Yeah: Ranching Traditions in Louisiana," [article online from 1991 Louisiana Folklife Festival book]; available from http://www.crt.state.la.us/folklife/creole_art_ranching_trad.html

the battle.³² By dealing with the multitude of issues brought before the legislature, Gilkison provided a record for the Louisiana public of the activity that occurred in there.

In addition to writing newspaper articles on the Louisiana legislature, Gilkison wrote articles explaining new state policies, which often praised the state for its progress through the Depression. In 1938, for example, Gilkison reported that the Federal Social Security Board approved Louisiana's welfare laws. Its director, Oscar Powell said that Louisiana had the "finest and most progressive welfare legislation that can be found."³³ Louisiana's welfare legislation was to aid the population of the state of Louisiana through the economic difficulties of the Depression. The ultimate praise that the state received was in the last column of 1938, when Gilkison declared that 1938 was the most prosperous year of the 1930s and that, according to government sources, Louisiana was winning the fight against recession.³⁴

While writing for and running the local office for the Louisiana Forum, Gilkison continued to promote the state's policies. The Louisiana Forum was a state-run newspaper that reported on Louisiana's affairs. This paper's entire mission was to inform the public on the positive activities of the state government. Her involvement in this paper provided more opportunities for her to play cheerleader for Louisiana's policies. Each department within the government had a section where its news was presented. There were very few bylines, but Gilkison had some articles attributed to her. One such article gave a detailed report of new federal aid to farmers in Louisiana, a 1933 cotton acreage reduction project designed to reduce the amount of cotton produced in order to

³² Newspaper clippings from "Manuscript Volumes," Box 4, "New Fight is Started on Bill to End Tick Pest" New Orleans States June 29, 1932, Helen Gilkison Papers.

³³ Helen Gilkison, "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy," News Digest, 21 October 1938.

³⁴ Helen Gilkison, "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy," News Digest, 30 December 1938.

increase the price of cotton in the market by forcing a shortage of product. The article predicted that between five and seven million dollars would be brought into Louisiana with the implementation of the program.³⁵ This must have seemed like a potential economic boon to a state with an economy so strongly tied to agriculture.

Gilkison worked in a public relations capacity for state agencies and promoted state policies. This aspect of her career included employment in state government, following the pattern described in the Boughner book, of writing journalistic articles about state government while simultaneously working in the government.³⁶ Gilkison was employed in 1939 to write at least the introduction to the “State of Louisiana Department of Public Works Report.” This report described the responsibilities and activities directed by the Department of Public Works along with the history of public assistance in Louisiana. Gilkison reported “Louisiana has made a sound beginning in assuming its responsibility to provide for the needy.” During an explanation of the history of public welfare in Louisiana, which could have been written as a dry timeline of legislation and commissions, Gilkison pointed with pride to the fact that in 1822 “Edward Livingston, the principal author of Louisiana’s Civil Code, proposed to the Legislature . . . that the State appropriate funds to provide work for the needy unemployed.” This forward looking suggestion, “a modern public assistance plan,” was, Gilkison stated “proposed a century before our present day theories began to get firmly rooted.” Even though Livingston’s plan was not enacted, it was the beginning of the move for public aid that was first established in the 1879 Constitution. Gilkison stressed that Livingston’s plan

³⁵ Helen Gilkison, “Cotton Plan Means Immediate Millions for State Planters,” Louisiana Forum, 27 June 1933, 1, 8.

³⁶ Boughner, Women in Journalism, 247.; DeMers, Maggie, 70.

and the laws that followed provided the base for a stronger public welfare program in Louisiana.³⁷

The third type of article that Gilkison wrote described the social activities of Louisiana's political players. She wrote a syndicated column titled the "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy" that took on an element of a society column. In it, she described the goings and comings of Louisiana's political elite and those who were politically connected. One of the characters frequently mentioned in this social column was Richard Leche, governor of Louisiana from 1936 to 1939.³⁸ Whether recounting his attendance at a Louisiana State University football game or traveling outside of the state to confer with the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Leche was presented as an in-charge, capable leader who could effect change in the state of Louisiana for the better. Leche's activities portrayed in this column included stumping for state candidates in elections, lobbying in Washington, D. C., for the location of the cotton experiment station in Louisiana (which would bring one million dollars to the state), and sponsoring the Louisiana State University Rodeo and Livestock Show.³⁹

In her political society columns, Gilkison also focused on what happened at the departmental level of state government. She pointed out that the state Public Welfare Association gained significant national recognition when its director, A. R. Johnson, was elected vice president of American Public Welfare Association. The Commissioner of

³⁷ "State of Louisiana Department of Public Works Second Report, January 1, 1938 – June 30, 1939, 5 – 12, Box 3, Helen Gilkison Papers. Though there is not assigned authorship in the published report, Gilkison's papers contain a typed copy of introduction with a note referring to her submission of the report.

³⁸ Miriam Reeves, *The Governors of Louisiana*, 5th ed. (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1998) 106.

³⁹ Helen Gilkison, "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy," *The Weekly News*, 24 September 1938; Helen Gilkison, "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy," 29 October 1938; Helen Gilkison, "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy," 18 November 1938.

Agriculture, Harry D. Wilson, was also, one of the government employees who had a “recurring role” in the society column. A public figure, Wilson was also a personal friend of Gilkison, so it was not surprising that she would be well aware of his activities. One article that mentioned Wilson also pointed out that his son Justin Wilson had been on a trip across the country telling Cajun stories.⁴⁰ Gilkison’s columns, the “Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy,” which contained interesting facts, also functioned as a way to keep the public interested in politics and enthusiastic about the state administration.

Gilkison’s fourth type of article were positive feature stories about political people. In them she presented politicians as part of a popular society, but also demonstrated her proximity to the centers of power in Louisiana. While working for the New Orleans Item-Tribune, in 1930, she wrote a feature article about the new governor’s mansion. In it she described the architecture and interior design of each room. According to her obituary she had access to the governor’s mansion before other reporters. Because of her close ties to the Long Administration, she examined it prior to its unveiling to the public.⁴¹ She described the mansion as luxurious with elaborate furnishings and upholstery. Huey Long, the infamous governor of Louisiana, oversaw the construction of this new executive house. Gilkison’s description lent a legitimacy and presence to the inhabitants of the house, Governor Huey P. Long and his family.

Another feature article that Gilkison wrote was about Joyce Allen, Governor O. K. Allen’s daughter. She was going to be involved in the inaugural celebrations of her father’s first term in office during 1932. This article describes Joyce Allen’s personality, activities, and looks. She is described as an outgoing coed who attended Louisiana State

⁴⁰ Helen Gilkison, “Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy,” Louisiana Progress, 1 September 1938. Justin Wilson continued to work in the capacity as a spreader of Cajun culture and cooking.

⁴¹ “Helen Gilkison Dies,” 1, 8.

University, belonged to Delta Zeta sorority, and enjoyed parties and entertainment. Her plans for the future echoed the traditional picture of a woman's life. Gilkison reported "there will be no career for Joyce Love, according to the present plans. She dismissed her future with a casual, 'another two years of school and then if daddy can afford it travel abroad, perhaps marriage afterward.'"⁴² Gilkison attempted to leave her readers with the impression of an almost royal executive mansion in Louisiana, under Huey P. Long and later the delightful "princess" of a daughter of Governor O. K. Allen.

Helen Grey Gilkison lived and worked in a politically charged atmosphere. Huey P. Long influenced the university she attended, and she entered the journalistic world at the height of his power in the state of Louisiana. Trained as a journalist at "Huey's university" during a time when journalism was experiencing great growth, her identity was tied up in her work. Gilkison was allowed to expand the social roles of women because she was single and, according to her family, chose to remain single. Through ambition and the political access she cultivated, she found employment with the state and with newspapers to write about the state. She used this access to create the image of an insider to the social world of politics. Taking full advantage of situations presented to her, she wrote articles that attempted to shore up the state administration during the 1930s and 1940s. This loyalty to state government by a journalist, which now would be considered inappropriate, was during the early twentieth century the accepted method of public relations for government. Boughner, in her book, encouraged political writers to cultivate relationships in politics that would lead to this type of job. S. Rhett Roman also wrote in order to shore up the political and economic structure of the elites, though her

⁴² Newspaper clippings from "Manuscript Volumes," Box 4, "Joyce Allen To Lead Ball," Helen Gilkison Papers

articles were editorial in nature and were meant to persuade the reader. Although they wrote differently, they were similar in that each woman had a financial reason to enter the workplace and each woman negotiated her career during a time when it was unusual for women to do so. Gilkison never masked her gender but she did present herself to the public as an insider to Louisiana politics.

Chapter 3

Iris Turner Kelso: Access to the Players

The year that Helen Gilkison died, Iris Turner, a native of Philadelphia, Mississippi, began her first job as a reporter for the newspaper Hattiesburg American in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.¹ Like Sallie Rhett Roman and Helen Gilkison, Turner faced similar obstacles. She became a journalist simply because she needed a job, but still had to find her place within the role of a woman and a female journalist. She used a particular voice to connect with her readers and to portray a particular image, and she dealt with political topics on the national, state and city level. On the state level she wrote about Earl Long, the Perez brothers, David Treen, Edwin Edwards and Mike Foster. In covering New Orleans her topics included, the city's mayors, Dutch and Mark Morial, and its District Attorney, Harry Connick. Kelso's articles provided insight into her political opinions and her personality.

Born in Meridian, Mississippi, on December 10, 1926, Iris Turner grew up in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where her family ran a lumber mill. Her large extended family created a safe and encouraging environment for a young girl who lost her mother at the age of four. After high school, Turner attended Ward Belmont Junior College in Nashville, Tennessee, and then Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, where she graduated with a degree in English. Turner acquired her first job through Randolph-Macon's career placement office. Unlike Helen Gilkison's journalism program at Louisiana State University, Turner's college education did not specifically

¹ Interview with Iris Turner Kelso by Anne G. Ritchie, Women in Journalism oral history project of the Washington Press Club Foundation, January 1991, iii – iv, in the Oral History Collection of Columbia University and other repositories.

train her for a career in journalism. She arrived at the door of the editor of the Hattiesburg American, Andy Harmon, and his newspaper would serve as her training ground in journalism. Turner stayed at the Hattiesburg American from 1948 to 1951. During that time she covered the business of a small town, the country correspondence, obituaries, local church news, and luncheon clubs. In 1951, with the encouragement of Harmon, Turner left Hattiesburg and took a job in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the New Orleans States. There she worked for Frank Allen, managing editor, and Walter Cowan, city editor, who both continued to train her and demand quality work from her. They also gave her progressively more responsibility. Though she had begun as a general reporter, she moved on to being a Sob Sister, then on to interviews, fires and murders and finally politics. Four years after she started work at the New Orleans States, she began covering city hall and writing a political column. This was a great adventure in which Turner was moving into a world of people with wild and powerful personalities who actually affected change in the city of New Orleans. In 1959, Turner began covering the Louisiana legislature with Emile Comar, a colleague from the States.² It was during this legislative session that Turner covered the commitment of Governor Earl Long to a series of mental hospitals. Kelso remained at the States until 1965.

After nine years in the newspaper industry, Iris Turner Kelso left and moved outside of media, taking a job with Total Community Action. This organization implemented the Head Start Program in New Orleans. As an educational specialist, Kelso helped implement this program that sought to provide health care, dental care and

² Ibid, vi, v, 1, 18. Country correspondence is the news of a small town; it usually describes the events, both large and small, of a community, often in a folksy way. A Sob Sister was a journalist, usually a woman, who wrote emotionally dramatic stories about victims of crimes or disasters.

early education for young children in poverty.³ Kelso remained at Total Community Action for two years and found the work very challenging but also very rewarding.

After her break from the news media, Iris Kelso returned, this time to the medium of television. Her first job in that medium came in 1967 at WDSU-TV, channel 6 in New Orleans. Responsible for political reporting and commentary, Kelso, during her time in television, won a Peabody Award for her series called, “City in Crisis,” a report on New Orleans’ financial trouble.⁴ In spite of her success in television, in 1976, Kelso returned to newspaper journalism, on a part time basis, for the Figaro, an alternative newspaper where she wrote a political column. In 1978 she became a full-time associate editor and reporter who wrote feature articles about political figures.⁵ She stayed at the Figaro until she moved to the Times-Picayune in 1979. Hired at the Times-Picayune to write editorials and later given a regular political column, she remained there until her retirement in 1996.

Kelso first entered the workforce because she was single when she finished college. She did not consider herself a career woman at the time; in fact, she took the job at the Hattiesburg American as a means to bide her time until she married, at which time she planned to quit work. She said that she was really just waiting for her Prince Charming and journalism was more appealing to her than teaching.⁶ She did, through her choice of professions, reject a traditional female profession, which may be indicative of a larger interest in a career. In 1960 at the age of thirty-four, Iris Turner married Robert Kelso. Kelso was a rewrite man at the New Orleans States. This change in her marital

³ Anne O’Brien, “Iris Turner Kelso: A Portrait of the Queen of Louisiana Political Journalism and Her Subjects,” (M. A. thesis, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1989), 138.

⁴ Interview with Iris Turner Kelso, 51, 58.

⁵ Letter from the Editor, Figaro, 31 May 1978, 2.

⁶ Interviews with Iris Turner Kelso, 11.

status could have led to her leaving the workplace, but she had been working for twelve years and enjoyed her job so she continued to work. The Kelsos never had children, which made it easier for her to continue working at the newspaper and later at the television station. Twelve years into their marriage, Robert Kelso died. Once again Iris Kelso became the sole source of her income. Since Iris Kelso married at an older age than most women of her time and since the Kelsos never had children, she did not have that added responsibility in her life. Iris Kelso chose to remain in the workforce when she might have quit working; this was different from Sallie Rhett Roman who worked to help ease her families financial trouble and Helen Grey Gilkison who worked to support herself as a single woman.

Iris Kelso did not enter the world of political journalism as a woman alone. Two other female journalists of her time wrote for newspapers and covered New Orleans' city hall, Ruth Sullivan and Lee Davis. Sullivan wrote for the New Orleans States and Davis wrote for the New Orleans Item. Kelso never felt like she was the first woman in political reporting since she followed Ruth Sullivan and came to New Orleans after World War II when women had started working the police beat and other areas of reporting that had previously been assigned to men. At that time, though, there were still many more men than women in journalism, and all the editors were men except for the society page editors.⁷

Unlike Sallie Roman, Kelso did not use her byline or voice to hide her gender. When she was unmarried her byline was Iris Turner and after she married Robert Kelso she changed her byline to Iris Kelso. But like Gilkison who used language in the "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy" column to describe the activities of the Louisiana state capital

⁷ Ibid, v, 19.

from an insider's perspective, Kelso also sought to portray herself as an insider and though not in the same way as Roman and Gilkison. Kelso did not mask her identity or blatantly court the halls of power for her own gain. Her insider status was subtle since over time the journalistic community had come to place a higher premium on objectivity. Kelso incorporated that element of objectivity into her identity and presented herself to her readers as an insider who had knowledge of political situations but was not compromised by her access since she was a journalist and therefore objective. Her insider perspective was useful since it worked to legitimize the information and opinions she put in her articles. The premise was that she knew all this information since she had an intimate knowledge of the situation and its context. An example of this use of voice appeared in a Figaro article in 1978. Kelso reported on a cocktail party given for State Representative Louis Charbonnet to support his 1979 reelection campaign. Kelso's description made it obvious that she was in attendance and had ample access to these powerful people as well as the political gossip of the moment. The buzz at the party, she reported, was that "[Dutch] Morial [would] come out with an endorsement" of Charbonnet "if a poll . . . show[ed] his endorsement [was] needed."⁸ Kelso's attendance at the party and her access to the political players was the reason that she had a complete understanding of Morial's careful spending of his political capital.

Her insider's knowledge extended to familiarity with the politicians themselves. In her last article written for the Times-Picayune, Kelso described some moments of personal experiences that she had with certain politicians. This indicated that they had allowed Kelso into their personal lives throughout her career. She described an incident

⁸ Iris Kelso, "Iris Kelso on Politics," Figaro, 22 February 1978. Ernest "Dutch" Morial was mayor of New Orleans from 1972 to 1986.

during 1987, when former Governor Edwin Edwards hosted her as a guest at the governor's mansion. She portrayed him as a thoughtful person who "turned on the TV set to be sure it was working, asked [her] if [she] wanted any magazines, then checked out the bathroom for guest towels and soap." For Kelso this was a glimpse into a part of Edwards that was not evident to the public and had never been obvious to her. She had always known him as a "cynical man, a man with a quick silver mind and great personal magnetism."

Kelso also had a personal experience with former Mayor of New Orleans, Ernst "Dutch" Morial. In 1978, after a meeting that they had both attended in Boston, Kelso traveled to New Haven, Connecticut, with Morial, to meet his daughter at Yale. What Kelso saw that afternoon in Julie Morial's dorm room was a father with his daughter. This was diametrically opposed to his image as mayor where he was often a difficult angry man dealing with the problems of an urban area.⁹

In Kelso's coverage of state politics she created an image of herself as the insider who not only was surrounded by politicians, like Gilkison was, but at some point was accepted into their world. Her first significant piece covering state politics was about Governor Earl Long's commitment to a mental institution.¹⁰ Kelso's articles about Long's breakdown were sympathetic. She noted that none of Long's immediate family and none of his "political lieutenants" were with him.¹¹ She said that she was "so touched by the sight of this crazy man and the tragedy of what was happening to him. It was just an emotional thing for" her. She took an affectionate tone on the subject of Earl

⁹ Iris Kelso, "Writers Finale: Rembrances of Politicians Past," *Times-Picayune*, 15 December 1996, Metro, B7.

¹⁰Interview with Iris Kelso, 25. At that time, 1959, Iris Kelso was not married. Her name was Iris Turner. She married Robert Kelso in 1960.

¹¹ Anne O'Brien, "Iris Turner Kelso," 148.

Long and described some of the many stories people told about him. Possibly because Governor Earl Long was her first big assignment, Kelso remembered him fondly. She saw him as a continuing part of Louisiana politics: “He’s there every time a group of people tell his stories.” Remembering her first big break through a warm story about Long indicates her admiration and fascination with one individual that she covered in politics. This event was her entrance to the world of statewide Louisiana politics and it shaped her tone.

Kelso also presented herself as an active investigator in her articles. The last piece written by Kelso for Figaro illustrated the way that she, as an insider, could get the “scoop” for her readers in a story that was local but had statewide consequences. This feature article was about Lea and Chalin Perez, sons of the late Leander Perez, Sr. She considered it the best story she ever wrote for that paper.¹² Interestingly she used several biblical allusions in the story. The subtitle was “The Feud Between the Perez Brothers Is A Battle Of Blood Between The Elder Who Was Denied His Birthright, And The Younger, Who Assumed Power.” This reference to the Old Testament story of Isaac’s sons Jacob and Esau elevated the fight to a dispute of epic proportions.¹³ The other biblical reference to the Perez brothers was of Cain and Abel.¹⁴

The feud between these two brothers from Plaquemines Parish was important because their family had control of a fortune from oil money and the entire parish government. Indeed, the influence of the family extended over the entire state. The conflict started when Leander Perez named his younger son, Chalin Perez, his successor as head of Plaquemines parish government. Kelso spoke with Lea and Chalin Perez

¹²Interview with Iris Turner Kelso, 25, 61.

¹³ Genesis 27: 1 – 40.

¹⁴ Genesis 4: 1 – 16.

separately. She spent several evenings with Lea Perez, the older brother, at his home in New Orleans getting his side of the dispute with his brother. She contacted Lea because she knew that Chalin would not spill the family secrets whereas Lea had some grudges that made protecting the family less important.¹⁵ She also got reactions from Chalin Perez. Kelso knew how to negotiate the political workings of this powerful family to gather inside information for a feature article.

Kelso also created the image of being inside the circle of state politicians. One such politician was Dave Treen. Treen, a Republican, entered the race for governor in 1979. Kelso's article described his three-stop announcement tour for that office as a calm and serious event, compared to that of another candidate, Louis Lambert, who held a flashy three-day announcement. In the comparison of these two campaigns, Kelso implied that she was one of the few journalists following Treen's announcement while Lambert's announcement was a zoo of journalists all getting the same story. She insinuated that a reader could get the story about Lambert anywhere, but only from her could you get the report about Treen.

Kelso described Treen as a "man of principle" who wrote a substantive speech, "reflecting his own personal goals for the state." This Republican candidate had paid his dues through years of running for "office many times when he had little chance of winning. He ran three times against the late Congressman Hale Boggs in the Second Congressional District, and he was the Republican candidate for Governor against Edwin W. Edwards in 1972 and received forty-three percent of the vote." She admired that he was not a political newcomer but an experienced player in the political game.

¹⁵ Interviews with Iris Kelso, 61.

Kelso described his announcement speech as one without “campaign rhetoric” and without “buzz words for conservative Republicans.” She portrayed Treen as an anti-politician who described the strategies of his potential administration including “(1) dealing with state finances in the face of declining oil and gas production; (2) education, training and job placement; (3) helping the handicapped; (4) protecting the natural environment.” This “reasonable” list of goals for a political administration, plus Treen’s reticent personality, separated him from the other politicians who were running against him. In Kelso’s opinion this was why Treen had a chance to win the gubernatorial election as a Republican in Louisiana. That would be a feat, considering he would be the “first Republican governor in more than 100 years” in the Bayou State.¹⁶

As Treen’s campaign progressed another challenge arose, how would he, a white Republican candidate, get enough black support to win the election and maintain that support in order to be able to work with the legislature after taking office. Kelso addressed the issue of African-American support for Treen. Many in the African-American community were troubled by his having been head of the States Rights Party in 1960 and the connection he had with Leander Perez, a segregationist. Treen addressed their fears by stating that, “he [wished] he could erase this from his record and that he was involved in the States Rights Party for philosophical, not racial reasons.”¹⁷ Kelso pointed out that other than Treen’s claim to have put that portion of his life behind him that his campaign had taken stands favorable to blacks and that blacks had been involved in his campaign from the beginning. Treen was elected governor of the state of Louisiana in 1979. Treen’s campaign may have been fully covered by the Louisiana press after he

¹⁶ Iris Kelso, “What Makes David Run?,” Figaro, 11 October 1978, 9.

¹⁷ Iris Kelso, “Black Backing For Treen?” Times-Picayune, 18 November 1979, Sec. 1, 8.

announced his candidacy but Kelso was given access to the quiet beginning of a campaign that surprised the political pundits when Treen won.

A state politician who influenced Louisiana's political landscape by both his personality and his longevity was Edwin Edwards. He served as governor from 1972 to 1980, again from 1984 to 1988, and finally from 1992 – 1996. In Edwards's second year of his fourth term, Kelso wrote an article about how she was disappointed in Edwards. He seemed to have lost his magic political touch. He had twice appointed people to serve on the board for the New Orleans casino whose financial backgrounds were so questionable that the Louisiana Senate would not approve them. Even his children were cause for concern. His daughter, Anna, "allegedly accepted \$4,000 from a woman who wanted a seat on the cosmetology board." Though Edwards claimed that he told her to return the money, it seemed to bring back memories of other indiscretions by members of his family. Kelso was unambiguous in her observations about the governor. She wondered if "the old magic [had] deserted Edwards or whether he just [didn't] care anymore."¹⁸ Kelso's tone in this article about Edwards was like a parent who has watched a child with much potential fail miserably. She did not blast Edwards's performance with the moral indignation of a political pundit but she addresses his failures with an attitude of intimacy.

After Edwards's disappointing last term as governor, a new era began when Mike Foster was elected governor in 1996. After the general election Kelso said that "Foster came from nowhere in the campaign. Whoever heard of a bald, overweight candidate with a mustache making it in this era of television. But voters [were] longing for

¹⁸ Iris Kelso, "Failing Grade," *Times-Picayune*, 3 January 1993, Metro B7. "... it reminded us of the 1977 story that Edwards' former wife, Elaine, had accepted \$10,000 from the South Korean businessman Tongsun Park."

something real. A proven conservative.”¹⁹ During the end of 1995, Kelso’s articles praised him for the “magnificent appointments to his staff and equally good decisions on his legislative team. They have ability, integrity and reform written all over them.”²⁰

Within two months of his inauguration in 1996, though, Foster came under criticism by Kelso. Foster had signed an executive order that “was designed to end special preferences for minorities and women in the awarding of state contracts – insofar as such programs aren’t mandated by federal or state law and thus beyond his control.”²¹ Kelso’s response the governor’s order was to feature in an article a person who would be affected by it. The introduction of Gwen Carter, an African-American woman, who ran a small travel agency and had received a contract through a minority program, from the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, which she would not have been able to get otherwise.²² Carter’s contract with the Board was extended after its initial offering based on her satisfactory service. Kelso brought a real person to her readers who benefited from affirmative action programs that Foster was targeting.

In defending his executive order, Foster said that those who were upset about it were “whoopin’ and hollerin.”²³ This caused even more controversy. Two national organizations, Essence magazine and the National Urban League, declared a boycott of New Orleans conferences and events. At the urging of President of the Senate Randy Ewing, United States Representative William Jefferson spoke with Foster about a way to resolve the dispute. Foster agreed to a “program for economically disadvantaged

¹⁹ Iris Kelso, “Wrapup On The Best And Worst Of The Campaigns,” Times-Picayune, 22 October 1995, Metro B9.

²⁰ Iris Kelso, “Reviewing the Past Year - - From Jolts To Obsessions,” Times-Picayune, 24 December 1995, Metro B7.

²¹ Iris Kelso, “Wrong Words?” Times-Picayune, 4 February 1996, Metro B7.

²² Iris Kelso, “The Affirmative Action Stumble,” Times-Picayune, 18 January 1996, Metro B7.

²³ Iris Kelso, “Wrong Words?” Metro B7.

business owners . . . black or white, male or female – can get significant help on loan guarantees, management training and monitoring.”²⁴ This negotiated settlement resulted in the holding of two events in New Orleans by Essence magazine and the National Urban League. Kelso described not only the details of the negotiations between the state of Louisiana and these two African-American organizations, but she revealed her insight into the consequences of Foster’s action on minorities with small businesses.

Kelso discussed her opinions on the political events in New Orleans as well as those of the state. She did not simply report events, but she articulated the possible repercussions of the events on all parties concerned, as Roman had, from the perspective of an insider. As a resident, Kelso was very concerned in her articles about city politics and their overall effect on New Orleans. Race had always been an issue in New Orleans politics because the city had a large black population. When Dutch Morial announced his candidacy for mayor he “made it clear that he [didn’t] want to be rated as THE BLACK CANDIDATE . . . he [wanted] to be rated on his own abilities.” Kelso noted that since the “city is 50 per cent black . . . his technical blackness [was] clearly his ace in the race.”²⁵ In a city where white politicians often represented the black population, it was important when Morial, the first black mayor was elected.

After Morial’s election, Kelso discussed the mayor elect with one of his supporters. Kelso was at the home of Frank Friedler, New Orleans City Councilman District A, the only councilman to back Morial for mayor.²⁶ While she and Friedler had drinks outside, he shared with her his opinions about Morial’s approach to selecting a

²⁴ Iris Kelso, “Open-Minded Settlement,” Times-Picayune, 18 February 1996, Metro B7.

²⁵ Iris Kelso, “Iris Kelso On Politics: Dutch Morial, Can He Make It Happen?” Figaro, 20 July 1977, 3.

²⁶ Iris Kelso, “Iris Kelso on Politics: Friedler Calls On Morial To Exorcise The Landrieu Ghost,” Figaro, 3 May 1978, 4.

new police chief and his selection of the members of his administration. The article implies a meeting of peers discussing the incoming political administration. Even the description of Friedler's backyard, with references to the quiet garden and the brick walls, alluded to the acceptance of Kelso into a private portion of the political world. It was implied that Kelso has access to Morial through his supporters.

Kelso also had personal access to Harry Connick, the controversial District Attorney of New Orleans from the 1970s to the 1990s. In two articles in Figaro she presented the criticism of Connick's opponents and his response to them. Many of Connick's critics were former employees in Connick's office. They admitted that he was a good District Attorney and tough on crime, but they felt that he was impossible to work for or with. They criticized him for the centralized power structure in his office and suspected that certain people had undue influence over him. In the District Attorney's office, in New Orleans, assistant district attorney's were asked to work long hours for little money and with little autonomy over the cases that they handled. According to critics, it was "difficult to handle their cases with Connick's office because his trial assistants [were] not allowed to make any decisions on their own."²⁷ Each decision on a case had to be handled by the assistant, their supervisor, and finally by Connick himself. This criticism of Connick depicted a man with an overwhelming need to control all things around him. The second criticism dealt with possible influence over Connick by one of three people; Connick's wife, Anita; William Wessel, Connick's former first assistant; and Raymond Comstock, Connick's chief investigator. Kelso seemed to dismiss this

²⁷ Iris Kelso, "Two Faces of Harry," Figaro, 20 December 1978, 25.

concern since there seemed to be no evidence of any of influence altering any judicial outcomes.

Kelso also wrote an article that allowed Connick to respond to these criticisms. It did not dismiss the criticism that had been directed toward him, but Kelso used it to fill out a picture of a complicated man. As for the centralized nature of the office, Connick said that this was a simple management technique. He knew what cases were coming in and out of the office and how they were being handled. This enforced his desire for accountability. “One result of this management is that cases under Connick [went] to trial within sixty days of the time they [were] accepted.” This type of centralized decision making resulted in “even-handedness among the sections,” regarding plea agreements.²⁸ Connick felt strongly that his office was well equipped to deal with the challenges of prosecuting the criminals of the city of New Orleans. Kelso presented her readers with a picture of Harry Connick as a man with a very tough job that required his management style. She also called the job of being an Assistant District Attorney a “plum job,” though it only paid 13,000 dollars a year it delivered the experience to “set you up for life.”²⁹ Her statement implied that because of the work experience a person gained under Connick’s tough system, much of the criticism about his unfairness was unwarranted. Kelso described the complexities of both the District Attorney and his office and she gave her readers access to the enigmatic public servant.

Kelso’s coverage of political campaigns, particularly local races offered her readers complete political details. She would often describe how an endorsement by a political official for a candidate would affect the race and create political alliances. Two

²⁸ Kelso, “The Other Side of Harry,” *Figaro*, 27 December 1978, 11.

²⁹ Kelso, “Two Faces of Harry,” 25.

incidents in particular had to do with Mayor Marc Morial's endorsements. In both cases race was a major issue.

In 1994, Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Revius Ortique retired from a seat on the bench that was designed to provide representation for the large African-American population in New Orleans. Of the three candidates who ran for the open seat, one was a white woman named Miriam Waltzer, the other two candidates were African-Americans. Waltzer had been a long time civil rights advocate. Marc Morial, the third black mayor of New Orleans, endorsed Civil District Judge Bernedette Johnson, an African-American woman. His endorsement, along with some heavily negative and hostile campaigning, galvanized the black voting population to vote to maintain at least one African-American Justice on the highest bench in the state.³⁰ Kelso described the "highly charged and divisive" atmosphere of the campaign. She challenged Morial's claim that "this race can mean a 'healing' for the community." She knew that the election had "left some bad feelings in the white community, and no rhetoric from the mayor about 'healing' [would] cure it." Kelso obviously disapproved of the negative campaign and the effect it had on the New Orleans population, dividing rather than uniting it. Because of Kelso's full understanding of the consequences of the results of the election for the State Supreme Court seat, she moved an analytical step past reporting Morial's declaration that this was a "victory for our community."³¹

Kelso also described another race in which Morial's endorsement had major consequences in the political community. In 1996 Marc Morial endorsed District

³⁰ Iris Kelso, "Civil Rights Crusade For Court Seat," Times-Picayune, 11 September 1994, Metro, B7.

³¹ Iris Kelso, "Waltzer Is Out, But Bad Feelings Linger," Times-Picayune, 9 October 1994, Metro, B7.

Attorney Harry Connick for reelection. Connick, who was white, had held the elected position for twenty-two years when he came up for reelection in 1996. Morial's endorsement was based on his family's political history. Harry Connick endorsed Dutch Morial, Marc Morial's father, in 1967, when he ran for a state legislative seat. Despite the history, Kelso believed that this endorsement created a "complicated position." Morial "decided to back a white incumbent against African-American challengers. That [was] a risk for a mayor who plan[ed] to run for a second term."³² Kelso was very aware of the racial composition of the population of New Orleans when she wrote political commentary. New Orleans had a majority black population and its voting power created challenges for white politicians. She was also very conscious of the political alliances that develop within the political system and described them for her readers. This type of back room deal would not have been as obvious to the public as it was to Kelso.

Through the over forty years that Iris Turner Kelso worked in journalism, she commented on and criticized political figures in her columns. She entered the workforce as a single woman to support herself and continued working after she married. She had fewer obstacles, as far as the role of women, since she started working after World War II when more women had entered the workforce. Just like Roman and Gilkison, she used voice to portray herself as an insider, which helped legitimize the views that she presented in the articles. Her use of voice implied that her acceptance into politics gave her the ability to tell the untold story without being tainted by politics because of her journalistic integrity. She covered a wide variety of political topics in her columns from the governor's race to the race for the New Orleans Council. As an insider, she did not

³² Iris Kelso, "Connick's Tough Reelection Road," Times-Picayune, 22 August 1996, Metro, B7.

challenge the over all structure of power, but she did criticize the power elite to a greater extent than Roman and Gilkison had.

Conclusion

Sallie Rhett Roman, Helen Grey Gilkison, and Iris Turner Kelso were journalists covering politics in Louisiana consecutively over a hundred-year period. The societal restraints that Roman negotiated during the late nineteenth century were more restrictive than when Gilkison and Kelso entered the field. As journalists they challenged these cultural restraints through their articles about politics. Given that their profession was not typical for women during their lifetimes, they portrayed themselves as insiders to the world of politics. By approaching both their chosen topics and their audience as members of the political world, they sought to establish their authority to have and disseminate their opinions. But if three women portrayed themselves as insiders, each one created her insider status in a different way.

Roman's insider status was created by masking her gender. The nineteenth century's image for women did not include writing strongly opinionated editorials on politics, trade and the economy. This sort of public expression of opinion on what were deemed masculine subjects challenged the role of the Southern lady whose irrationality would have made the appropriate analysis impossible and had no business discussing such matters. In order to conceal the fact that she was a woman, Roman signed her articles with an ambiguous name and often used a man as the first person point of view in her articles. These elements suggested to her readers that she was indeed a man. Finally her masculinity was created through the subjects she chose to address in her articles. Complex issues of trade relations and the effect of national legislation on the state of Louisiana were treated in very analytical ways. She never approached these topics from

the standard of women's moral authority but from the position that practicality and economic growth was the driving force for change. By masking her gender she created the illusion that she was a member of the voting public, white men, and part of the established power structure.

Rather than masking her gender to portray herself as an insider, Gilkison cultivated access to the state's political officials. Cultural circumstances were not as restrictive for Gilkison as they were for Roman. Gilkison, as a single woman, worked without hiding her identity. According to family myth, she chose to remain single and even rejected a potential mate to pursue her career. Her political access was based on her proximity to those in powerful positions. It was through this proximity that she was involved in the Reveille scandal of 1934, where then Senator Huey P. Long appointed her censor of the Reveille, the student newspaper at Louisiana State University. She also was deputized by the coroner immediately following the shooting of Long to search the senator's body.¹ In her articles she portrayed her access to state politics through her syndicated column the "Louisiana Hurdy-Gurdy." A type of society column, the "Hurdy-Gurdy" described the activity in and around the state capitol. By associating everyday with those in political office, Gilkison could describe the lives of the politicians with first hand authority.

Kelso's insider status was portrayed in order to suggest her expertise on the political events and consequences that she covered in her articles. Her situation was different from both Roman and Gilkison in that she was both single and married during her working career. Though she entered the workforce by necessity, she continued to

¹ John DeMers , "Maggie: The Life and Times of the Louisiana Newspaper Woman," (M. A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1984), 52 - 64.

work after her marriage by choice. Kelso also encountered fewer problems with gender roles than the previous two journalists. Women were more common in journalism in particular and the workforce in general after World War II, which is when Kelso entered the job market. In her articles she did portray herself as an insider, though in different ways than Roman and Gilkison. With the increased emphasis on objectivity in the field of journalism, she crafted an insider status that was much more subtle and tempered by the need to be objective. Her access to political figures and her full understanding and analysis of the political circumstances rather than a direct parroting of the positions of those already in power did not taint her journalism with bias. It was her journalistic integrity that allowed her to criticize the public officials and still present herself as someone with full access to the politics of Louisiana.

All three women understood that in order to publish articles in newspapers a rapport must be developed with the reader. Part of developing a relationship was projecting a persona that the reader would accept. For Roman this meant masking her gender and creating a persona that was male and therefore allowed to participate publicly in political and economic debates. For Gilkison her persona was that of a social insider, a person who had everyday access to the people in public office. For Kelso, her insider status was created based on her thorough understanding of political situations and events. All three women reflected the current power structure through their approach to their subjects and audience.

The careers of three political journalists do not give a full picture of the circumstances and all the methods that women used to enter and find acceptance within the workplace. They do, though, provide three case studies on women in different time

periods and how they gained entrance to the public sphere by controlling the image projected. For these three women there were no banners raised in protest or rallies outside of office buildings to force the powers that be to allow them to increase the public space for women. Nor once they entered did they use their positions on behalf of women's rights or any other disadvantaged group. They increased their public involvement by displaying themselves as individuals that their readers would accept; insiders.

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