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Reinventing The Body Politic:
Women, Consumer Culture, and Civic Identity
From Suffrage to the New Deal

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Jamie Mayhew Bufalino

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Brian Lloyd, Chairperson

Dr. Catherine Allgor

Dr. Molly McGarry

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The Dissertation of Jamie Mayhew Bufalino is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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Dedication

To my daughters Lily, Emma and Rachel Bufalino who have generously shared their childhood with this dissertation.

.As I complete this dissertation just days before my daughter Lily's 10th birthday, I wonder if I'd have pursued graduate school if I'd known how long it would take. I'm glad I didn't know.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

Jamie Mayhew Bufalino

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
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Dr. Brian Lloyd, Chairperson

“Reinventing the Body Politic: Women, Consumer Culture, and Civic Identity from Suffrage to the New Deal” argues that social feminists of the 1920s found in consumer culture a means through which to create a model of female political participation that was consistent both with their own ideals and pervasive images of modern womanhood accepted by most Americans. By adopting the images, and methods of consumer culture in their rhetoric, women’s political organizations attempted to wrap a new political identity for women in the familiar trappings of consumer culture. In so doing, they solidified the transformation of twentieth-century political culture from its roots in local political party machines to a modern form in which national public relations professionals and issue-based lobbies dominated.

My dissertation unites social feminism and consumer culture through the notion of the consumerist compromise. Striking an intermediate path using the tenets of consumer culture, social feminists argued that modern consumer conveniences granted women the free time to pursue interests outside the home, that women's status as consumers made them vital to the national economy, and that the complexities of modern industrial life blurred the lines between domestic and public spheres making politics increasingly significant to the quality of women's lives. Social feminist organizations accepted this image of modern American womanhood as a public relations strategy designed to increase female voter participation and, in turn, their leverage as lobbyists. The consumerist compromise helped social feminists' usher in a modern American liberalism consistent with their progressive social reform agenda and in which they served as experts in labor relations, industrial health and safety, and child welfare. Their success during the New Deal was the culmination of these efforts and reflected both their lasting impact on American politics and the limits of their political power.

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Introduction

“For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy’s wing.”¹

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s rumination about reality expressed the sense of uncertainty both lamented and celebrated in the 1920s by a group of *avant-garde* American writers collectively known as the “Lost Generation.”² Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the interwar period, which captured the growing pains of a nation moving swiftly into modernity, was founded on a profound disillusionment with the Western values that had dominated American culture since the nineteenth century, including the Victorian faith in technological and scientific progress as a force for good, the Protestant notion of the perfectibility of humanity through hard work, and white chauvinism as a justification for colonialism and segregation. The horrors of World I revealed the fallacy of these values to a generation of young writers forced to witness and participate in the unprecedented scale, brutality, and fruitlessness of modern warfare. While most Americans did not view the interwar period as the complete cultural schism that members of “The Lost Generation” did, many social critics including historian Frederick Lewis Allen and sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd shared Fitzgerald’s view that the 1920s was a period of significant cultural change in which Victorian social norms competed for dominance with a modern consumer-based culture.³

Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is a cautionary tale of the dangers of a world rooted in the shallow foundation of consumer culture, the metaphorical fairy-wings

described above. Like modern advertisements, the novel is peopled primarily by the young, the beautiful, and the wealthy. Lacking any sort of binding moral code, the title character Jay Gatsby attempts to live up to the vision of himself he developed in late adolescence. As advertisers create a demand for their products by placing them within a social tableaux, an appealing vignette that suggests through visual queues social status, emotion, and moral value, so too were Gatsby's manner of dress and speech, his lavish parties and, in particular, his luxurious home intended to illicit the desire of his obsession, Daisy Buchanan. Fitzgerald critiques Gatsby's notion that one can make over one's life simply by recreating one's image – the founding principle of consumer culture – as Gatsby's dream of happiness with Daisy proves not only unattainable but also destructive to himself and others.

The dawn of modernity in *The Great Gatsby* is characterized as much by the decline of nineteenth-century Victorian social mores as by the rise of modern consumer culture. Fitzgerald fails to mourn the demise of a nineteenth-century ideology in which industrialization rendered humanity cogs whose moral value was determined by their place within the industrial system – industrialists and professionals were good people by virtue of their wealth while workers' poverty served as evidence of their moral failings. Yet Fitzgerald's ambivalence regarding consumer culture as a replacement for Victorian morality is the central theme of the novel. The significance of the shift from a culture defined by industrial production to one characterized by consumption is made manifest in the novel through a roadside billboard advertising the services of an optometrist, Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, whose gigantic spectacled eyes rise prominently out of the "valley of ashes,"

an industrial area characterized by an “impenetrable cloud” of industrial soot and located beyond “the dark undeserted saloons of the faded-gilt nineteen-hundreds.”⁴ Throughout the novel the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg watch the characters as they attempt to recreate reality for their own benefit, lying to themselves and each another with impunity. The climax of the book in which a woman is carelessly killed by a speeding car, takes place under the watchful eyes of Dr. Eckleburg.⁵ Those eyes, which represent an omniscient God to the victim’s grief-stricken husband, likewise bore witness to the final self-serving lie that results in Gatsby’s death.⁶ The valley of ashes and the Eckleburg billboard represent, respectively, the decline of Victorian values and the rise of consumer culture. American industrialization is reduced to ashes, God to a powerless, amoral advertisement, and humanity to a group of self-absorbed careless people. *The Great Gatsby* captures Fitzgerald’s sense of profound anxiety about the rising influence of consumer culture that was reshaping American values in what he perceived to be a vacuum created by the decline of Victorian social norms.

This study begins with Fitzgerald’s rendering of the 1920s as an illustration of one particularly keen observer’s sense of this period as one of significant cultural change. *The Great Gatsby* portrays with vivid imagery both the inadequacy of traditional social norms in addressing the complexities of modern life in the aftermath of World War I and the uncertainty about what American modernity would be. The major figures within this dissertation – female reformers concerned with establishing a place for themselves in American politics following the achievement of suffrage – were, like Fitzgerald, well aware that traditional values, hierarchies and institutions were no longer sufficient to

meet the challenges of modern social, economic and political conditions. They saw the increasing presence of consumer culture infiltrating diverse areas of American life in the archetypal female consumer who came to occupy an important role in the national economy and in a new political culture that mirrored consumerist methods of influencing public opinion. Understanding like Fitzgerald, that consumer culture represented the future and seeing it as an avenue to expand women's influence outside the home, the women discussed herein sought to use consumer culture as a vehicle to achieve a complex social and political agenda in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Most of the major women's organizations active in the 1920s can be placed loosely within the broad category of social feminism.⁷ Although they belonged to myriad organizations and pursued different social and political agendas, the women of the period have come to refer to them collectively as social feminists because they shared the belief that women's biological differences from men – their physical weakness, ability to bear and nurse children – predisposed them to be morally superior to men and that as such their good influence was critical to the reform of American society and politics. The League of Women Voters, Women's Trade Union League, National Consumers' League, Women's Joint Congressional Committee and most members of the women's divisions of the Republican and Democratic Parties, all of which will be discussed here, were guided by this underlying philosophy. The one exception, discussed in chapter three, was the National Woman's Party, one of the remaining remnants of radical feminism in the 1920s, which argued that women in America deserved equal status with men on the basis of their shared humanity rather than their feminine qualities.

Social feminists in the 1920s straddled traditional and modern cultures, gender ideologies, and political traditions. They upheld traditional views of the family as the foundation of American society and placed women in the vital role of nurturing middle-class and elite American youth yet they railed against the industrial system that victimized women and children of the working class. They continued to cherish Victorian notions of gender differentiation in which women as a sex were viewed to be physically weaker but morally stronger than men and in which women's moral compass provided them with a vital social role as caretakers of the home and the community. Yet they believed that women's perspective was vital to the repair of a political system broken by partisanship, self-interestedness, and greed. They championed American liberalism which held that the active participation of the nation's people was the key to good government yet they argued that the time for laissez-faire political philosophy was over, that modern industrial conditions demanded that government be accountable for the welfare of its citizens. Highly innovative in their attempts both to make a place for women in American politics and to reform the American political system, social feminists were participants in many of the discourses in the 1920s that sought to address the questions posed by Fitzgerald and others about what modern America should be.

Placing the rhetoric of social feminists in the context of these diverse discourses requires locating it within several historiographies. The first relates to women's involvement in the progressive movement of the early twentieth century. Historians have suggested that the 1920s was the period in which progressivism lost its momentum, succumbing to the conservative political backlash that followed the conclusion of the

First World War and the rise of communism in Eastern Europe.⁸ For women, the achievement of suffrage in 1920 also was thought to hasten the demise of progressive coalitions as women's groups fragmented over latent class, race, and ideological differences masked by their unified pursuit of suffrage.⁹ Two major studies in the 1980s, Nancy Cott's *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* and Susan Ware's *Beyond Suffrage: Women of the New Deal* took exception to this view, arguing that fragmentation of the suffrage coalition resulted in reformulations of women's groups that continued to work for the improvement of conditions for women. Those efforts bore fruit in the gradual change in cultural perceptions of women's role and in the development of the welfare state represented by the New Deal.¹⁰ Since then a number of historians have published works taking a closer look at the work of individual women's social clubs and political groups confirming the assertions of Cott and Ware that women continued to be politically active in the 1920s.¹¹

This dissertation builds on Ware's notion that a social feminist network of women developed in Washington D.C. and New York that nurtured the seeds of social reform in the hostile 1920s and gained prominence in the 1930s as part of the New Deal.¹² Like Ware, I argue that the doctrine of social feminism ultimately limited the ability of the leading female political figures to pursue their political aspirations beyond the 1930s. By exploring the discourses developed by the most prominent women's political organizations of the 1920s instead of focusing on the careers of individual women as Ware does, this dissertation highlights the central role played by consumer culture in the development of social feminism during this period. This study contributes to the existing

body of scholarship on women's political contributions in the 1920s by suggesting that women's appropriation of the rhetoric, public relations strategies, and economic assumptions inherent in consumer culture facilitated the larger transformation of American political culture in the 1930s.

This dissertation also contributes to historical scholarship both by adding to scholars' understanding of the role of advertising in shaping gender identities between the wars and by chronicling its impact on American political culture. In *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* Roland Marchand argues that the use social tableaux significantly impacted the community of discourse in American culture by providing a common vocabulary and syntax of verbal and visual images that influence the terms in which society thinks.¹³ Marchand argues that parables and clichés in advertising were so successful and were used so frequently because consumer audiences were drawn to the very personal, archetypal narratives with which they could identify and which provided models of how to live with the anxieties of modern society.¹⁴

Art historian John Berger's work, *Ways of Seeing*, likewise argues that the repetition of images in advertising provides cultural context for viewers' understanding of their own roles in society.¹⁵ Berger argues that advertisements are "not merely an assembly of competing messages: [but] a language in itself which is always being used to make the same general proposal ... that we [can] transform ourselves, or our lives, buying something more ... that will make us in some way richer."¹⁶ Publicity, which Berger defines as the sum total of the products of marketing that address the public, maintains its credibility despite the fact that the product does not live up to its promise to

transform the consumer upon purchase because the spectator of the image momentarily places herself within the image and in that moment is transformed within her own mind.

Recently historians have begun to examine the impact of consumer culture on American politics. In *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*, Margaret Finnegan examines the myriad ways in which women's identities as consumers influenced their sense of their roles as citizens, their public presentation of their community, and their strategies for political activism in the campaign for woman suffrage.¹⁷ She asserts that the suffrage movement's appropriation of consumer culture was critical to the development of a national dialogue about women's citizenship. Yet she suggests that the union between suffrage and consumption trivialized women's potential political contributions by limiting the scope of public perception of the movement to traditionally female domestic issues. This dissertation asserts that this dichotomy continued following suffrage and that the development of a consumer-based political identity for women was a critical step in making a female political persona acceptable to the public at large, even as it set boundaries on women's political action that female political leaders ultimately found limiting.

More than any other work to date, *The Big Vote: Gender, Consumer Culture, and the Politics of Exclusion, 1890s-1920s* credits the transformation of American political culture in the twentieth century on the rise of consumer culture.¹⁸ Author Liette Gidlow examines the five major Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns of the 1920s and argues that the campaigns were a response to American ambivalence about the meaning of citizenship in the age of nearly universal suffrage. She suggests that affluent whites transformed

political culture in the likeness of consumer culture in order to secure their political dominance over ethnic, racial, and class-based “others.” Although Gidlow discusses the League of Women Voters extensively in *The Big Vote*, she ties their agenda to more conservative civic organizations undertaking Get-out-the-vote campaigns. Gidlow does not explore the extent to which the League’s agenda differed from the other male dominated groups who led get-out-the-vote campaigns. She argues that the groups sought to maintain their existing political dominance using the methods and images of consumer culture because those images largely reflected themselves – as middle-class and elite whites. While images from consumer culture unquestionably reflected the League’s racial and class status, this dissertation will argue that the League espoused a consumer-based model of citizenship as means to make a place for their sex in politics. Far from attempting to maintain their dominance, they simply sought a foothold.

The following chapters will argue that women’s groups found in consumer culture a means through which to create a model of female political participation that was consistent both with their own social feminist beliefs and pervasive images of modern womanhood accepted by most Americans. By adopting the images, methods, and spaces created and utilized by consumer culture in their Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns, ERA pageants, and writings in popular magazines, women’s political organizations attempted to wrap a new political identity for women in the familiar trappings of consumer culture. In so doing they helped solidify the transformation of twentieth-century political culture from its roots in nineteenth-century local political party machines to a modern form in which national public relations professionals and issue-based lobbyists dominated.

This dissertation unites social feminism and consumer culture through the notion of the consumerist compromise. Social feminists' promoted in their rhetoric an image of modern womanhood based on consumer culture that was a compromise between traditional gender norms which held that women did not belong in politics and radical feminists' idea that politics should be blind to gender. Striking an intermediate path using the tenets of consumer culture, social feminists argued that modern consumer conveniences granted women the time to pursue interests outside the home, that women's status as consumers made them vital to the national economy, and that the complexities of modern industrial life blurred the lines between domestic and public spheres making politics increasingly significant to the quality of women's lives within the home. Critical to their efforts to forge a place for women in American politics in the 1920s, the consumerist compromise was vital to their success in achieving their legislative agenda in the early 1930s but ultimately limited their ability to develop political identities free of stereotypical notions of gendered expertise by the 1940s. This study argues that social feminist women's political organizations – the League of Women Voters, the Women's Trade Union League, Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the National Consumers' League – accepted the image of modern American womanhood inherent in the consumer culture in the 1920s as a public relations strategy designed to increase female voter participation and their leverage as lobbyists for social reform measures. Touting themselves as representatives of American women as a whole they needed to rally women in a show of political strength. The consumerist compromise also helped social feminists' articulate a modern American liberalism consistent with their

progressive social reform agenda and in which they would serve as experts in labor relations, industrial health and safety, and child welfare among other areas. By taking the consumerist compromise they played a major role in the transformation of American political culture to one dominated by national publicity campaigns and managed by competing lobbies. Social feminists' success during the New Deal was the culmination of these efforts and reflected both their lasting impact on American politics and the limits of their personal political power.

The following chapters chronicle social feminists' efforts to mobilize women politically by developing a rhetoric of female political participation and advocating an expansion of American liberalism to include greater governmental responsibility for social welfare. Chapter one situates the social feminist political agenda within the context of a transformation of gender ideology taking place in the 1920s from one based on the Victorian notion of separate spheres to a broader one prescribed by consumer culture in which women played a new role in maintaining and improving the household's social status. The chapter highlights the continuing importance of traditional gender ideals on mainstream culture even as consumer culture became an increasingly significant force in shaping Americans' ideals about themselves and their society. It explores a broad range of discourses regarding gender, including *Middletown*, a major sociological study published in 1925, *Main Street*, a book of the month club novel published in 1920, Listerine and "Send it to the Laundry" ad campaigns from 1925, and articles on marriage and gender relations from syndicated advice columnist Dorothy Dix among others. These sources suggest that although women won the vote in 1920, most

Americans did not see political participation as a necessary part of women's social role. Chapter one introduces the notion of the consumer compromise as a means through which social feminists attempted to create a model of female political participation that was ideologically compatible with modern gender roles promoted in consumer culture.

Chapter two explores the first major effort by social feminists to develop an image of female political participation using the consumerist compromise. Through the Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns of the 1920s, the League of Women Voters led social feminist efforts to redefine American political culture by critiquing nineteenth-century party-based political loyalties and advocating instead the notion of "expert citizenship," which called on Americans to educate themselves on current political issues and make informed choices for themselves rather than relying on party affiliation to dictate their vote. The League educated new voters and encouraged eligible voters to get out and vote by utilizing the methods of influence found in consumer culture – extensive use of print advertising, billboards, and radio; reliance on visual, emotional, and entertaining appeals; and extensive use of consumer spaces such as stores, movie theaters, and gas stations to promote politics. The League's effort to undermine the power of political parties by relocating politics in consumer spaces was based on their desire to make politics more appealing and more accessible to women. By locating political activities within a public space dominated by women they effectively undermined traditional views that women did not belong in politics.

Chapter three explores the conflict between social and radical feminists over the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Social feminists opposed the Equal Rights

Amendment because they felt that it would invalidate legislation designed to protect women workers. As advocates of the Equal Rights Amendment, the NWP opposed the idea that women's political significance stemmed from a set of feminine attributes. Given this view, they chose to develop images of the archetypal woman voter based on classical imagery from Western political culture rather than consumer culture. This effort was insufficient however to make the ERA appealing to a nation convinced that men and women's differences were both numerous and significant. The National Woman's Party's campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment highlights the impact of consumer culture on American politics in the 1920s and helps to explain why social feminists thought it necessary and advantageous to adopt the consumerist compromise, revealing the impossibly difficult task of arousing support for a model of female political participation that did not accept the tenets of 1920s gender ideology. This chapter also explores the differing views of American liberalism at the heart of social and radical feminists' opposing views on the ERA, locating social feminists at the forefront of efforts to expand American liberalism to include greater governmental responsibility for the general welfare.

Chapter four continues the discussion of social feminist efforts to establish a federal mandate for state regulation of social welfare by exploring the campaign for the Child Labor Amendment. Again highlighting the influence of consumer-based arguments and methods both by social feminists and forces opposing the Child Labor Amendment, this chapter pinpoints the change in the image of the consumer activist from

a female model long advocated by the National Consumers' League to a male one, thereby preparing the ground for the consumer citizenship of the New Deal.

Centered on Eleanor Roosevelt's ascent within American politics, the last chapter analyzes the development of social feminist rhetoric in the early 1930s and explores their rise to political prominence within the New Deal. Roosevelt was an important member of all of the social feminist groups discussed in the dissertation. By the 1930s she was their most important lobbyist in Washington and served as the single most public example of the social feminist ideology at work. Her efforts on behalf of social feminists reveal the central role of mass culture and consumer citizenship on 1930s politics, the achievement of the social feminist dreams of a new liberalism which placed social welfare measures at the center of American politics, and the limits of social feminist strategies to achieve political prominence. Beginning in the late 1930s Eleanor Roosevelt provided the first model of a political identity for women that transcended the gender-based distinctions inherent in social feminism and set the standard for female politicians for years to come.

Just as Fitzgerald saw in the 1920s the dawn of a modern America dominated by consumer culture, social feminists saw the possibility of a modernization in American gender norms and political culture precipitated by consumer culture. They sought to harness the power of consumer culture to transform American politics to reflect their view of liberalism and thus make a place for themselves at the head of new governmental programs designed to ensure the general welfare of American citizens. While these

efforts were often not completely successful in terms of their legislative agenda their effect on the general conduct of politics in the twentieth century was profound.

Endnotes

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925, p. 99.

² Coined by Gertrude Stein, to describe a group of American writers living in Paris, "The Lost Generation" including among others, Stein, Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Pasos, Sherwood Anderson, Kay Boyle, Hart Crane, Ford Maddox Ford, and Zelda Fitzgerald. For more on the "Lost Generation" see: Scott Donaldson, *Hemingway and Fitzgerald: The Rise and Fall of a Literary Friendship* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1999); Donald Pizer, *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Moment: Modernity and Place*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1996; J. Gerald Kennedy, *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*. New York: Viking Press, 1951; James R Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company*. New York: Praeger, 1974; J. Gerald Kennedy and Jackson R. Bryer, *French Connections: Hemingway and Fitzgerald Abroad*. New York St. Martins Press, 1998; William G Bailey, *Americans in Paris, 1900-1930s: A Selected Annotated Bibliography*. New York Greenwood Press, 1989.

³ Both Frederick Lewis Allen and Robert and Helen Lynd argued that consumer culture was transforming American values in the 1920s. For their arguments see: Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*. New York 1931; Robert S. and Helen H. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929.

⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 68.

⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 113-146.

⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 159-161.

⁷ Term first used in William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969, p. x, 51.

⁸ The Historiography on Progressivism is extensive and as varied as the progressives themselves: Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*. New York: Macmillan, 1930; William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*. New York: Knopf, 1955; Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917*. New York: Harper, 1954; Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953; David Potter, *People of Plenty*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1954; Arthur Link, *What Happened to the Progressives in the 1920s?* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959; Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as Social Type*. New York, 1965; David Thelen, "Social Tensions and the Origins of Progressivism," *Readings in American Political History – A Modern Reader*. Fank Otto Gatell, Paul Goodman, Allen Weinstein, eds. New York, 1972. For discussions of the impact of progressivism on women's activism see: Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977; Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*. New York: Oxford University Press. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

⁹ O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave*, p. x, 51.

¹⁰ Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, p. 145-174; Ware, Susan, *Beyond Suffrage*, p. 43-86.

¹¹ Joan M Jensen and Lois Scarf, *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics: From Consciousness to Mass Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984; Linda Gordon, *Women, the State and Welfare*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*, New York: Free Press and Harvard University Press, 1994; Kristi Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996; Sara Hunter Graham, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996; Anna L. Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Susan D. Becker, *Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981; Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*, New York: New York University Press, 1986; Elizabeth Anne Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robbin and the Women's Trade Union League*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Louise Young and Ralph Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989; Linda G. Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's party, 1912-1920*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*; Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2004; Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

¹² Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, p. 3-18.

¹³ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 13. Popular magazines of the 1920s, including Ladies Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, provide hundreds of examples of social tableau in advertising. Some of the best examples may be found in Listerine advertisements that appeared regularly in both magazines throughout the 1920s.

¹⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. Several other examples include: Allen, *Only Yesterday*; Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*; Lewis, Sinclair, *Main Street*. New York: P.F. Collier, 1920; syndicated advice columns of Dorothy Dix; Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p.53.

¹⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Viking Press, 1972, p. 43.

¹⁶ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 43.

¹⁷ Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p.169-174.

¹⁸ Liette, Gidlow, *The Big Vote: Gender, Consumer Culture and the Politics of Exclusion, 1890s-1920s*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, pps. 1-16, 140-200.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: Gender and Modernity in 1920s Consumer Culture

“Why are these women not satisfied? What are they after? What more do they want?”

“Well, my masculine friends, they want much more than you in your present obtuse attitude can imagine. They have the vote, but they want to enjoy the power that this vote entails. They are clamoring for their say politically, just as you have yours. You can no more stop the flood of this desire, now that the gates are opened, than you can keep back the aerial waves, which have brought music into the households. Women are in politics to stay, and the sooner the men accept this fact with good grace the happier will be the outcome.”¹

Democratic leader Elisabeth Marbury, quoted above, believed that women’s failure to make a greater impact on politics in the five years since the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment rested as much at the feet of men who refused to share power with female political representatives as it did of women who lacked understanding of the inner workings of the political process. She cited as an example her experience as delegate-at-large to the 1924 Democratic National Convention: the business of the convention was conducted outside the general assemblies in small committee meetings from which women were excluded. Marbury argued that male politicians viewed women merely as figureheads, more celebrated for their aesthetic appeal than their substantive contribution.²

Men’s failure to include women in the decision-making process even as they embraced women’s symbolic presence at the convention revealed, in Marbury’s mind, an assumption that women would be willing to accept a passive role in politics following

suffrage. She countered that women would not be content to be window-dressing but rather sought to add their voices to the political discourse. While Marbury did grant some legitimacy to the argument posed by male politicians that women's lack of political experience placed them in a junior role to seasoned male politicians, she viewed this situation as temporary and argued that women's lack of political savvy was actually an asset because their ideals remained uncorrupted by political partisanship. She predicted that as women became more educated and experienced in the ways of politics they would impose their will increasingly on the political system.³ Eleanor Roosevelt, another female Democrat at the Convention, found women's exclusion from the Platform Committee meeting to be equally revealing. In an interview for the *New York Times* immediately following the Convention, she stressed the need for women to "get into the game and stay in it," learning how, when, and where the political decisions were being made and making sure they were at the table influencing the discussion.⁴ Like Marbury, Roosevelt used the popular press as a medium through which to encourage female political participation.

While Marbury and Roosevelt insisted that women were entitled to and capable of equal representation in politics, both maintained the belief that women, as a group, shared a common bond based on their sex that made them essentially different in their political perspective from men, and that political experience would not evade this difference. Both assumed that women formed a distinctive constituency and therefore would act collectively in ways different from men. This widely held view, which historians have come to refer to as "social feminism," was rooted in the voluntary reform societies in

which women gathered in the nineteenth century.⁵ These efforts began at the local level, but by the turn of the twentieth century focused on state and national issues as part of the progressive movement. The final battles of the campaign for suffrage in the early twentieth century led women to articulate formally the tenets of social feminism as a means to sway men in favor of women's political emancipation. By arguing that women would act politically in the same ways that they acted socially – placing the needs of others ahead of their own, pursuing action based on morality rather than self-interest -- many suffragists sought to convince Americans that woman's suffrage would not make women more masculine but instead would bring to politics the softer touch that women brought to their homes, communities and churches.

Marbury viewed women's unique influence on politics to be as inevitable as the flow of radio waves across the country. Of course implicit in the radio wave metaphor is the radio itself, which must be present in the home to render the ever-present radio waves audible. So for Marbury was the presence of women in the political sphere necessary to make the collective voice of American women heard. This metaphor is noteworthy because it reflects her belief that readers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, who viewed numerous radio advertisements in the very issue in which her article appeared, understood consumerism to be inevitable.⁶ This link between the rhetoric of social feminism and rise of consumer culture is one that this chapter will explore.

In order to contextualize the task social feminists faced in their quest to establish a place for women in American political culture, this chapter will begin by tracing American views on gender differentiation from its roots in nineteenth-century

prescriptive literature through its modernization at the hands of social reformers and advertisers promoting consumer culture. It will explore public gender discourses present in the 1920s by examining advertising, popular literature, and the *Middletown* study – all of which suggest that consumer culture was precipitating a transition in American gender mores in the 1920s. Men and women’s roles continued to be modeled after their traditional roles within the family and those roles were based largely on social characteristics attributed to sexual difference. Even after women achieved suffrage the majority of white middle class Americans continued to believe that woman’s social role was tied to her role within the home and the local community rather than to the national process of making, administering, or adjudicating laws.

This chapter will illustrate that American consumer culture put pressure on American women to embark on a new, more public role as consumers.⁷ The role of the female consumer as presented in advertisements and political discourse in the 1920s was broadly defined to include both social and political dimensions, as women’s consumption of goods was argued to be vital both to maintaining the class status of the household and preserving the prosperity of the national economy. While many Americans viewed this transition with apprehension and sought to maintain the status quo, social feminists took advantage of this expansion of women’s conventional roles, promoting what I will refer to as a “consumerist compromise.” By this I mean that social feminists accepted the legitimacy of the separate spheres ideology inherent in the social mores of consumer culture, deriving women’s ability to take part in politics from time saved by modern conveniences and the entry into public life created by their roles as consumers. As it

develops throughout the nineteen twenties and early thirties the consumerist compromise permits women's entrance into politics on the grounds that politics have expanded to include the concerns that fall within the modern sphere of female influence created by consumer culture. This strategy is an extension of the one begun by social feminist reformers in the progressive era in which they broadened the boundaries of the domestic sphere to include the local community as a target of their reform efforts. Rather than contesting the boundaries of the female sphere, social feminists instead sought to redefine politics in the likeness of consumer culture, envisioning a female consumer citizen who could participate in politics without stepping outside the bounds of appropriate female behavior.

William O'Neill coined the term social feminism in his pioneering history of American feminism.⁸ Although the term predates the establishment of the field of women's history in the 1980s it has been adopted by women's historians such as Nancy Cott, Susan Ware, and many others to describe a particular phase in the woman's movement. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, this brand of feminism sought to improve the status of American women socially, legally, economically and politically by asserting that, on the basis of qualities inherent to their sex, women had a special role to play in the world and that they should be allowed greater freedom in order to achieve their potential.⁹

The notion that men and women's biological differences predetermined their social roles stemmed from what historian Barbara Welter called the "Cult of True Womanhood."¹⁰ She argued that nineteenth-century writers of prescriptive literature

sought to define the limits of acceptable behavior for middle-class women within a strict set of qualities, such as piety and nurturing, which they believed to be inherent to women. Proponents of the cult of true womanhood claimed that man women were born with mutually exclusive sets of qualities and thus operated within different spheres of influence. Women were confined within the domestic sphere in which their purity and kindness could both be protected and exert a soothing influence on children and male family members. The public sphere, which consisted of business and politics, was the domain of men.

A number of women's historians have noted the varied ways in which women sought to challenge the boundaries of the domestic sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, using volunteerism and, later, consumerism as the means by which to enter the public sphere.¹¹ In *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, Lori Ginzberg chronicles the advent of women's benevolent societies in the nineteenth century in which upper and middle class women sought to extend women's moral guardianship of the home into the community by teaching immigrants middle class values. Elizabeth Ewen, Kathy Peiss, and Christine Stansell all point to the important role that consumer culture played in the development of culture and class-based identities in the late nineteenth century. Florence Kelley and Landon Storrs describe the coalition developed between middle and working class women in the National Consumers' League, which pursued social activism through conscientious consumption. The final campaign for suffrage in the 1910s, described by Margaret Finnegan in *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*, was dominated by the rhetoric of female domesticity. Suffragists

sought to prove that women voters would clean up a corrupt political culture and anti-suffragists feared that the domestic sphere would be tainted by women's exposure to the corrupt world of politics.

In order to understand the contentious transition through which gender ideology passed in the 1920s, one must begin with the ideas that Americans of the period inherited from their parents. The nineteenth-century American middle class appropriated tenets of evangelical religion and American liberalism to infuse the increasing distinctions between public and domestic spheres that developed out of industrialization with a deeply gendered worldview. This distinction was regarded as absolute and natural. The public sphere was the sphere of men. Men engaged in the political and economic work of the industrializing nation. They were viewed to be by nature as well as by their exposure to the corrupting forces of the public sphere, morally compromised – prone to greed, corruption, and lust.

The private or domestic sphere was the home, a haven from the harsh world of wage or salaried labor. Women were understood to be, by nature, spiritual and nurturing therefore the domestic sphere was a morally uplifted and uplifting world in which women bestowed on the family the benefits of their innate virtue and provided a healing sanctuary that was beautiful, cultured, and loving.¹² Men returned to the bosom of the private sphere to be rejuvenated, both physically and morally. Women were cloistered within the domestic sphere, which protected them from the degrading influences of work, politics, and men. Women's role was to be a moral guide for the family and society as a whole through self-sacrifice and good works. Women were seen as physically and

intellectually weaker than men but morally stronger. Many, like Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, argued that these characteristics were causally related – women were morally stronger because their physical and mental vulnerabilities forced them to rely much more on God than on their own constitutions.¹³

Despite the fact that most women's actual lives never reflected this ideal, it remained the dominant ideology among middle and upper class Americans. A man's ability to support his household without the paid labor of wife or children was the badge of middle class status. Nineteenth-century gender ideology was so pervasive because American industrialization which sparked the rise of the middle class also ushered in the expansion of the publishing industry. Increased literacy and the availability of religious tracts and sentimental novels to the public made visible to an unprecedented number of Americans this cultural ideal. Sentimental novels depicted poignant scenes in which women who embodied the gender ideal exercised their power of influence to redeem those around them. Religious tracts promoted a gendered form of morality in which men protected women from the corrupting influence of the male world and in which women's purity, safely cloistered within the home, provided salvation for men from the degrading effects of business and politics.¹⁴

The dramatic increase in female readership that accompanied the rise of the middle-class housewife led to the publication of thousands of books, magazines, pulp novels, newspaper advice columns, and editorials promoting domesticity among women well into the twentieth century.¹⁵ The novel of sensibility or sentimental novel is a form of literature written widely in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which

sympathy and pathos were used to teach a lesson to the reader through the experiences of characters in the novel or story. The moral promoted the domestic ideal, often placing women who stepped outside the protection of the domestic sphere in severe moral and physical danger.

The death of Beth March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is a notable example. The most profound instance of Beth's power of moral persuasion in the novel is her slow and wasting death. Alcott suggested that the spectacle of Beth's willing sacrifice of her bodily existence emboldened her sister, Jo to take over her sister's role in the family and thus achieve the ideal of selfless womanhood. Beth's family was not the only one affected by the quiet girl's illness and death. The milkman, baker, grocer, butcher, and all the neighbors were grieved by her illness. Alcott suggested that Beth's affect on these people revealed her power, despite her shyness, to touch the hearts and alter the behavior of members of the world outside her home. "Simple, sincere people seldom speak much of their piety; it shows itself in acts, rather than in words, and has more influence than homilies or protestations."¹⁶ The message that Alcott sent to young readers -- Beth was a powerful moral influence and that she was a model on which they should pattern their own behavior -- illustrates what Ann Douglas called the compensatory power of nineteenth century womanhood. She defined it as "power granted to a group too significant to be entirely ignored yet deemed in some sense inferior to those who hold the real power."¹⁷ Alcott argued that women's moral superiority was as powerful and valuable, if not more so, than the economic and political power that was reserved for men. However, Douglass points out that the loss of a male

benefactor in sentimental novels through death, divorce, or abandonment revealed the extent to which women's moral superiority was dependent upon the financial support of a husband or father who could shelter them from corrupting exposure to the world of work. The lives of real men and women, particularly those who were not financially secure, frequently fell short of the ideal but popular novels suggested that such failures represented not the normal course of market forces or life cycles, but rather that underlying moral failings on the part of the woman compromised her happiness and security.¹⁸

While the Victorian ideal of the sheltered, morally righteous but practically powerless woman continued to influence American life in the 1920s, a new ideal was taking shape as consumer culture began to replace religion as the primary means of ascribing value to one's life. In the 1920s middle-class women continued to be avid readers and looked to magazines both to confirm existing ideas about their roles and to provide glimpses of the new consumerist ethic that underlay modern ideals of womanhood and housekeeping. Nineteen-twenties consumer culture opened a space in which the private world of home and the public world of capitalist enterprise met and female shoppers represented the family in the negotiations of household purchases. By "space," I am referring both to the marketplace itself and to the magazines, billboards, product labels, sponsored radio programs and other mediums in which consumers were exposed to products available for purchase. The physical space of the marketplace was not new in the 1920s, although it was expanded during this period to enable a much

greater incursion of product information within the home through mass commercial media.

Also inherent in consumer culture was a set of values that placed modern ahead of traditional, new over old, style over character, immediate gratification over reasoned selection and consumption over production of goods. While the values inherent in consumer culture and those of Christianity coexist in an uneasy balance today, the 1920s was the period when the culture of consumption first began to compete seriously with the protestant values upon which America was founded.¹⁹ This broader notion of consumer culture – a set of attitudes and rituals shared by a group of people – was new in this period and would come to define American society increasingly as the twentieth century progressed. Consumer culture was both a system of reaching and influencing a mass audience and a way of thinking about the role of consumption in society. While all Americans were exposed to the values of consumerism through various forms of media, women were affected most immediately because under the existing gender ideology women were responsible for managing the household and therefore were the primary consumers.

The shift from the production of goods within the home to the purchase of goods in the marketplace was a gradual one that began long before the 1920s. However, by the 1920s women's public role as consumers had acquired a social and political meaning that expanded the boundaries of gender norms in important ways. On a macroeconomic level, female consumers ensured the success of American industrial capitalism by increasing their consumption in step with the increasing production of the period. On a

microeconomic level women were urged to be smart shoppers, optimizing the household income. Socially, women were expected to exhibit through their consumption a personal aesthetic that highlighted the family's class status. Politically, civic organizations called on women to capitalize on their position within this new public space by boycotting unfair labor practices, establishing truth in advertising campaigns, and demanding quality control standards.

Nothing better illustrates how this ideological shift was experienced on the ground than *Middletown*, Robert and Helen Lynd's 1925 study of Muncie, Indiana.²⁰ For over two years the Lynds and their staff asked residents a battery of questions, examined the material resources within the city, and gathered extensive demographic data. Their goal was to record the behaviors of the residents of a typical American city in terms of the major types of activities in which humans engaged in the 1920s.²¹ These activities included getting a living, making a home, training the young, using leisure, engaging in religious practices, and engaging in community activities.²²

Middletown divides the majority of residents into two socioeconomic groups – the business class and the working class.²³ They defined the business class as those who earned a living through activities

“addressed predominately to people in the selling or promotion of things, services, or ideas” while the working class was defined as those who earned a living through activities addressed to making or performing services with and on things.²⁴ They argued that being born into one of these groups “[was] the most significant single cultural factor tending to influence what one does all day long throughout one's life.”²⁵

Along with this Progressive-style class analysis, the Lynds made many observations about what we would currently refer to as gender distinctions. The evidence that they collected supports the hypothesis posed here that gender relations in the 1920s continued to be influenced by the nineteenth-century notion that men and women's social roles were based on biological differences. The Lynd's found that Middletown residents believed that social roles to be biologically constructed, and that women's prescribed roles as mothers strongly influenced other roles they might play within the family and community.²⁶ Those interviewed believed that women had a propensity to be morally superior to men but also "relatively impractical, emotional, unstable, given to prejudice, easily hurt and largely incapable of facing facts or doing hard thinking."²⁷ Men were viewed to be "stronger, bolder, less pure, less refined, more logical, more reasonable, more given to see things in the large, but at home need coddling and reassurance 'like little boys.'"²⁸

Views on men and women's roles within marriage were particularly influenced by Victorian ideas regarding sex-based traits. Among Middletown residents the chief expectation of a husband was that he provide a good living and represent the family's interests in civic affairs while women were expected to be homemaker and child-rearers.²⁹ Even as Middle women embraced an idealized notions of men and women's nature and roles in society that were pervasive among the middle class, statistics regarding occupations for women in *Middletown* and elsewhere in America suggested that they were entering increasingly into professions viewed to be the domain of men.

The Lynds suggested that in 1925 the idea that men and women should occupy separate spheres and perform mutually exclusive, but mutually dependant, roles informed the structure of middle-class households. Middle-class male breadwinners' social status was secured by the fact that their wives remained at home and did not engage in paid labor; women's freedom from paid work outside the home was dependent upon their husband's salaries as middle-class professionals. But the division between men and women was much more profound than simply an arbitrary division based on social roles:

The worlds of the sexes constitute something akin to separate subcultures. Each involves an elaborate assignment of roles to its members and the development of preferred personality types emphasizing various ones of the more significant role attributes ... this culture says not only that men and women do different things; they are different kinds of people.³⁰

The Lynds' note that while mutual attraction was regarded as one of the most significant aspects of courtship and marriage, a high degree of companionship within marriage was not viewed as essential.³¹ Syndicated columnist Dorothy Dix goes even further, suggesting that husband and wife should not confide in one another but maintain the façade of ideal manhood and womanhood,

“as long as husband and wife are good actors it is the part of wisdom for their mates not to pry too deeply into the motives that inspire their conduct ... nothing does more to preserve the illusions that a man and a woman have about each other than the things they don't know.”³²

Dix suggests that men and women should seek companionship from members of their own sex rather than from their spouse implying that even within marriage gender difference was a significant divide between Americans.

Middletown was one among several groundbreaking studies of the period because it suggested that social views on a wide variety of subjects were subject to change over time and that in the 1920s consumer culture was the most important new factor influencing the development of Americans values and ideals. The Lynds claimed that Dorothy Dix' nationally syndicated advice column was "the most potent single agency of diffusion from without shaping the habits of thought of Middletown in regard to marriage and possibly represent[ed] Middletown's views on marriage more completely than any other source."³³ They based this view on a number of factors including anecdotal evidence from interviews in which "business class" women commented on their readership of news. They also noted the increasing impact of magazine readership on middle-class women's household management. They attributed the modernization of *Middletown* households in large part to the rise in monthly and weekly subscriptions to such prescriptive magazines as *American Magazine*, *Delineator*, *McCall's*, *Physical Culture*, *True Story*, and *Women's Home Companion*, each of which was read by over ten percent of Middletown households. Furthermore, of 367 high school girls interviewed, ninety-four percent stated that they read one of more women's magazines per month. In the 1920s, national magazine served as important vehicles through which consumer culture was transmitted providing readers images of modern American life to which they should aspire.

By virtue of their sheer number and repetition advertisements became in the 1920s perhaps the most dominant transmitter of consumer culture. The process through which the purchase of ready-made goods became a culture that competed with long-held

religious beliefs began with advertising. Advertising fundamentally altered the way in which products were presented to consumers in the early twentieth century. As mass production dramatically increased the quantity of like items being produced by different companies, there arose the need to differentiate products – detergents, coffees, silk stockings – whose functions were identical. Using techniques first developed centuries ago by snake oil salesmen and traveling performers, advertisers sought to imbue ordinary household items with a potential beyond their immediate function. Rather than simply listing the attributes of the product, advertisers used art and language to place the product within a tableaux, thereby promoting a set of meanings and desires that were not inherent to the product in any way.

In *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, historian Roland Marchand explored how the placement of the advertised product within the ad infused the product with social significance. He claimed that the use of “social tableaux,” a series of commonly used, and easily recognizable, narratives of social situations, allowed advertisers to attribute social status, emotion, and moral value to their products through visual cues. He argued that these social tableaux significantly impacted the community of discourse in American culture by providing a common vocabulary, a syntax of verbal and visual images, that limited the terms and range within which America thought about themselves and their society.³⁴

Marchand identified parables and clichés present in numerous advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s that depicted familiar scenes and promoted commonly held values using recognizable images and phrases. For example, the parable of the first impression

warned consumers about the importance of appearing their best when meeting someone for the first time. Listerine mouthwash advertisements pioneered this technique. Drawing on viewers' feelings of pity, as well as their fear of social alienation, ads like those for Listerine sold products by making viewers anxious about their own social status and offering their product as a means of building up their self-confidence. But they reveal much about the values of the dominant culture as well because in order to be effective ads must mirror the social fears and aspirations of their audience. Marchand argued that parables and clichés in advertising were used frequently because consumer audiences were drawn to the very personal, archetypal narratives that offered advice on how to live with the anxieties of modern society.

By placing women's role as consumers within the ideological framework of their role as mistresses of the domestic sphere, advertisers infused the act of consumption with a similar cultural value and legitimacy. Rather than just being a chore performed by women, consumption of goods became the means through which women defined the status of the household. Along with her freedom from paid labor, a middle-class woman's selection and use of consumer goods vitally delineated the family's status as well.

Advertisers worked hard to promote the idea that consumption was an extension of women's roles as homemakers and that women were as inherently suited to shopping as they were to caring for home, husband, and children. The reason advertisers focused so much attention on women in the 1920s was simple: women purchased over eighty percent of the consumer goods in a given household during this period. An example of a

very common tactic used by advertisers to equate consumerism with traits inherent to women may be found in a 1925 Overland automobile ad, which states that “women are by nature the great students of quality, the close judges of value, the shrewdest of buyers – because women are everlastingly making comparisons.”³⁵ Other automobile and auto part advertisements appealed to women’s eye for quality, concern with safety, and demand for style. They claimed that these qualities were the possessions of women alone -- the gentler, more nurturing, and more beautiful of the sexes. Historian Roland Marchand argues that through this frequently-used tableaux of woman as expert consumer, advertisers professionalized the female sphere, making homemaking a career.³⁶

In *Living Up to the Ads*, Simone Weil Davis offered another explanation for the connection between women and consumption in American advertising.³⁷ Influenced by the theories of Marx and Weber, she asserts that in the 1920s advertisers depicted American consumer culture as a female-dominated space in contrast to the male-dominated spaces of business and production. Davis claimed that advertisers set up a dichotomy between producer and consumer, in part, to obscure the failure of production to effectively anticipate market needs and the failure of advertising to successfully identify and market overproduced goods. Advertisers claimed that products were constantly being reinvented because consumers were fickle and failed to adequately consume existing supplies, not because producers failed to make products good enough the first time or flooded the market with an overabundance of a given product. Davis argued that the association of consumerism with stereotypically feminine characteristics,

such as indecision and sentimentality, was the defining characteristic of Americans' understanding of gender in the 1920s and 1930s.

Evidence from advice columnist Dorothy Dix and *Middletown* corroborates Davis's assessment. The Lynds argued that "modern advertising pound[ed] away at the habits of the Middletown housewife" with "whole industries mobilized to impress a new dietary habit upon her."³⁸ Dix explained how consumer culture created a new role for middle-class women as "social pace setters:"

"Woman makes the family's social status... The old idea used to be that the way for a woman to help her husband was by being thrifty and industrious ... But the woman who makes of herself nothing but a domestic drudge ... is not a help to her husband. She is a hindrance...and ... a man's wife is the show window where he exhibits the measure of his achievement"³⁹

By using nineteenth-century gender roles to legitimize consumer culture, making it as "natural" as womanhood itself, advertising helped to modernize the traditional gender ideal. Advertising offered a new rhetoric and a new set of modern images that refurbished the same old notion that men and women's behaviors and predispositions were based on their sex and tended to be mutually exclusive. The 1920s version of American womanhood included a new public space for women – the marketplace – and it expanded middle-class women's roles as housekeepers and symbols of middle-class status by making women responsible for the quality and style of their households, their bodies, and the clothing worn by all members of the family. Dix articulated the expansion of women's public role precipitated by consumer culture:

“The old idea used to be that the way for a woman to help her husband was by being thrifty and industrious ... But the woman who makes of herself nothing but a domestic drudge ... is not a help to her husband. She is a hindrance... The woman who cultivates a circle of worth-while people, who belongs to clubs, who makes herself interesting and agreeable ... is a help to her husband.”⁴⁰

Dix argued that the key to a woman’s social success is her mastery of consumption.

Even a woman lacking in natural beauty could be publicly admired to the benefit of her family by dressing well. Dix accepted the idea inherent in consumer culture that goods could transform the way in which a person is perceived in public. Even more importantly, her columns promoted the idea that the judicious use of consumer goods to this end was the responsibility of the modern woman.

Middletown chronicled this transformation in the meaning of consumption in American life. The Lynds’ found that consumption of goods and media such as movies, radio and magazines was assuming an increasingly influential place in the lives of Americans. Consumption of goods and media were among the most important new ways in which Middletown residents understood and ordered their community. *Middletown* noted that the community of Muncie was far more secular in 1925 than it had been in 1890 and that by 1935 religious doctrine had lost considerable hold on the daily value judgments of the community. Inversely, they argued that consumer culture, represented by advertising and product merchandising, mass media such as movies, radio and magazines, as well as consumer products themselves, played an increasingly significant role in determining *Middletown* residents’ attitudes about what constituted class status, gender roles, personal fulfillment, and social approbation.⁴¹

As a result of this new consumerist ethic, magazines looked quite different in 1925 than they had even just ten years prior. In the nineteen twenties, magazines grew significantly longer as the number of advertisements grew and came to dominate them. World War I tax breaks for businesses filtered unprecedented quantities of money into advertising. Advertisers' participation in wartime Committee on Public Information and their celebrated success at changing the tide of American public opinion in favor of the war earned the profession of advertising new legitimacy. Together these factors led more businesses than ever to pump money into advertising. Women's magazines were perhaps the most prominent among the many mediums that received advertising in the nineteen twenties. Given the wide variety of women's magazines available and their popularity among women of all ages and classes, advertisers viewed them as the best way to reach their target audience.

In keeping with the venues in which they appeared, advertisements in women's magazines were usually prescriptive, meaning that they sought to instruct women in the ways of modern housekeeping, beauty, and fashion trends, in addition to promoting their own products. Ads in women's magazines are the forums that best illustrated how the transformation or modernization of gender norms was articulated. In order to market entirely new types of products, ads needed to convince people that modern life created new needs that could only be met by these new products. While each ad sought to convince viewers that their product was unique the ads projected collectively the vision of a modern world in which consumer goods were critical signifiers of one's social status, one's character, and ultimately one's happiness. Taken together these ads promised that

by adorning yourself, your home, and your family in a more stylish way you would be perceived by others to be a better class of person. Such a person would then be welcomed into better circles, finally, would be more successful and thus happier.

This new type of “prescription” stood in opposition to nineteenth century prescriptive literature, which argued that one’s ultimate success was dictated by one’s inner character rather than the other way round. In nineteenth-century sentimental novels, where the eyes of God saw one’s inner flaws and punished them, women’s internal moral failings frequently precipitated worldly retribution. One’s inner character thus determined one’s outward success. In twentieth century prescriptive literature the reverse was true: women were called to make their bodies over in the image they wanted to project using consumer products and were led to expect that they would become the person they set out to be.

Even as they prescribed new values for women, ads relied heavily on existing social mores to make their products seem familiar and their claims believable. The groundbreaking Listerine ads of the 1920s illustrate this process at work. They established their authority by depicting a familiar world rigidly divided by gender. Yet the product, mouthwash, which had never been used by Americans before was marketed using modern social mores. This balance between new and old social rules was essential to the success of the ad campaign.

Like the prescriptive literature still present in women’s magazines in the nineteen twenties, ads directed at women were often melodramatic, moralistic narratives in which women’s faults had in dire consequences. Gender relations were the primary topic, as

women's relations with men were viewed to be paramount to their ultimate social success. Advertising also manipulated class anxieties, advertisements below, advertisers appealed to consumers' fears of a loss of social status as well as to their aspirations to rise on the social scale.

A product designed by Lambert Pharmacal [sic] Company as an antiseptic, Listerine initially was used by hospitals to sterilize surgical equipment and wounds. In the 1920s, advertisers marketed Listerine as a mouthwash, shampoo, deodorant, and as a prophylactic treatment for cough and sore throat. Among beauty and hygiene products, Listerine's long-running ad campaign was a trendsetter both in its use of photography to communicate emotion and its appeal to middle-class men and women's fears of social alienation and failure. At the same time, the ads illustrate the expansion of women's social roles within consumer culture, providing a glimpse of the rhetorical framework of a new middle-class gender ideology in the nineteen twenties.

By comparing Listerine advertisements that were marketed solely to women in *Ladies' Home Journal* with those that assumed a largely male audience in *Saturday Evening Post*, one can observe the continued dominance of the Gilded Age gender ideology over middle-class household role differentiation. Advertisers of Listerine created a market for their product by suggesting that "halitosis," the term they coined to describe bad breath, posed a serious threat to middle-class status. For both men and women, halitosis signified a lack of middle-class consumer savvy and social grace. But the consequences of such a social *faux paw* differed for men and women. For men, halitosis alienated the professional from his customers; for women, the consequence was

more dire. It made her an unattractive candidate for marriage and therefore cut her off from her primary avenue to feminine achievement – family life. The scenarios in which they chose to place their characters reveal the very different ways in which middle-class manhood and womanhood were defined. A comparison of several Listerine ads from 1925 illustrates this point.

The caption of a July 1925 Listerine ad in *Ladies' Home Journal* represents the first use of a phrase that is now common in American parlance, “Often a *Bridesmaid* but never a *Bride*.” The narrative follows:

Her case was really a pathetic one. Most of the girls in her set were married or about to be. That morning she had received still another wedding announcement. And as her birthdays crept gradually toward that tragic thirty mark, marriage seemed further from her life than ever. She was often a bridesmaid, but never a bride.⁴²

Neither the photograph of the attractive woman sadly reading the announcement of a friend's wedding nor the narrative give any hint about the cause of the woman's “pathetic” case. However, the sales pitch that follows the narrative explains her tragic flaw. It states that “one rarely knows when one has halitosis.”⁴³ The woman is unaware that bad breath is the reason why she has not drawn the attention of eligible bachelors. The approach of the “tragic thirty mark” reveals both that the window of opportunity for marriage is finite, dependent upon youth and beauty, and also that the proper role for a mature woman of thirty is wife and mother.⁴⁴ It suggests that in the absence of marriage a middle-class woman of thirty lacks purpose, lacks a domestic sphere in which to reign. Advertisers of Listerine chose failure to marry as just punishment for this woman's bad breath because spinsterhood represented the ultimate failure of middle-class womanhood.

An ad appearing in the *Saturday Evening Post* in October 1925 used the same strategy on a male audience. The penalty for halitosis in this case, however, was quite different. The narrative explained,

Lately, Jepson had felt himself slipping as a salesman. He couldn't seem to land the big orders; and he was too proud to go after the little ones ... Finally, one evening, he got the real truth from his little boy.⁴⁵

Jepson experienced the ill effects of halitosis differently from his female counterpart -- he suffered the loss of status in his business. Listerine advertisers who sought to market their antiseptic to men developed an ad campaign that played on middle-class men's fear of failure at their most important role -- that of breadwinner.

Advertisers' use of a Victorian ideal that was unattainable for working class families reveals how gender could be used to reinforce middle-class dominance. In this ad, halitosis threatens Jepson's economic prosperity and his status as a business-class professional and breadwinner. Implied by the presence of a young boy on his lap is the existence of a middle-class housewife, who depends on his labor to support her. Should his sales fall to such a point that her paid labor was required, the family's class status would be diminished even though he remained employed and exhibited no other external signs of his failure. Together with the aforementioned ad in *Ladies' Home Journal* we see the nexus between gender and class in early twentieth-century American culture -- middle class status was dependent upon women maintaining their domestic roles while in turn, women's domesticity was dependent on the financial support of men. Both the melodramatic style and traditional portrayal of gender roles within the ads mirrored the prescriptive literature of the nineteenth century.

Yet the central role played by the product in the narrative of the ads introduces a modern element into this Victorian ideology. Listerine ads married existing gender norms with a new mass culture by making consumer goods the standard bearers of class status and making women responsible for maintaining those standards. A Listerine ad that appeared in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in March 1925 reveals that while a women's skillful use of consumer products was an extension of her inherent domestic prowess, it was not a quality expected of men.⁴⁶ The narrative lists the positive attributes of the beau of the stubborn but sad-looking woman depicted in the ad. His notable qualities included attractiveness, fine family lineage, and good business prospects. The narrative then describes the confusion of the woman's family and friends who could not understand her hesitation to marry him. Ironically, the ad, which was designed to prove the importance of Listerine for female readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, implied that halitosis was not reason enough for a woman to reject a suitor who could offer her a happy and stable life because, as any savvy female consumer should know, Listerine could easily remedy the situation. The caption of the ad questions her behavior asking – "Was she Right or Prudish?"⁴⁷ As the wife of this suitable young man, the women in the narrative could have introduced Listerine into the household, saving her spouse from the embarrassment of halitosis and securing the social standing of the family as a modern homemaker should. In contrast to the ad in which the young woman was assumed to be an unacceptable candidate for marriage because of halitosis, this narrative suggests that halitosis was not a legitimate criterion for determining the worthiness of a potential husband.

In both ads in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the women's failure to be aware of the wonders of Listerine either as remedy for her own bad breath or that of her suitor was indicative of her failure to meet the middle-class expectation that a woman be a savvy consumer of beauty and hygiene products so as to be a lovely and charming example of her husband's economic success. In other words, halitosis signified a woman's failure to be a "fastidious" social pacesetter. However, in the case of the men, halitosis was indicative of carelessness that falls *outside* the realm of his social role. Thus, the presence of halitosis was not significant enough to warrant reprisal in a man who was successful in business and therefore able to fulfill his role as provider. The narrative of the ad implies as much saying, "Other girls would have 'fallen over themselves' to have his attention."⁴⁸ In their effort to create a demand for their product, advertisers of Listerine participated with myriad other advertisers in transforming the standards of middle-class gender ideology, making women's bodies and homes the stages upon which the visual trappings of middle-class status would be displayed. Women became responsible for keeping up with now ever-changing standards for personal hygiene, beauty, fashion, household management and design, clothing, and nutrition in order to maintain their class status.

Even as advertisers sought to enhance the social significance of woman's role as consumer, they claimed that the host of new products women had to choose from would make their lives easier and richer by freeing them from time-consuming household labor. Consumer products such as appliances, packaged foods, and chemically-enhanced detergents promised to save women time. With this additional free time, women could

engage in various pursuits for both self-improvement and the development of the family. Advertisers' depiction of what women would do with their newfound free time added another dimension to the ideal of modern womanhood.

The 1925 American Laundry Machine Company ad campaign, called "Send it to the Laundry," sought to revolutionize the way in which the nation's middle-class housewives washed their families' clothes by providing professional, mechanized laundry services. The company touted their service as a way to free the modern housewife from her most cumbersome and time-consuming chore by giving her the gift of time – at least one full day per week. The ad campaign stands out among advertisements of the period as being the one that most celebrated the public role that American women could play in community affairs. However, the campaign to professionalize household chores was inconsistent with the dominant gender ideology and thus was ultimately doomed to failure. As such, it reveals the limits of the new gender ideology with regard to women's roles outside the domestic sphere and foreshadows the up-hill battle social feminists would face trying to urge women to become active in politics.

In a March 1925 ad in *Ladies' Home Journal*, the lengthy text defined the modern women in terms consistent with most other ads in women's magazines in the 1920s – as an efficient user of household appliances.⁴⁹ The 'modern woman' was explicitly contrasted with the flapper, an alternate image of adolescent womanhood from American literature in the 1920s. The ad limited the meaning of the term "modern woman" by disavowing the modernity of the "poetry-reading flapper" claiming that she is "a type as old as Eve." The young, self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking flapper was not the type of

woman that The American Laundry Machine Company sought to rescue from the drudgery of housework because by definition flappers rejected the traditional responsibilities of wife and mother. The reference to Eve suggested the public display of sexuality associated with the flapper while the reading of poetry suggested cultured self-indulgence and freedom from responsibility.

The “Send it to the laundry” ad was different from most other ads of the period in one respect. Rather than focusing on consumer goods as signs of middle-class status, they highlighted the personal benefits of increased productivity to the modern woman and, even more unusual, the benefits of a woman’s attention to the community and the world at large. Instead of being the skilled laundress who takes pride in the whiteness of her husband’s shirt and her daughter’s pinafore, this ad campaign focused on a woman’s responsibility to organize a Women’s City Club in her town in order to “make the world a safer, cleaner, healthier place for her children ... gain [] for herself a broader outlook on life that will make her a better partner to her husband, a better mother to her children.”⁵⁰ The vocation to make the world a better place is justified using the logic of the social feminist ideology – woman’s work in the public sphere served to ensure the well-being of her primary charges, husband and children, using qualities inherent to her on the basis of her sex. By suggesting that consumer culture could modernize household chores such that woman’s sphere could be expanded to include activities such as politics, the ad campaign takes a modern social feminist stance on the traditional view about women’s work: “woman’s little sphere of pots and pans broadened into an amazing world of clubs and sports, church and community activities, education, business, self-development.”⁵¹

This ad campaign sought to offer the possibility that consumer culture would allow women continue to nurture the private sphere while also protecting and improving the public interest as well.

The “Send it to the Laundry” campaign, which offered professional laundry service as an alternative to purchasing a washing machine, was ultimately unsuccessful.⁵² Certainly, the long term expense of laundry service was probably higher than the investment in a washing machine. But one cannot underestimate the impact of gender ideology on the ultimate failure of the campaign. Washing machine ads also claimed to save women time, and did in fact greatly reduce the manual labor involved in washing clothing. However, use of the washing machine kept women at home while professional washing service freed them to pursue interests outside the home. Had Americans viewed this freedom to work outside the home as a social benefit rather than a potential threat, many would probably have hesitated to make the relatively large initial investment in a washing machine or used credit to obtain one. The fact that washing machines became during this period the universal method for washing clothing suggests that Americans were significantly invested in the notion that women should remain at home.

Using the same strategy as the “Send it to the Laundry” campaign, Elizabeth Marbury placed women’s new role as participants in politics within the context of modern consumer culture:

How little, after all, do the lords of creation understand the psychology of the modern woman? They are archaic in their ignorance. They do not even follow with intelligence the columns of the advertisement in the present-day magazines, for if they did, they would note that all domestic drudgery is practically done away with. Recall cuts of the housewife rocking in an armchair while some mechanical device is considerately

doing her work. As a rule she is portrayed reading. Who knows but that she may be studying these very questions of national import, which theoretically the men alone are qualified to cope with?⁵³

Marbury argued that modern household conveniences made it possible for women to be politically aware and active while still completing the household tasks expected of them. Marbury's desire to align women's political activities with the modern ideal of womanhood espoused by consumer culture is an example of the consumer compromise undertaken by most social feminist organizations in the 1920s. Consumer culture provided an acceptable avenue through which to expand women's sphere of influence to include mass civic participation on a national level. Walking much the same line as the ad campaign above, Marbury balanced traditional gender roles with the new possibilities of modern conveniences, and contributed to the development of a new rhetoric of female civic identity.

Marbury was in good company, using the popular press as a vehicle through which to reach American women. Many politically active women on both sides of the aisle embraced the tradition of prescriptive literature, writing articles and giving interviews for popular magazines and newspapers as advocates of a modern gender ideology that included female political participation.⁵⁴ One of the most prominent social feminists of the late 1920s was Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of a rising star in the Democratic Party. Her busy life was cited as an example of "modern womanhood," combining family life, household management, social pace setting of the very highest order (as the wife of a New York politician), political lobbying, and philanthropy.⁵⁵ Roosevelt, the 1930s the famous woman in America, was a vocal advocate of social

feminism, acknowledging that American women's primary role was and should be domestic but arguing that national politics seriously impacted American homes and therefore required women's attention and participation.⁵⁶

Leading social feminists, Roosevelt chief among them, often encouraged women to embrace political causes by employing the domestic and consumerist rhetorics found in popular magazines ads. By definition, social feminists believed that women's political contributions would reflect their unique experiences as the homemakers and caregivers of the nation. But, perhaps even more importantly, they understood that as experienced female political lobbyists their lives differed quite dramatically from those of the majority of women. They knew that the majority of American women would not dedicate their lives to the pursuit of better government. The idea of reading political pamphlets between loads of laundry was outside the mainstream gender ideal for the majority of American women who were not quite sure that casting their votes was a lady-like thing to do.⁵⁷

By contrasting the relatively traditional role of women's clubs in Muncie with the more modern role of the leaders of national women's organizations one begins to see why urban social feminists who led national women's organizations in cities like New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C. needed to develop an image of female citizenship that would fit within the gender ideology of their more traditional sisters in smaller cities and towns. The consumerist compromise was forged in large measure to treasure this cultural divide. As lobbyists, social feminist leaders' political influence was based on their ability to sway the female electorate. As such, they needed to encourage women to align with

them politically by making their agendas fall within the limits of existing social norms. Consumer culture provided the best available path to do this.

The leaders of most of the major women's organizations believed that their forays into politics reflected their special interests as women in such areas as social welfare, industrial health and safety – fields that they had come to dominate over several decades by gradually expanding the boundaries of the domestic sphere to include female philanthropy. Still, their roles as professional lobbyists and politicians far exceeded the activities of local civic organizations in towns like Muncie and reflected a much more modern view of the role that women should play in public life. Leading social feminists' like Marbury, Roosevelt, Florence Kelley, Carrie Chapman Catt and others tended to be mature women whose children were grown or unmarried, women who had no children. This freedom from the responsibilities of child rearing afforded them the opportunity to pursue politics virtually full-time.⁵⁸ Furthermore, leading social feminists' political activities placed them in the public eye much more than was customary for most American women: they published articles, gave radio interviews and speeches, testified before Congress as experts in social welfare, and frequently were quoted in the national press.⁵⁹

But the difference between elite social feminists and the majority of American women was more than just how they occupied their time. In keeping with the Progressive tradition, social feminists believed that government should be responsible for the well being of its citizens. Social welfare, for these reformers, was now a public issue subject to state authority. While the Progressive movement had won many advocates at

the turn of the twentieth century, World War I triggered in resurgence in Americans' allegiance to the laissez-faire political philosophy.⁶⁰ As a result, most Americans tended to view social welfare as a form of charity, best conducted privately or at the community level.⁶¹

Middletown offers insight into how gender played a fundamental role in maintaining the political status quo. In Muncie, like most American towns, women's clubs were the primary outlets for women's civic participation. As in most other areas of men and women's lives, civic participation was largely segregated by sex in keeping with traditional gender norms.⁶² Most people viewed politics in limited terms, placing many of the civic activities in which women engaged outside the realm of politics. Those activities considered political, limited to the election of officials and the administration of basic services, were associated with men, while those civic activities associated with women were viewed as social, cultural, or artistic.⁶³

Middletown illustrated the trend seen nationwide of a decline in traditional (male-oriented by *Middletown's* standards) political engagement in the 1920s (as compared to the 1890s). The Lynds' argued that the community had become more consumed with getting a living and pursuing leisure and as result began to view politics only in terms of its impact on business.⁶⁴ The primary political concern of the staunchly Republican community was tax increases.⁶⁵ Based on their experience, *Middletown* residents viewed politicians as corrupt and sought to limit government to tasks such as a maintaining law and order. Voter participation declined during this period in *Middletown* just as it did nationwide.

The negative view of the political process was intensified by the addition of women to the ranks of the voting population. In response to the increase in the number of eligible voters, Muncie officials argued that existing equipment, staff, facilities, and districting were inadequate so they enacted time limits for voting (fifteen seconds per voter). This change benefited the reigning Republican Party because it increased voters' tendency to vote a straight party ticket.⁶⁶ Additionally, the two leading newspapers, which were both affiliated with the Republican Party, were pressured not to publish the ballot information in order to limit voters' ability to make educated choices.⁶⁷ Efforts to restrict the flow of information about political candidates affected women, as novice voters, more profoundly than it did men and intensified the trend noted by Dorothy Dix for women to rely on the opinions of male family members when voting or to refrain from voting at all. Dix noted that "ever since women have been allowed to vote with men some tendency persists for women of all classes to depend in such practical matters upon the opinions of their husbands "coming in from outside with the breath of the fighting world about them."⁶⁸

While participation in what *Middletown* generally thought of as politics declined in the 1920s, women's civic participation increased during this period. Women's clubs thrived in part because they were rooted in traditional methods of socialization. Since men and women often did not share a sense of camaraderie, even as husband and wife, clubs served as a vital source of emotional support and friendship. Clubs, in which membership was often determined by class standing within the community, could serve as a conservative social force, assuring that members behaved in ways deemed acceptable

by the majority of members. Conversely, clubs also served as opportunities for cultural and intellectual development – women investigated social issues and enacted reform within their communities – thereby expanding their social roles.

Among the most important cultural tasks undertaken by women's clubs was the administration of charity. The expansion of Victorian gender ideology to include female philanthropy was the forerunner of many twentieth-century social reform movements. Charity was a quality long idealized as feminine -- recall the image of Beth in *Little Women*, who devoted her life to making others more comfortable.⁶⁹ Therefore, social welfare was primarily relegated to voluntary forms of charity that were administered either through churches or women's clubs. Social mores of the period held that jobs were available to all able-bodied men who truly sought them and that with hard work most people could take care of themselves most of the time.⁷⁰ In other words, capitalism worked. But they also believed in the importance of charity as an exercise of Christian or human decency when it provided for the temporary assistance of a misfortunate family. Residents also believed in charity for the aged, ill, and women and children who could not take care of themselves.

In 1920s Muncie, organizations like the YWCA, Social Security Bureau, Anti-Tuberculosis League, Visiting Nurses Association, as well as various lodges and churches in the community provided social services to members of the community in need of temporary assistance. The community had established a privately administered Community Fund to which approximately one-third of the city's population donated money for those residents unable to take care of themselves. While bureaucratic, this

fund was likewise viewed to be a charitable organization. The Lynds noted that church leadership social welfare had declined since the 1890s and, by the 1920s, women played an inordinately large role in the administration of programs either dedicated to or participating in social welfare. Women's leadership of charitable organizations in Muncie revealed that the expansion of the domestic sphere to include social welfare that had begun in the nineteenth century had been widely accepted in American culture by the 1920s. But Americans' long-standing belief in the laissez-faire political ideology, which discouraged governmental intervention in either business or social welfare, discouraged Americans' from viewing such work as political.

Leading social feminists, who sought to win the support of the female electorate and thus gain political leverage, had the difficult task of convincing American women, like the residents of Muncie, that the issues they viewed as philanthropic were indeed political. They used the methods and strategies of consumer culture to attract American women to their causes en masse. A conduit for this effort in small towns and big cities across America was the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) which served as a means through which to gain access to the thousands of local clubs across the nation. Social feminists exploited this resource – sending literature, making presentations, and vying for political support for legislation. They marketed their agendas to women's clubs and to the public generally using many of the same strategies used by advertisers to market their products. Referred to by the GFWC as “municipal housekeeping,” the model of female political culture they created celebrated the political benefits of the special qualities inherent in women – selflessness, moral fortitude, even the shopper's eye

for detail, arguing, like Dorothy Dix, that the modern woman had an important public role to play.⁷¹ A GFWC Federation Bulletin on the subject noted:

“It is strange how slow men are to recognize that in all matter of practical hygiene, the women are necessary, says *American Medicine*. We shall never have clean cities until they undertake the job, nor shall we know how to be good national housekeepers until the private housekeepers of the nation extend their hereditary function to public needs and duties. Every time the women are given a chance to clean up a dirty city, or carry on a crusade against public disgraces and immoralities, they are successful, and there is at once a new order of things.”⁷²

Social feminists exploited similar arguments on issues that clearly fell outside the realm of traditionally feminine concerns – for example, disarmament. An anti-war cartoon published by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) entitled “Do You Mean to Say I’ve Got to Raise a Family on This?” depicts an older matron complaining to an elderly soldier, presumably her husband, that the “household budget” appropriates the majority of funds to war expenditures.⁷³ By merging the image of the soldier and the husband, the cartoon links the national budget to the household budget and suggests that women, left to run the home front with inadequate resources, are indeed affected by political decisions regarding foreign policy. Another WILPF flyer appealed to women’s roles as mothers in its argument against chemical warfare by describing the starving and orphaned children of World War I rather than stressing the effect on soldiers.⁷⁴ A cartoon entitled, “Wanted: Millions of the Young” implored mothers and fathers of America to make the world safe for children as a line of toddlers awaits use as cannon fodder.⁷⁵ In 1920s America, where mothers were the primary caretakers of and ultimate authorities on young children, such arguments were explicitly

gendered. They appealed to maternal sentimentality rather than the outrage of families of soldiers injured or killed in the war. Using vivid emotional appeals that blurred the lines between female concerns and political issues, social feminists created a social tableaux of female political activism.

The use of consumer culture as a mechanism for promoting modern values was observed at the time by a number of prominent writers and social critics.⁷⁶ One such critique of the impact of consumer culture provides an important counterpoint to social feminists' pragmatic embrace of consumerist rhetoric. Sinclair Lewis suggested in *Main Street* that consumer culture created an ideological space for women to enter politics by weakening the barriers between local and national issues and therefore between male and female spheres of civic activity.⁷⁷ In his depiction of one woman's experience in small town America, Lewis argued that the transformative power of consumerism was reaching into small towns, making Americans more likely to think in terms of a mass culture in which the boundaries between local and national issues were more fluid. Lewis's fictional account highlights this cultural shift on which social feminists sought to capitalize in their efforts both to secure a political identity for women and to promote a social reform agenda.

Based on his own hometown of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, *Main Street* is the story of Carol, an idealistic young college graduate from Minneapolis, who moves to the small town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota upon her marriage to Dr. Will Kennicott.⁷⁸ The novel chronicles Carol Kennicott's adjustment to small town life. Through the openly biased

lens of Carol's progressive urbane narration, Sinclair critiqued both the American small town and the social feminist perspective adopted by its narrator.

Carol Kennicott arrives in Gopher Prairie after several years working in St. Paul as a librarian, a job that, she told Will on their first meeting, seemed to lack the sense of social purpose that she craved. Kennicott wooed Carol, despite her love of city life, by enticing her with the possibility that she could transform the town of Gopher Prairie with her combination of modern ideals and feminine charm. Charm, he argued, was the critical element of "feminine" persuasion that suffragists sacrificed in their quest for formal political power. Carol's belief in the essentially passive nature of feminine power illustrated by her acceptance of this notion foreshadowed the difficulties she experienced in her many attempts to culturally and intellectually uplift a self-satisfied Gopher Prairie.

In much the same way that ads "sell" products, Kennicott used photographs of Gopher Prairie to convince Carol to embark on a life as the wife of a small town doctor. The key was not the photo itself but rather the promise inherent in Kennicott's sales pitch.⁷⁹ Taking note of Carol's interest in progressive social reform, Kennicott convinced Carol that her cosmopolitan experience and liberal education were the requisite tools required to modernize the town, giving Carol the "social purpose" she so desires. The novel is dominated by Carol's disillusionment as the people of Gopher Prairie resist her efforts to reform them and critique her progressive sensibilities.

Will's efforts to woo Carol with an idealized image of herself in Gopher Prairie mirror the effects of advertising on viewers. Art historian John Berger explains has noted that ads are "not merely an assembly of competing messages: [but] a language in itself

which is always being used to make the same general proposal ... that we [can] transform ourselves, or our lives, buying something more ... that will make us in some way richer.”⁸⁰ Berger argues that advertising works by allowing the viewer to place herself within the world imagined in the ad in much the same way that Kennicott encouraged Carol to imagine an appealing version of herself as she looked at the photos of Gopher Prairie. Even when the product does not live up to its promise, he continues, ads maintain their credibility because the spectator’s imagined transformation continues to ring true in their own minds. While the viewer may be disillusioned by the failure of reality to live up to her imagination, she keeps striving for it, lured by the promise of improvement. In *Main Street*, Carol finds Gopher Prairie largely resistant to her modernizing efforts, but continues to fall prey to an idealized image of her own role in the transformation of the town. When the leading citizens of Gopher Prairie attempt a booster campaign to attract new residents and visitors to the town, Carol embarks once again on a campaign of social reforms. She soon realizes that the real Gopher Prairie fails to live up to the promise of the idealized one described in booster rhetoric. She remains committed to this ideal at the conclusion of the novel, however. Armed with a more realistic understanding of the Gopher Prairie, she redoubles her efforts to modernize the town she has finally accepted as her home.⁸¹

Widely lauded by contemporaries as a keen observer of the conditions of American life, Lewis dramatized the rise of consumer culture as an increasingly important influence in middle-class Americans views of themselves.⁸² In *Main Street*, Lewis creates characters who were witnesses to, believers in, and creators of an

astounding variety of idealized images of their own existence. The unprecedented leisure of middle-class men and women, the rise of advertising and national distribution of standardized goods, and small town boosterism all contributed to the self-conscious effort on the part of middle-class Americans to market their own way of life. As will be discussed extensively in subsequent chapters, social feminists were quick to jump on the consumerist bandwagon. Their campaign for suffrage was a model of boosterism at work. Using parades, pageants, banners, and a new rhetoric that sought to make suffrage more appealing, more marketable to their audience, social feminists sought to drive women to the polls and redefine American political culture to include the social welfare agenda they supported.

Sinclair critiques social feminists' willingness to accept the tenets of modern womanhood promoted by consumer culture. A Washington suffragist modeled on radical feminist Alice Paul of the National Women's Party denies the view inherent in the consumerist compromise that sex roles are natural. She argues instead that gender roles were socially constructed and must to be eliminated for women to assume their place in American politics and society. Challenging Carol to abandon the comforts of a middle-class identity, the suffragist says:

There's one attack you can make ... you can keep on looking at one thing after another in your home and church and bank, and ask why it is, and who first laid down the law that it had to be that way. If enough of us do this impolitely enough, then we'll be civilized in merely twenty thousand years or so ... Easy, pleasant, lucrative home-work for wives: asking people to define their jobs. That's the most dangerous doctrine I know.⁸³

Here Lewis highlights the problem that Marbury described in her article in *The Saturday Evening Post*. It was not enough simply to obtain suffrage. In order for women to occupy a different place in American society, a revolution must occur in the minds of ordinary Americans. They must be able to imagine a world in which women were not relegated to a sphere of influence devoid of political or economic power. The creation of an equal rights rhetoric through literature, advertising, political discourse as well as other mediums of mass communication was essential to the expansion of female political identities. While suffrage was an important first step because it formally acknowledged the legitimacy of women's authority to question the social and political structures of American society, women still needed to force their way to the political table, agenda in hand, and force existing power brokers to listen to them.

Main Street lampoons social feminists' agenda by attributing the failure of Carol's initiatives to her attempt to live up to the two contradictory ideals at the heart of the consumerist compromise. By striving to live up to the ideal of the modern, emancipated woman aesthetic while at the same time trying to exercise political influence over the town, Carol was afraid to push any issue to the point of offending anyone and thereby tarnishing her reputation or that of her husband. Many of Carol's reforms were purely concerned with aesthetics and leisure – organizing the local elite into a theater group and attempting to expand the reading selections of the her women's group to include more sophisticated and, in the still Victorian minds of the other members, immoral literature. While Carol's broader reforms did not threaten the ability of Gopher Prairie patriarchs to hoard the profits of local agriculture, they did call on the local elite to

give some of the profits back to the community in the form of taxes for library books, a new more beautiful and service-oriented city hall, and an improved rest room for farmers' families visiting town. These attempts were simply ignored by the elected officials of the town. Carol's lack of sustained dedication to any specific ideal and her unwillingness to give up her view of herself as a lovely wife, competent household manager, dedicated mother, and up-standing middle-class woman doomed her many attempts to improve the town.

Taken together, *Main Street*, *Middletown*, and the Listerine and "Send it to the Laundry" ads in this chapter juxtapose the continuing dominance of traditional gender roles with the modern values inherent in consumer culture. The idea of a gender-based social role differentiation is redefined to reflect a modern consumerist ethic by stressing women's roles as social pace-setters. While the 1920s saw women's entrance into the consumer marketplace and the expansion of the philanthropic women's club, politics continued to be a space defined as male for the majority of Americans. Leading social feminists, who sought to represent American womanhood as they lobbied American legislatures in favor of progressive social welfare reforms, turned to the modern ideal of womanhood represented in consumer culture as a model for politically active American female electorate they were attempting to create.

Lewis's critique of social feminism in *Main Street* exposes the limits of the consumerist compromise as a strategy for achieving equal rights for women. He argues that social feminists' unwillingness to abandon Victorian notions of women's superior morality and domestic leadership ultimately compromised their ability to pursue their

political agenda. The following chapters will explore this theme – by tracking the efforts of several of the largest and most influential social feminist groups as they attempt to break down the wall between civic reform or philanthropy and national politics without breaking down the ideological barrier between the sexes.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p.53.
- ² Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p.53.
- ³ Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p.53.
- ⁴ Rose Feld, "Women are Slow to Use the Ballot," *New York Times*, April, 20, 1924, pg. XX1; Eleanor Roosevelt, "Women Must Learn to Play the Game as Men Do" *The Redbook Magazine*. 50, no 6 (April 1928) 78-79, 141-142; S.J. Woolf, "A Woman Speaks Her Political Mind" *New York Times* April 8, 1928, p SM2; Eleanor Roosevelt, *It's Up to the Women*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1933.
- ⁵ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 83-115. The term is often used to highlight the differences between two groups of suffragists, the most moderate, represented by the National American Woman Suffrage Association who held social feminist views and the more radical, represented by the National Woman's Party, who argued the women were no different than men politically and should not be different legally. This argument has also been referred to using the terms "equality and difference."
- ⁶ Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p.53.
- ⁷ Robert S. and Helen H. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929 pps. 110-130, 153-180. *Middletown* chronicled the increasing influence of consumer culture on the American household. Noting that women's roles as housekeepers had changed significantly since the 1880s, they pointed to women's modern role as social pace-setters responsible for making sure that the family's middle-class status was reflected in their consumption of ready-made goods. *Middletown* suggested that national magazines and newspapers played an important new role in the 1920s teaching women how to use consumer goods to signify their class status.
- ⁸ O'Neill, William L. *Everyone was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969, p. x, 51.
- ⁹ O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave*, p. 77-107; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 3-17; Fowler, Robert Booth, *Carrie Catt: Feminist Politician*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986, p 62-69.
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- ¹⁴ Douglas, Ann, *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Alfred A, Knopf 1977.
- ¹⁵ Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, p. 62.
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- ¹⁷ Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, p. xii.
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- ¹⁹ Davis, Simone Weil, *Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 7-10.
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- ²² Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p.132, Note 4.
- ²³ The Lynds chose not to include the small, but statistically and culturally significant population of African Americans in either category.
- ²⁴ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 132 Note 22.
- ²⁵ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 132 Note 24.
- ²⁶ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 177.
- ²⁷ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 117.
- ²⁸ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 117.
- ²⁹ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 117.
- ³⁰ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1937, p. 176.
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- ³² Dix' column quoted in Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 120.
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- ³⁴ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 13.
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- ³⁶ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, p. 167-171.
- ³⁷ Davis, *Living Up to the Ads*.
- ³⁸ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 158.
- ³⁹ Dix' column quoted in Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 116.
- ⁴⁰ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 116.
- ⁴¹ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, pps. 110-130, 153-180, 251-314.
- ⁴² *Ladies' Home Journal*. 1925. Listerine advertisement. July, p. 70.
- ⁴³ *Ladies' Home Journal*. 1925. Listerine advertisement. July, p. 70.
- ⁴⁴ *Ladies' Home Journal*. 1925. Listerine advertisement. July, p. 70.
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- ⁵⁵ Wisheart, "Mrs. Roosevelt Answers a Big Question" *Good Housekeeping*, August 1930, p. 34-35, 166, 169-7.

⁵⁶ Roosevelt, Eleanor, "In Defense of Curiosity," *Saturday Evening Post* 208 (August 24, 1935): 8-9, 64-66.

⁵⁷ Dix, column quoted in Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p.118-119.

⁵⁸ Ware, Susan, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 18-42.

⁵⁹ Joan M Jensen and Lois Scarf, *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics: From Consciousness to Mass Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984; Linda Gordon, *Women, the State and Welfare*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*, New York: Free Press and Harvard University Press, 1994; Kristi Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996; Sara Hunter Graham, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996; Anna L. Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Susan D. Becker, *Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981; Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*, New York: New York University Press, 1986; Elizabeth Anne Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robb and the Women's Trade Union League*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Louise Young and Ralph Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989; Linda G. Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's party, 1912-1920*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*; Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2004; Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

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⁶¹ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, pps. 413-434, 458-470.

⁶² Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, pps. 413-434, 458-470.

⁶³ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, pps. 413-434, 458-470.

⁶⁴ Lynd, and Lynd, *Middletown*, pps. 413-434.

⁶⁵ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 419.

⁶⁶ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 418.

⁶⁷ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 418.

⁶⁸ Dix, column quoted in Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 118-119.

⁶⁹ Alcott, *Little Women*.

⁷⁰ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 458-470.

⁷¹ Liette Gidlow, *The Big Vote: Gender, Consumer Culture, and the Politics of Exclusion, 1980s-1920s*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, p. 183-188.

⁷² **Cora C. Stuart, "Women in Municipal Housekeeping," *The Federation Bulletin*, 3 (November 1905): 97, General Federation of Women's Clubs Archives, Washington, D.C.** Included in [How Did the General Federation of Women's Clubs Shape Women's Involvement in the Conservation Movement, 1900-1930?](#), by Kimberly A. Jarvis in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 11/27/2009.

⁷³ Cartoon: "Do you Mean I've Got to Raise the Family on This? [1921] The Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section, 1919-1959, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (Microfilm reel 3, frame 82). Included in [How Did the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Campaign against Chemical Warfare, 1915-1930?](#), by Allison Sobek in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 11/4/2005.

⁷⁴ **"Tell the Child the Truth about These Things!" [early 1920s]. The Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section, 1919-1959, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (Microfilm, reel 33, frame 81).** Included in [How Did the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Campaign against Chemical Warfare, 1915-1930?](#), by Allison Sobek in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 11/4/2005.

⁷⁵ **Cartoon: "Wanted: Millions of the Young," [early 1930s]. The Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section, 1919-1959, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (Microfilm, reel 33, frames 974-77).** Included in [How Did the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Campaign against Chemical Warfare, 1915-1930?](#), by Allison Sobek in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 11/4/2005.

⁷⁶ The novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Dos Passos and social commentary by Frederick Lewis Allen, H.L. Mencken and Walter Lippman are a few of the best critiques of consumer culture.

⁷⁷ Lewis, Sinclair, *Main Street*. New York: P.F. Collier, 1920.

⁷⁸ Allen, Brooke, "Introduction" *Main Street*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003, p. xv.

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Main Street*, p. 20-24

⁸⁰ Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Viking Press, 1973, p.43.

⁸¹ Lewis, p. 474-479.

⁸² “I know of no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is a social document of a high order. ” H.L. Mencken *Smart Set* 69 (October 1922) 138-40.

⁸³ Lewis, *Main Street*, p. 506.

Chapter 2

Developing a Rhetoric of Female Citizenship: The League of Women Voters Gets Out the Vote

‘Tis not so long that these two great parties were vying with each other in legislative halls in eloquent declarations that women really did not know enough to vote. Now they seem fairly well scared because women know so much.’¹

On March 26, 1919 at the Jubilee Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) Carrie Chapman Catt called for the creation of a league of women voters out of the membership of the NAWSA that would continue the fight for suffrage but which would also begin the vital process of educating women in the form and function of American politics. While these two aims were primary, Catt also dedicated the league to the pursuit of an ideal democracy, one that would be a model to the nations of the world. Her social feminist vision of an ideal democracy was predicated on the expansion of a number of social, political, and industrial rights and protections for women and children.² Catt imagined that a league operating outside the bounds of any political party could contribute to the improvement of government by creating a body of citizens educated to make independent political decisions for the good of humanity rather than that of a given group.³ Central to the implementation of this threefold mission was the notion that the league should be non-partisan. While individual members were strongly encouraged to choose a political party and to be active within it, Catt felt that the league’s goal to educate all Americans to be responsible citizens could be best carried out by refraining from political allegiances and thereby acting as a resource from which

undecided voters might draw unbiased information about all parties, candidates and issues.

Prior to the women's movement of the 1960s few historians viewed the experiences of American women as worthy of the historical record. The suffrage movement, which began with a few extraordinary women in the 1840s, was viewed as a slight exception to this rule.⁴ The prevailing view of the movement was developed in William O'Neil's, *Everyone was Brave*, which suggested that following the achievement of enfranchisement in 1920 the coalition of women activists dissolved and women as a whole failed to take political participation seriously.⁵ The advent of the field of women's history in the 1980s out of the ideological fervor of the women's movement led to a gradual reassessment of suffrage. Participants in the movement for women's liberation who made up the ranks of the first women's historians felt that they were building the world anew with their activism and drew inspiration from the civil rights movement. Looking back to their mothers and to the repressive gender views of the 1950s, they did not see a legacy of feminist activism upon which to build.

As a result of their feelings of isolation from any pre-existing movement for women's rights, women's historians initially sought to understand why the suffrage movement had failed to be sustained – why by the 1940s and 1950s feminism had seemingly disappeared. Their attempts to answer this question netted a rich harvest. The first generation of historians of women found internal diversions among women's groups, rooted in racial and class differences, that undermined women's solidarity resulting in the disintegration of the women's movement in the 1920s.⁶ This vast literature coalesced

into a narrative in which the fragile coalition of women pursuing the goal of suffrage could be maintained only because suffrage was the most basic issue, the most fundamental right on which all women could agree.

Once suffrage was achieved, women's groups splintered in the 1920s over the question, what next? Educated, professional women represented by the National Women's Party sought an Equal Rights Amendment that would grant them legal equality and form the basis from which to fight for equality in marriage, employment, politics, and society. With black men, black women needed to overcome local barriers to voting based on discriminatory Jim Crow laws. Women workers joined forces with middle-class social feminists to win protective legislation to guarantee safer working conditions and better wages in industry. Many middle-class women viewed peace as the most pressing issue facing America in the 1920s. These were just a few of the many, sometimes contradictory issues, facing women as they looked ahead after suffrage was achieved. Women's groups disagreed on how best to approach their diverse agendas. Some felt that the time for women to form a coalition based on sex was over, that women now needed to enter the parties or address issues on a case-by-case basis with men rather than developing a women's agenda. Even among those who continued to cling to the notion of a woman's movement, ideas differed. The NWP and the LWV strenuously opposed each other – the former arguing that women should act on the political parties from without until women's legal equality was ensured. The latter argued that women should enter the parties, arguing in favor of a diverse agenda of issues important to women. Women's historians pointed to these and other ideological and methodological

differences as the reasons why women could not sustain a united movement following suffrage.

Building on this foundation, other scholarship has following the various strands of the broken coalition, finding that women in the 1920s and 1930s did have an impact on a variety of political and social questions relevant to women.⁷ Women's historians now tend to characterize the 1920s as a period hostile to progressive ideals generally, of which feminism was one. They see the social feminists of the period, whose activism stemmed from their belief in women's predisposition toward protecting the general welfare, as guardians of progressive ideals, protecting and nourishing them until they could be planted in the more fertile soil of 1930s America.⁸ While many efforts on the part of women were unsuccessful, some were short-lived, and some limited by their own lack of vision, women activists following suffrage did experience successes in the opening up of the professions, in the growing number of women elected and appointed to positions in government, in laws securing their political and social rights, and in challenging the laissez faire political culture that had long reigned in America. Historians now cite women's contributions to the creation of an American welfare state that sought to ensure a basic level of security for all Americans.

In *Votes Without Leverage* Anna Harvey seeks to explain why women failed to use the vote to develop a political voice of their own in the 1920s.⁹ Focused on the efforts of the League of Women Voters Harvey argues that the two major political parties preempted the League's attempts to unite women voters by establishing women's divisions and leveraging women's votes as part of a larger political agenda within which

women became largely invisible. Implicit in this argument, however, is the notion that the parties drew women away from the League and that as a result women failed to pursue the League agenda. Evidence from the memberships of both the League and the major political parties refutes this notion. The same women were in fact leading members of both the League and the political parties – Mary Garrett Hay of the women’s division of the republican party and Emily Blair Newell of the Democratic Party as well as Eleanor Roosevelt and many others were members of both the two major political parties and the League of Women Voters and they pursued the league agenda within the parties.

The work of Liette Gidlow in *The Big Vote*, which is critical to my analysis here of the Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) campaigns, provides a counterpoint to Harvey’s argument.¹⁰ She suggests that the period between 1890 and 1920 saw the transformation of American political culture from one in which the two major political parties dominated and in which men of diverse classes and ethnicities participated to one in which consumer culture melded with political culture in the creation of an “expert” citizenry made up of white, middle-class or elite men and women. She argues that the LWV was one of the leading organizations that promoted the modern notion of American political culture that developed during this period, which through its appropriation of consumer culture privileged whiteness and middle-class status and excluded people of color and the working class.

This study will now turn its attention to the major national social feminist organizations of the period, exploring their efforts to achieve their political agendas by

accepting the consumerist compromise. The consumerist compromise is the notion that social feminist political organizations appropriated the ideal of modern womanhood presented in consumer culture as the basis for their assertion that American women could and should become politically active. The League of Women Voter's, the pre-eminent women's political organization of the period spearheaded efforts to incorporate the ideals, images, and public relations strategies of consumer culture into the social feminist political agenda. The discussion will begin by analyzing the League's effort to articulate a new rhetoric of female citizenship and create a modern political culture that placed women at its ideological center. The League of Women Voters was an organization that explicitly set out to mobilize the vast female electorate into active citizens. To this end, it sought to reform an electoral process that had historically excluded them. By loosening the grip that party allegiance held over the mass of uninformed voters, the League sought to secure a vital place in a new political culture that stressed expert knowledge over party loyalty by serving as a non-partisan source of political information. The new political culture that they envisioned relied heavily on modern public relations techniques used in advertising for the transmission of information and sought to relocate the practice of politics from male and party-dominated spaces to the market place where women reigned. Attempting to realize the promise of woman suffrage, the LWV sought to educate and organize the female electorate in favor a progressive political agenda by creating an image of female political identity based on familiar images of modern female expertise found in consumer culture.

The League of Women's Voters efforts to reform American political culture met with resistance from a number of people and groups reluctant to share their political power with women. It shouldered the burden of responding to attacks on this new social feminist political rhetoric. The League's mission to provide non-partisan information to American voters called into question the validity of party political machines, whose pre-eminence was already threatened by the 1920s as many Americans lost interest in politics, turning increasing attention instead to personal business and leisure.¹¹ This chapter will illustrate the extent to which the League's stance threatened party leaders by considering the widely publicized opposition of Governor Nathan Miller of New York. Governor Miller's attack on the League in 1921 embodied concerns that a number of groups had about the social and political impact of woman suffrage.

The chapter will conclude by examining the League's first and most extensive effort to put their new rhetoric into practice – the Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns of the 1920s. While a large number of groups of varying political agendas engaged in Get-Out-the-Vote efforts, the League was the group whose identity was most closely tied to the effort. The League's notion of American political culture as exemplified in the GOTV campaigns was predicated on the social feminist vision of the expert citizen who based her legitimacy on her status as a consumer. Much more than an effort to bring people to the polls, the League's Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns were spectacles that relied heavily on the methods, spaces, and ideals of consumer culture, and which sought to make the League the leaders of a vast electorate of female consumer citizens.

Before embarking on a discussion of the League's activities it is important to place their efforts within the context of sociopolitical shifts occurring in the 1920s. The first was the decline of the American progressive movement following World War I.¹² The second was transformation of American political culture that led to a significant decline in voter participation in the 1920s.¹³ The leadership of the League of Women Voters was educated in and sympathetic to the tradition of American Progressivism, which had developed beginning in the 1880s. The League's support of this ideology which was condemned by the political establishment in the 1920s combined with their concern with women who had no place in the existing political system, led the League to take a strong stance against the existing political culture which stressed partisanship and encouraged it instead to join those groups seeking to modernize American politics. Falling voter turnout presented the League with an opportunity to reach out to the American electorate and articulate their vision of a modern political culture in which women could find a place politically.

It is worth taking a moment to make the distinction between the progressive movement and the Progressive Party, which, while related, do not refer to all of the same people. Social feminists, like the leadership of the League and most other women's political groups, were highly influenced by and played a major role in the progressive movement. Most were not, however, members of the Progressive Party. The Progressive Party began in 1911 as the National Progressive Republican League founded by Wisconsin Governor Robert M. La Follette. Focused primarily on political corruption and trust busting, La Follette adopted reforms such as the initiative, referendum, and

recall, direct primaries, and more equitable taxes. These reforms were designed to undermine the boss system, which had long prevailed in many cities. The boss system was characterized by election fraud, bribery, and cronyism. On the more positive side, it was also characterized by high voter participation, notably among the working class and including immigrants who were not yet citizens of the U.S. but to whom voting rights were extended in many states.

The Progressive era, which historians date approximately from 1880 to 1920, encompassed the Progressive Party but included much more. It is characterized by a large number of independent reform efforts that developed in response to the industrialization and urbanization of America in the mid-nineteenth century. Along with industrialization came the rise of higher education for women. As a result the progressive era saw the first generation of female professionals go to work on the problems of urban industrial society. The progressive movement included a wide variety of issues such as woman suffrage, industrial health and safety, compulsory education, eugenics, election practices, and child labor, among others. These varied and at times contradictory responses to America's economic growth shared one idea – they looked to government as the solution to what they viewed to be the nation's most pressing social problems. The League of Women Voters, which was born out of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, was part of the progressive tradition, supporting governmental intervention for the creation of a better nation and better conditions for women and children.

As social feminists, the leadership of the League had long believed that women's contribution to American politics should be rooted in their gender-based concerns with human health and welfare. Progressivism, which sought to reform government in accordance with changes in modern American society, provided the mechanism through which social feminists, including suffragists, had for several decades sought to enact social reforms.¹⁴ Like other progressives at the turn of the century, members of the NAWSA viewed government as morally compromised and prejudiced. At the same time, as lobbyists social feminists were well versed in the same sorts of political strategies and public relations maneuvers that were at the heart of Americans' distrust of government. For NAWSA leader Carrie Chapman Catt, as well as thousands of social feminists who supported suffrage, it was women's moral superiority that made it essential that they win the vote. They viewed suffrage as a means through which to force government to regulate the increasingly corrupt and inhuman conditions of America urban centers. After winning woman suffrage, the League of Women Voters hoped to mobilize women in support of progressive reform by convincing them that political participation was an important part of their responsibilities as women and by educating them in the form and function of American politics.

But by 1919 when the League of Women Voters was formed public opinion had begun to shift against progressive ideals. Middle and upper class Americans sought stability after the horrors of World War, voting against the League of Nations, which they viewed as a continuation of U.S. involvement in European conflicts, and voting for a "return to normalcy" promised by Warren G. Harding. Many looked to government to

protect their jobs and neighborhoods from discontented blacks, immigrants, and working-class whites who flooded the nation's urban areas during and after the war. They viewed with increasing suspicion these racial and ethnic minorities, whom progressives sought to help, fearing that they were communist sympathizers looking to overthrow American capitalist democracy. The Harding administration promised to adopt just the sort of pro-business attitude that these folks wanted.

Amid all this social upheaval, extending the vote to middle and upper class white women who shared their husbands' social and economic interests was viewed as a means of protecting traditional privileges by increasing the numerical advantage of the middle class against working class voters. So while woman suffrage appeared to many Americans to be a conservative political measure, the League's strongly progressive social agenda and their mission to make women voters independent decision-makers placed them at odds with the political climate of the 1920s.

Undaunted, the League collaborated with other progressive political groups, particularly women's groups like the National Consumer's League, Women's Christian Temperance Union, Women's Trade Union League, and the YMCA, to promote a number of welfare measures such as the abolition of night work, the minimum wage, child labor regulations, work hour limits for women and children, and Prohibition. They also promoted disarmament and supported America's entrance into the League of Nations. The LWV was non-partisan, which for them meant that the organization was free from any permanent allegiance to any single party. However, they did support

issues, candidates, and party platforms and oppose others insofar as they furthered the League's overall progressive agenda.

In order for the League to win support for a progressive social reform agenda it needed to develop a base of voters whose support they could claim as they lobbied in America's legislatures. Given the League's social feminist leanings, women were, of course, their key constituency. But before the League could rally women en masse behind its agenda they first needed to convince women to vote. This was a particularly difficult task because, as discussed in chapter one, the women of the nation needed to be convinced that political participation was indeed an appropriate activity for them. Worse yet, just as women won entrance into the electorate, changes in American political culture precipitated a dramatic decline in voter participation across the board. In the 1920s voter turnout slipped below 50% for first time in almost a century.¹⁵ The causes for this decline were diverse but many pointed to woman suffrage as a key component of the problem, as many women take advantage of the franchise.¹⁶

This decline in voter participation raised public concern and debate in the 1920s. The realignment of the political parties in the 1890s fundamentally weakened party loyalty and thus voting.¹⁷ During this period, elite Southern white Democrats violently disenfranchised blacks and wrested control of the Democratic Party from urban business interests creating what has come to be known as a "solid south" in favor of the Democrats. The leadership of the Democratic Party by an exclusive group of elite white Southerners precipitated a decline in general interest in politics. As urban democratic machines lost influence to elite Southern interests nineteenth-century political culture

deteriorated in American cities causing a reduction in political participation in northern cities as well.¹⁸

For most of the nineteenth century precinct captains representing the two major political parties brought voters to the polls en masse using spectacles like shows, parades, and other election days festivities. Election days had a holiday atmosphere and because elections were held more frequently in the nineteenth century than in the twentieth they served as well established meeting places that reflected not only Party identity but church, family, work, ethnic identity, community identities as well.¹⁹ Progressives attempting to curb political corruption in America's cities also undermined the social customs and personal ties that had brought urban Americans to the polls, particularly working class Americans. By making voting a private rather than a public experience in order to decrease coercion, Progressives took much of the fun out of election days. They also effectively changed the public image of political parties, which by the 1920s, were viewed as corrupt.²⁰

These changes in political influence and culture affected the working class and minorities more significantly than middle-class whites. African-Americans were disenfranchised in the 1890s by Southern Democrats who prohibited them from voting through poll taxes, literacy tests, and coercion. This was followed, somewhat less systematically by a decline in immigrant and working class voter participation, as urban machines lost influence and failed to draw them to the polls.

Public discourse about falling voter turnout at the time did not address these kinds of issues. Instead, such commentaries tended to point to upper-middle class white men

and women as the cause of the problem when, in fact, people of color and working-class whites were far more likely to refrain from voting than middle class and affluent white men.²¹ It was true that middle and upper-class white women did not vote in as great numbers as white men but they outvote minorities in areas of the country where minorities were barred from voting.²² Conservatives thought failure to vote threatened American prosperity and made the U.S. vulnerable to the communist threat. They argued that middle-class voters needed to ensure that taxes remained low to promote business growth.²³ Alternatively, Progressives sought to increase voter participation to win public support for social and governmental reforms. Rather than reflecting the actual causes of declining voter participation, those views instead reveal elite and middle-class whites desire to maintain, in the case of men, and increase, in the case of women, their dominance over American politics.

Social feminists, like the members of the League of Women Voters, were concerned that falling voter participation rates might contribute to the perception that woman suffrage was having a negative effect on American politics.²⁴ A number of articles appeared in the mid-1920s attempting to assess the impact of woman suffrage. The League led the effort by social feminists to place a positive spin on the issue. It did so by arguing that women's failure to descend on the polls in droves did not reflect political apathy but rather that women sought to be good citizens and therefore sought first to educate themselves in the ways of politics before voting. The League strongly promoted this view of the woman voter as desirous of a political education from its inception.

Ester Everett Lape, the Chairman of the Committee on American Citizenship of the New York State League of Women Voters, illustrates the League's vision of the American woman voter. In a 1919 article, Lape argued that "rank and file" female voters "have set out to educate themselves and their neighbors with a zeal and thoroughness heretofore unknown in this cause."²⁵ She developed a portrait of the woman voter from the correspondence the League received from women throughout the nation. She argued that women wanted to understand the mechanics of voting and government in practical terms. In contrast to male voters, she argued that women were more interested in gaining detailed information about candidates and legislation on which they might vote because they were less swayed by – in fact, were often suspicious of – party labels.²⁶ Yet she argued that they also wanted information about the current platforms of the political parties. Lape described women voters as sympathetic to the progressive concerns shared by social feminists. She argued that women wanted to understand what government currently did to improve conditions in American homes, businesses, and factories and, most importantly, what current "social, industrial, and governmental problems" could possibly be alleviated through governmental intervention.²⁷ While she suggested that the Republican and Democratic Parties did an admirable job of supplying women with the information they desired about governmental structure and voting practices, she noted that the parties' inability to offer non-partisan information about issues and candidates "weaken[ed] their power right now to minister to the great group of new women voters."²⁸ Lape noted that many politicians viewed women's non-partisanship as political naiveté. Yet much like Elizabeth Marbury in chapter one, Lape suggested that women's

naiveté was a political asset because it signified an openness to new solutions and freedom from corrupting loyalties and obligations.²⁹

Lape's article showcased much that was threatening to political parties about the stance of the League of Women Voters and about women voters in general. Firstly, their lack of party loyalty meant that party leaders did not know what to expect from female voters. Women's unaffiliated status suggested the possibility that minority parties, like La Follette's Progressive Party, which focused more on issues than on party name, could threaten the dominance of the Republican and Democratic Parties. But far worse than either of these short-term problems, non-partisanship threatened the long-term influence of the majority political parties. Lape argued that the League of Women Voters was dedicated to the theory that "the individual voter can and should do her own studying and thinking to a very large degree."³⁰

Through the application of this theory, Lape envisioned "campaign meetings at which the candidates of all parties appear and state their positions" and suggested the expansion of bipartisan or (ominously) all-partisan boards giving out information to voters.³¹ She left little question that she looked forward to a transformation in electoral practices as a whole when she concluded, "This tendency among women voters cannot help having a favorable reaction upon all voters and upon the political life of this country as a whole."³² Lape clearly articulated the League's vision that the women voters would initiate a transformation in American political culture by undermining the dominance of political parties and ushering in a new era in which citizens would become experts on

political issues and the League would play a central role in providing the necessary political information.

As the leading women's political organization of the period and the first to articulate a vision of female citizenship, the League placed itself at the epicenter of a nationwide debate regarding the social and political significance of suffrage. The fact that the League of Women Voters proposed to undertake a national non-partisan education campaign that encouraged expert citizenship even as the organization lobbied for a number of progressive causes led to fears that they would undermine attempts by Republicans and Democrats to incorporate women into their ranks. Preferring that women followed the example described in *Middletown* of joining the political party to which their husbands or fathers belonged and voting the party ticket, the major political parties viewed the League's model of female citizenship as a threat their political dominance.³³

Nothing better illustrates party fears about the potential effect of League ideals than Republican Governor Nathan Miller's speech before the League in 1921. At the Annual Convention of the New York State League of Women Voters on January 27, 1921 Governor Nathan L. Miller of New York argued that the League was "a menace" to American institutions and had "no excuse for existence."³⁴ The subsequent battle sheds light on both the League's attempts to reform American government and efforts by members of the Republican Party to stem the tide of social and political change. Miller assailed the League agenda along three closely related fronts. First, he condemned their status as an issue-based political lobby. Second, he opposed the League as a single-sex

political organization. Third, he argued against the League's social agenda as an illegitimate intervention into the marketplace and an unwarranted (if not immoral) expansion of governmental responsibility for the well-being of American citizens.³⁵

Miller's opposition to both the structure of the organization and its agenda suggested that he feared that the addition of women to the electorate under the leadership of the League of Women Voters could transform both the electoral process and government's mandate with regard to the welfare of its people.

Miller's opposition to the League was in part a reaction to the changes in political culture occurring in the 1920s. He clung to a party-dominated political culture that was being undermined by a number of issue-based lobbies, including the League. The organization of voters into issue-based interest groups that attempted to dictate platforms from outside the parties was on the rise in the 1920s and appeared to Miller to be a significant threat to party power. He claimed that the League's efforts to prevent the re-election of an aggressively anti-suffrage, anti-progressive Senator constituted an abuse of power because the League was not elected and therefore was not subject to the will of the people as a whole.³⁶ As is the case with all lobbies, the League did informally represent a certain portion of the people, in this case, supporters of suffrage and progressive social reforms. But Miller argued that in order to be considered a non-partisan organization that the League should not take a stand for or against a candidate but instead should simply provide unbiased information about all candidates and issues.

Members of the League did not view their activism as partisan but they did understand that their lobby could significantly weaken the two major political parties.

Members of the League reasoned that if their opposition to Republican Senator James Wadsworth were a partisan maneuver, as Miller claimed, one would expect the campaign to have been led by members of the League who were registered Democrats. This, however, was not the case. Immediately following the speech the League took a poll of the political affiliation of the members in the room at the time. While the poll was not a complete sampling of all members of the League it found that Republicans overwhelmingly outnumbered Democrats and Independents among Leaguers present. In composing their written response following Miller's speech, only members who were registered Republicans signed the letter. In their letter, Republican members of the League championed a modern political ideal in which loyalty to one's agenda transcended loyalty to one's party.

The League's response revealed that women did not accept the tenets of traditional political culture. Comparing their partisanship with Miller's, they wrote, "Our chief point of difference is in the way we regard party allegiance. In joining a political party we do not feel we must give our conscience into its keeping."³⁷ This view stemmed both from the legacy of exclusion from politics these women had experienced and from their progressive sympathies. In order to explain the source of their distrust of political parties they wrote,

Our experience within the organization of the parties, however, is a humiliating one. It has taught us that there is as yet no real equality in the management of party affairs, nor in the choice of delegates or candidates. We are forbidden to exercise independence or judgment, and are openly advised that there is no place in the party except for those who take orders.³⁸

The League's non-partisanship was a direct result of the experiences of League members who were active in the political parties. The existing parties failed to adequately represent women and as a result women organized outside the parties and lobbied from without for a comprehensive agenda of female issues.

The League's campaign against Wadsworth revealed their influence not just as a political lobby, but as a shaper of American political culture. When the final votes were tallied, Wadsworth had 800,000 fewer votes in his victorious bid for re-election to the Senate than the successful Republican candidate for President, Warren G. Harding. The fact that many of the 800,000 voters were registered Republicans who broke from the party line, voting for Harding but not for Wadsworth, suggested that "women m[ight] develop the habit of thinking things through; and that in consequence they might continue to act in a manner inconvenient to party managers."³⁹ Not only did the League convince a significant quantity of voters to oppose Wadsworth but in does so they also set the precedent for novice women voters to consider the merits of each candidate individually rather than choosing a party ticket. The League's campaign against Wadsworth signaled a shift in electoral politics toward issue-based rather than party-based voting that was deeply threatening to entrenched party politicians.

If, in fact, the League's guidance of the female electorate was the central cause of the disparity in votes between Harding and Wadsworth then politicians were going to need to consider very carefully whether they could afford to go against the women's lobby.⁴⁰ The League would then be in a strong position to play the major political parties off one another, demanding support for their agenda in exchange for the woman's vote.

Women constituted so large a percentage of the electorate that if they organized into a united lobby outside the existing political parties, the party system would be seriously undermined.

Miller's second problem with the League was the fact that it represented women. While other lobbies represented small groups of supporters of single businesses or issues, the League had the potential to represent all American women – approximately half the population of the nation. In their response to Miller the League asserted that this was for Miller an even bigger issue than the fact that the League was a non-partisan lobby. They argued that the League was not at all unique in its attempts to direct unfavorable publicity toward a candidate with ideals contrary to theirs, but rather that it was the League's constituency that was at issue. They wrote,

You deny our right to work as a group outside the political party for political measures, and you say that all non-partisan groups that seek to affect legislation and the choice of candidates are a menace to the welfare of the country. Do you include in this such groups as the State Charities Aid, the Dairymen's League, the Grange, the Citizens' Union, the Bar Association, the American Legion, and the Manufacturers' Union, or are we a menace because we are women?"⁴¹

Vanderlip listed a number of powerful lobbying organizations that sought to influence politics in ways favorable to their business interests.⁴² Notably, the list did not include any issue-based social feminist lobbies such as the National Consumers' League, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, or the Women's Trade Union League. By limiting her list to male-dominated lobbies Vanderlip redirected the emphasis of the debate from the issue of partisanship to that of gender, placing Miller's critique of the League within the scope of the broader debate about the political implications of suffrage.

Miller was certainly correct in his claim that the League's organization and agenda were highly influenced by sex. Members' hesitance to accept party leadership unquestioningly was tied to their social feminist views. They believed that women had different concerns than men that they had unique skills that could be used to improve government, and that men would not be eager to yield to women's perspective. An article in *The Nation* summarized the social feminist view that stood at the heart of the League's mission saying,

“women have, unfortunately, certain jobs to do that will never be done through direct initiative of the political parties. Until the citizenship laws are changed; until maternity is protected and compensated; until illegitimacy is abolished and the care of all babies assured; until birth control is legalized – until these questions and a dozen more are attended to there must be vigorous, non-partisan organization of women. By his fearful opposition, Governor Miller has only emphasized the need.”⁴³

Knowing that suffrage did not automatically win women a place of authority in government, the League of Women Voters was created to make women ready to assume greater civic responsibility by working together as a sex.

League members saw that the major political parties were not ready to grant women full access to positions of power so the League sought to unite women to put greater pressure on the parties for the changes they advocated. The Wadsworth campaign served as perfect example of why the women needed to unite outside the political parties as well as within. League member and leading Republican Mary Garrett Hay was forced to step down from her position as Chairman of the Women's Executive Committee of the Republican National Committee for contesting the re-nomination of Wadsworth. The Women's Executive Committee was a body of women within the Republican leadership,

responsible for developing “women’s planks” for the Republican Platform. Hay’s removal from her position as chairman as result of her failure to endorse Wadsworth illustrated that the committee held merely a rubber stamp and that the Republican leadership had no intention of incorporating women’s views in party decision-making. In chapter 1, Democrats Elizabeth Marbury and Eleanor Roosevelt came to much the same conclusion following the 1924 Democratic Convention.⁴⁴ Hay’s experience illustrated to League members that the Republican Party would not be an advocate for women’s rights and led to the League’s active opposition of Wadsworth.

Miller’s objection to the League limited allegiance to political parties as well as their organization into a gender-based lobby illustrated his fear that the League could become strong woman’s political party. Miller’s view that the League abused its substantial political influence among novice women voters when they campaigned against Wadsworth suggested his underlying belief that American women were likely to vote as a block, sharing values and concerns that differed from those of men and which subsequently the League would be better able to address than any existing political party. Thus, he objected to the league as an organization of women that could potentially sway the majority of female voters.

Miller had many supporters who objected to the League of Women Voters as a “sex party.”⁴⁵ A female member of the Woman’s Executive Committee of the Republican State Committee, the committee that Hay had led prior to the Wadsworth debacle, stated, “I heartily endorse Governor Miller’s statement. There is no place for such an organization in the political life of the United States today. Women and men are,

in fact, equal partners in our political scheme; no sex line is drawn. The logical evolution of the League of Women Voters leads to one result, a sex party.”⁴⁶ A number of female Republicans agreed and called for Hay’s resignation from the Republican Party.

A supporter of the League interpreted the situation differently, arguing that “the league is not a political party, and it urges its members to belong to parties. Its most prominent members are women of opposite political beliefs. Mary Garrett Hay sacrificed her place in the Republican Party because she believed it was her duty to oppose Wadsworth, which shows that she was working honestly for what she believed was the best thing to do politically.”⁴⁷ Here again, women’s views of party participation differed from men’s; supporters of the League argued that Hay’s “sacrifice” of her position in the Republican Party in order to follow her political conscience illustrated both her loyalty to the party and, more importantly, to her political conscience. In contrast, supporters of Miller interpreted Hay’s leadership of the League’s campaign against Wadsworth as evidence that she had abandoned the Republican Party and taken up with a competing organization that solely represented women.

Miller’s final argument against the League was a condemnation of their stance on social welfare legislation that stressed the dangers of centralizing power, a powerful critique at a time when fears of communist influence circulated widely. He asserted that:

“the function of the State is to prevent sickness and not to put a premium upon getting sick . . . it is the function of the State not to make life comfortable, not to remove these cares which the sentimentalists say afflict the poor working people, not to make it certain that, regardless of their industry or thrift, they will be taken care of whether they are employed or not ...if you are to have the stimulus which is necessary for human progress you must leave to the individual himself the provision for his old age or for his unemployment or for his sickness”⁴⁸

Given Miller's fears that the League bore at least some of the responsibility for the disparity between the overwhelming victory of Harding and the less stellar but still positive outcome of the Wadsworth campaign, the tone of Miller's attack on the League's legislative agenda also suggests that he feared Leaguers could draw the rank and file voter toward progressive reform. Highlighting the League's social reform agenda Miller presented the possibility that women could highjack the American political agenda drastically increasing governmental responsibility for the well being of American citizens. Thus, the debate, in its broadest sense, was about the impact that women would have on American government. The coverage of the issue by the press suggested that Miller represented the unspoken concerns of many politicians. "Governor Miller in his Albany speech merely gave frank expression to the fear which party politicians feel towards any movement which looks toward the reinvigoration of the local centers of political opinion and resolution."⁴⁹

Eager to prove its worth as an institution and convinced by Miller's attack of the need to break the hold of partisanship on American political culture, the League of Women Voters dedicated itself to bringing out the vote in 1923. The League's Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns throughout the 1920s illustrate the vital role that consumer culture played in social feminists' vision of female citizenship. By transforming American political culture in the image of consumer culture the League sought to encourage Americans, and women in particular, to take a new interest in politics. The League utilized a modern view of womanhood promoted in consumer culture, which celebrated women's traditional domestic role while at the same time making room for a public role

for women in the marketplace. Through the Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns the League politicized the marketplace, plastering commercial spaces with political ads created by marketing professionals and likening the expert citizen to the expert shopper. By locating politics within a public space designed for women and in which women were already comfortable they hoped to overcome women's resistance to political participation.

This first get-out-the-vote campaign in American history set out not only to bring Americans to the polls but also to create a new kind of voter – an expert citizen. At the April 1923 League convention members resolved to

“call upon the public-spirited men and women of all political parties and in every section of the United States to take part in a campaign for efficient citizenship to the end that at the next Presidential election at least seventy-five percent of the voters accept the responsibility and the privilege of self-government and cast their ballots according to the best information they can obtain.”⁵⁰

They resolved that each state league would study laws, legislation, and the machinery of government in their states to provide voters' with a source of non-partisan political information necessary to make an informed vote.⁵¹ Given their mission to educate voters, the League's introduction of this program was as natural as it was timely. The Get-Out-the-Vote campaign offered the League the perfect opportunity to both mobilize the vast new female electorate and reform the electoral process as a whole, placing civic education rather than party affiliation as the central tenet.

The League was one of a large number of groups that attempted to increase voter participation in the 1924 presidential election. Their effort was among the largest and most visible, however. The primary thrust of their two-fold strategy in the first campaign

in 1923-4 was publicity – they reminded people to register and vote – the secondary one was civic education. Their education courses sought to develop political literacy, introducing working-class immigrants and first time women voters to the mechanics of voting and to current issues in the upcoming election.⁵² The League’s GOTV campaign came to occupy a central role in the organization’s mission by the mid nineteen twenties. By 1926 civic education became the central focus of the League’s GOTV efforts as the League became known for the quality of its non-partisan political information.⁵³

Using publicity and slogans, the national and local branches of the League set out to encourage voter registration and election-day turnout. In downtown Cincinnati a huge civic thermostat gauged registration in local precincts and reminded citizens driving by to “Register so you can Vote.”⁵⁴ Local leagues were critical to this effort as were established local networks involving other women’s groups, particularly the General Federation of Women’s Clubs but also including the YWCA, National Council of Jewish women, Girls’ Friendly Societies, Nat’l Congress of Mothers, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. At the national level, professional League publicists worked with *Collier’s* magazine to develop a national print campaign, kept League information in newspapers across the nation, and developed a Speakers Bureau to conduct a lecture series through state Leagues.⁵⁵

Although there were numerous other GOTV campaigns going on that year, the League tended to work only with other women’s organizations. The leading organization with whom they did not work was the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). While their efforts complimented one another, both addressed their campaigns to their

own groups – the league to women and other first-time voters, NAM to professional men. Gender was not the only reason the two groups did not work together, however. At the same time that these two organizations were both engaged in the GOTV campaign, they were also involved in the battle over the proposed Child Labor Amendment. Members of the League legislative committee were working with other women’s groups through the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee for ratification of the amendment in the states.⁵⁶ NAM, a politically conservative pro-business lobby, was aggressively campaigning to prevent the Amendment’s passage. The battle, which will be discussed extensively in chapter four, was an extremely contentious one that made it impossible for the two groups to collaborate.

Both groups were notable among the many GOTV campaigns for their sophisticated use of publicity. Inspired by U.S. government’s 1917-1919 pro-war campaign, both organizations relied extensively on professional publicists and extensively utilized the national press to advertise.⁵⁷ Both condemned the “unthinking voter,” stressing voter education and non-partisanship, and asked citizens to go to the polls regardless of political affiliation. A NAM slogan “Vote as You Please -- But Vote” was universally adopted.⁵⁸ The expert citizen portrayed in GOTV advertisements entered the polling place armed with carefully considered political information. He or she was middle-class or elite, white, and strongly resembled the images of Americans found in magazine ads and movies. Notably, the citizens depicted in these ads were not portrayed as party members but rather considered the merits of both positions and voted with their conscience.

An article in *Outlook* argued that the League's efforts had precipitated "the dawn of a new kind of campaigning, for which the new voter, who is forming her political beliefs intelligently and is not bound by blind party loyalty, is responsible."⁵⁹ League President Maud Wood Park argued that woman suffrage provided a rare opportunity to change the way the electorate voted. They viewed women voters as "untrammelled by carelessly made political affiliations... [without] bad political tendencies to undo."⁶⁰ The LWV sought to take advantage of this moment to create an educated female electorate before the parties got control of them – the very event that Governor Miller feared as he railed against the League in 1921.⁶¹

Essential to the creation of the expert female citizen was the availability of non-partisan political information. State Leagues researched, developed and distributed en masse pamphlets entitled *Know Your Town, Know Your State*. The National Headquarters issued *Know Your Country*, and *Know Your Political Party* explaining all the basic information voters would need to cast their ballot.⁶² The national league developed curriculum for citizenship and literacy classes held at colleges and schools reaching thousands throughout the nation. By 1929 the League had conducted one thousand citizenship trainings, reaching hundreds of thousands of citizens. This was particularly useful in the early nineteen twenties, when, in communities like Muncie, Indiana, information about candidates was purposely suppressed in order that voters would be forced to rely solely on party affiliation in choosing candidates for office. This abuse of power by politically affiliated news organizations represented the type of corruption that the League sought to undermine.⁶³

Much of the League's campaign was strongly gendered and the character of these gendered appeals often privileged middle class consumer-based ideals. The League argued that government played a vital role in the security and comfort of American households and therefore fell within the purview of women's concerns. They tied politics to "housekeeping" using familiar language and imagery to convince women that political participation was just an extension of their current concerns.⁶⁴ Advancing the notion of woman's moral superiority beyond the realm of the domestic, they argued that women could act as a moral compass in politics just as they did inside the home. The League Efficiency in Government Committee, which spearheaded the Get-Out-The-Vote campaign, urged women to apply skills they already possessed as housekeepers to their responsibilities as citizens in order to improve conditions for the nation's families.

"Women in politics are still in the feather duster stage. While the feather duster brushes off a little surface grit, sometimes it throws dust into the eyes of its manipulator to blind her to the grim underneath...The way to clean house is to get inside and use soap suds and a broom. But if women are admitted only to the public reception hall and excluded from those small inner rooms which they know are in need of air and light and sunshine, the feather duster will continue to hold the scrubbing brush at bay and the establishment of recognized standards for party members will be longer delayed."⁶⁵

In an effort to convince women that politics was relevant to their daily domestic concerns, the League linked homemaker's tasks to governmental departments responsible for some aspect of those tasks. For instance, food on one's table was subsidized by the Department of Agriculture, domestic help was linked to the State Department of

Employment and the Federal Department of Labor, one's car and roads were regulated and, in the case of roads, maintained by State Public Works Departments.⁶⁶ In a play entitled "The Voter's Dream" a woman preoccupied with home concerns learned that failing to vote threatened the stability of the domestic security she held so dear, solidifying the relationship between government and domestic life. A League radio show entitled "Why a Homemaker Should be Interested in Voting" as well as a number of pamphlets, speeches, and citizenship classes "illustrated the literal truth that government – local, state, or that of the U.S. – does something personal for you from dawn to midnight and from cradle to grave."⁶⁷

A Pennsylvania Leaguer's letter to the *New York Times* used domestic rhetoric to confirm Governor Miller's fear that women intended to use their votes to change the way American government was conducted. "Perhaps New York is politically clean. But there is reason for the existence of a League of Women Voters so long as 93 cents of every dollar that Congress appropriates is spent on war, 6 cents on other things and actually 1 cent on education."⁶⁸ A number of other articles on the debate likewise pointed to the gendered agenda of the League. *The New Republic* concluded that,

"If American nationality is to remain the expression of a moral rather than a merely mechanical unity, good Americans must combine to reinvigorate the vitality of those domestic and parochial centers of human traffic and intercourse, which provide a mansion for the wholesome educative activity of smaller groups, of less ambitious enterprises and of humbler people ... Instead of discrediting the League, as he intended, the Governor's indictment of its objects will intensify its appeal to those of the newly franchised voters who believe that the bestowal of political power on women can be made to contribute a positively new element to the standards and practices of American politics."⁶⁹

Yet while the League courted American women by appealing to traditional female roles, there was also something distinctly modern in their view of women as citizens. Their claim that women belonged in politics rested not only on the idea that the political affected the domestic but also, taking their cue from consumer culture, the League argued that modern women already made important contributions outside the home. Women's occupations as clubwomen and consumers provided them with both the opportunity to educate themselves politically and the skills to make hard political choices. In League rhetoric, a critical link between women's domestic responsibilities and their political ones would be their identities as consumers. Through the Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns the League of Women Voters invited women to shop for candidates for political office in much the same way that they chose items for their households by educating themselves in the subtle nuances between products and making an informed personal choice.

In a letter published in the *Woman Citizen* a reader ordered five more subscriptions of the journal in order that a variety of clubs, organizations and institutions in her community might benefit from the political information included in it. In her description of her busy life, she offered a portrait of just the type of modern clubwoman to whom League publications directed their appeals. She was a housewife, though she relegated the significance of this aspect of her identity to that of "scullery maid." She privileged her life outside her home -- using her car to help an undertaker, and traveling to numerous clubs and civil activities. Two aspects of her description of herself are particularly noteworthy -- first, her age, sixty-three, indicates that her busy life outside her home is made possible in part due to the fact that she is past the age of child-bearing.

Secondly, her mobility is dependent on her car, which suggests an independence supported by a upper-middle class wage-earning spouse. This woman is precisely the type of person to whom the League of Women Voters sought to appeal in their efforts to bring women to the polls. Her age and class status offer her the freedom to become an expert citizen by taking advantage of the resources provided by the League.

Implicit in this woman's description of her busy life is the idea that she was freed from home by her car. The automobile opened up to them a variety of public spaces that had previously been beyond their reach.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as discussed earlier, household consumer goods claimed to free women from their roles as "scullery maids" by making housekeeping less time-consuming. Lastly, the rise of mass-produced goods in the twentieth century freed women from the work of making many household goods and, perhaps most importantly, created a public marketplace in which women congregated as the primary household consumers. These are just few of the many benefits of modern consumer culture upon which the League of Women Voters would draw to encourage women into the public world of politics.

The automobile was an apt symbol of the modern pace of life for white middle-class American women, which was frequently used in advertising. The car was a both a tool that literally moved one forward at great speed and a symbol of the freedom that technological innovations claimed to make in women's lives that provided them with the time to engage in civic and cultural activities. In 1925, Ford advertisers appropriated this notion of freedom in their ads to women in *The Ladies Home Journal*. The ads claim that cars allowed women to venture out into the world "widen[ing] her sphere of interests."⁷¹

While both ads carefully illustrate woman's broadened sphere within the realm of "domestic obligations" they still suggested that the automobile provided women with greater mobility and placed a much larger geographic area within their reach. An ad for Perfection Oil Cook Stoves and Ovens depicted a woman racing away from home in an automobile symbolizing "woman's new freedom" from long hours spent slaving over the stove at home.⁷² Ads for washing machines and laundry service both touted time saved as one of the greatest benefits of their products. Many such ads portrayed women spending quality time with their children but they also suggested that women might use their free time to read or to be active in civic clubs.

A political cartoon in League Journal, *The Woman Citizen*, used this same troupe, aligning suffrage with modernity using the image of the automobile. Called "Signs of the Times" the cartoon depicted an automobile labeled suffrage and filled with smartly dressed women turning at a crossroads, apparently following the plethora of political signs printed there. The signs suggested the importance of modern forms of political communication akin to advertising on American political culture. The get-out-the-vote campaigns of the 1920s illustrated the League's embrace of this type of publicity as a mechanism to usher American women into politics.

Highly influenced by consumer culture, GOTV publicity efforts combined entertainment with education. From pageants to plays, songs to radio addresses the LWV sought to dress civic duty in festive attire that often bespoke of middle-class women's existing social customs. Local leagues developed plays and pageants, held first-time voters teas and lunches, fashion shows, performances of school children and bake sales,

using traditional middle-class female social gatherings as means both to register female voters and educate them in preparation for voting.⁷³ One state league had a baby-derby in which they adorned toddlers with sashes that urged mothers to vote, another registered voters outside a baby clinic. These efforts reflected the League's commitment to social feminism, as they reached out to women as citizens through their identities as mothers.

The League's GOTV campaign also approached Americans, particularly women, in consumer spaces. They developed a group of short films on civic duty that ran at the movies in Illinois and several other states. They registered voters at booths outside department stores, movie theaters, gas stations, and grocery stores nationwide.⁷⁴ They designed posters for store windows and fliers for inclusion in customer shopping bags. In St Louis, fifty thousand cars were adorned with posters, reminding people to register to vote. In New Jersey, they put ads on parked cars. The New Mexico League sold lunch boxes with GOTV fliers at "Indian Festivals."⁷⁵ Illustrating the League's appropriation of consumer culture, these posters and ads were designed and produced for the League by professionals in the fields of advertising and public relations and used the same cutting-edge techniques for appealing to audiences that were used to promote consumer products. Furthermore, by reaching out to women as they shopped the League established a connection between voting and consumer product selection.

The League was explicit in its desire to model its version of political culture on consumer culture. The Manhattan League called in public relations pioneer, Ivy Lee, to advise them in 1925, providing "An Advertiser's View on Selling Good Government." League President Maud Wood Park argued that the purpose of the GOTV campaign was

to “sell” the idea of voting.⁷⁶ Historian Liette Gidlow argues that “by linking the products, techniques, places, personnel, and language of consumer culture to political practices consistently, systematically and on a mass scale, the GOTV campaigns helped to define and remake the political culture of the 1920s.”⁷⁷

In urban areas radio served as an important way to advertise. In states like New York and Chicago they held radio teas at which women gathered together to listen to radio program sponsored by the LWV called the “Voters’ Campaign Information Service” on NBC radio. Begun in 1928 the weekly thirty minute program mixed civic education and entertainment. It ran five years reaching 15 million listeners and was widely lauded for its educational value.⁷⁸ The program featured well-known political leaders like Eleanor Roosevelt who spoke about the importance of civic participation.⁷⁹

The National League provided the leadership for the many local efforts.

Elizabeth Hauser, who headed the Publicity Department of the National League, provided information in “camera ready form” to national newspapers thus making them easy to print. The National League also provided state leagues with posters pamphlets and brochures for local distribution. In the summer of 1924 Frederic J. Haskin Co., a news information bureau in Washington DC offered to print a League booklet, entitled “The ABCs of Voting.”⁸⁰ They also publicized the twenty-page booklet in newspapers and filled mail-in requests. Fifty thousand copied were distributed nationwide. The National headquarters distributed 7500 copies of a forty- page GOTV handbook to local leagues and other women’s groups providing talking points, sample fliers, details on how

to canvas, slogans. The LWV headquarters also designed and distributed 10,000 copies of a prize-winning GOTV poster.

This use of consumer spaces and modern advertising replaced the raucous festive elections of the nineteenth century but the differences in culture were significant. The modern consumer-based GOTV campaigns “marketed a social vision in which consumption served as a main source of identity and value” and which “encouraged workers to emulate ... middle-class and distinctly managerial values ...” like the “gospel of personal efficiency” including time-saving, pleasure-maximizing, improvement-minded consumption.⁸¹ This consumer-based political culture was particularly attractive to the League because it affirmed social feminist views. The social feminist ideal, which celebrated women’s unique talents within a female sphere of influence and sought to broaden the scope of their influence, was dependent on a middle-class or elite life-style. Rooted in the nineteenth-century idea of separate spheres and modernized by consumer culture, the social feminist model of female citizenship promoted in the GOTV campaigns depicted women with an extensive amount of free time to dedicate to the study of politics in order to become expert citizens and bemoaned the evils of the uninformed voter. Although Americanization schools and citizenship classes welcomed working-class minorities, the image of the expert citizen in campaign ads was characterized by distinctly middle-class advantages such as free time for study that were not generally available to the working class. Furthermore, their critique of partisanship, which they characterized as uninformed voting, strongly discouraged Americans from coming to the polls without having spent time educating oneself regarding politics. By

embracing the consumerist compromise the League undermined their own attempts to increase voter participation generally even as they promoted a notion of female citizenship appealing to social feminists.

Ultimately, the League of Women Voters' efforts to create a nation of expert citizens by conducting research about current political issues and broadly distributing this information to interested citizens became the hallmark for which they would be known and admired. Miller's critique of the League would begin to look, in retrospect, to be a desperate attempt to cling to a political culture that was losing its hold on America in the twentieth century. Ten years after women earned the right to vote in New York an editorial in the *New York Times* noted that one of the most significant contributions made by women as a result of suffrage was the creation of the League of Women Voters as "the only national clearinghouse of non partisan political information in the country."⁸² The League garnered international attention as well. An English journalist noted, "in a land otherwise politically arid, the League of Women Voters blossoms from coast to coast."⁸³

Despite efforts by the League to bring minorities and the working class to the polls the consumer-based model of American political culture served to alienate the working-class and people of color whose lives were not reflected in the images of good citizenship promoted in campaign ads. With its emphasis on building an informed electorate, "the educational style of campaigning was less boisterous, less colorful, less engaging, and less accessible" than nineteenth century political culture even as it's ads reflected the cutting-edge of public relations techniques.⁸⁴ The plays, radio segments,

and posters of the League GOTV campaigns of the 1920s, while designed to be entertaining still extolled the virtues of the expert citizen in order to encourage middle-class women to vote, and were thus exclusive in their portrayal of citizenship. This stood in contrast to nineteenth century political culture, which with its public parades, election day holidays and stress on partisanship as a form of community kinship was more inclusive of working-class men. Together, these factors served to discourage broad political involvement in the 1920s. The economic struggles of the nineteen thirties would re-ignite Americans' enthusiasm for politics as they looked to government to ensure basic economic security but by then the transformation of American political culture in the image of consumer culture was complete.

For the purpose of this discussion, however, the legacy of the League must be analyzed in terms of its influence on the idea of the woman citizen in America. While the League's efforts were highly lauded, its limited effect on the majority of women was also noted.

“A large number of intelligent women in every community ... have been immensely stimulated to take an interest in civic questions ... and have conscientiously assumed their full share of political responsibilities...These women contribute the greatest to the body politic...I believe the majority of women, however, are not any more interested in politics than they were ten years ago, but remain indifferent to their civic responsibilities.”⁸⁵

Although the League's attempts to create a female political identity that would bring women to the polls *en masse* was not particularly successful, it did play a pivotal

role in the transformation of American political culture generally to one that stressed expert knowledge and relied extensively on the practices and images of consumer culture. By moving the practice of politics to commercial spaces and making political culture mirror consumer culture, the League sought both to make women more comfortable with their new role as citizens and to remake American politics by breaking down the structures and practices that had formerly excluded them.

Yet, as Sinclair Lewis pointed out in *Main Street*, by tying their ideal of female citizenship more closely to notions of femininity than to notions of citizenship – by limiting their idea about women’s political potential to social and moral issues that fell within the traditional scope of female expertise – the League tied female citizenship to a progressive agenda that was unpopular in the 1920s.⁸⁶ Miller’s objection to the League’s efforts to expand the role of the federal government to protect citizens’ in need would resurface again and again throughout the 1920s as the League of Women Voters and their social feminist allies attempted promote their progressive agenda. As subsequent chapters will explore, opponents of the social feminist reform agenda would get much better at combating their efforts than Nathan Miller in his speech before the League.

Endnotes

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²¹ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p29-34.

²² “Scholars estimate women’s turn out in 1920s lagged 20 to 30% behind men’s” Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p.26.

²³ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 20.

²⁴ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 20.

²⁵ Lape, Ester Everett, “Teaching the Woman Voter Politics: The Rapid Growth of a New Idea” *Forum* September/October 1920, p.198.

²⁶ Since the organization’s inception they regularly asked candidates to speak regarding their views on issues relevant to the League: *New York Times*, “Ask Candidates’ Views” September 20, 1920, p. E5; *New York Times*, “Women Ready for Campaign” July 10, 1921, p. 77.

²⁷ Lape, “Teaching the Woman Voter Politics,” p. 200.

²⁸ Lape, “Teaching the Woman Voter Politics,” p. 200-201.

²⁹ Elisabeth Marbury, “Women in Politics” *Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p. 53.

³⁰ Lape, “Teaching the Woman Voter Politics,” p. 205.

³¹ Lape, “Teaching the Woman Voter Politics,” p. 201, 207.

³² Lape, “Teaching the Woman Voter Politics,” p. 207.

³³ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, p. 458-470.

³⁴ “Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions” *New York Times* Jan 28, 1921, p.1.

³⁵ “Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions,” p. 1.

³⁶ “Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions,” p. 1.

³⁷ “Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions,” p. 1.

³⁸ “Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions,” p. 1.

³⁹ Carrie Chapman Catt, “Tempest in a Tea Pot,” *The Woman Citizen*, Feb 5 1921, p. 1.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that other political issues were at work in 1920 that may have played as great a role in the outcome of the election as did the League’s campaign against Wadsworth. The fact that the Nineteenth Amendment had passed less than six months earlier supported the notion that Wadsworth was at least slightly in the minority on suffrage, particularly in New York where women had gained the vote in 1917. Furthermore, the election of 1920 hinged on Americans views on the League of Nations. The overwhelming Republican victory in 1920 was considered by many at the time, as well as by scholars today, to be more a vote against the League of Nations and Woodrow Wilson’s promise of American aid abroad than it was a victory for Harding. In fact, according to historian Frederick Lewis Allen, the Republican leadership chose Harding not because he was a strong candidate, but because their victory was all but assured regardless of whom they choose and they preferred an amiable character that the public

would like and the Party could control. Still, Miller's indignance at the League's opposition to Wadsworth suggests that Party leaders were watching very closely to see how seriously they needed to consider the woman's vote.

⁴¹ "Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions," p1.

⁴² Extensive discussion of Miller's speech, Vanderlip's response, and press coverage of the issue found in Carrie Chapman Catt, "Tempest in a Tea Pot," *The Woman Citizen*, Feb 5 1921, p. 1 and *The Woman Citizen*, "The Second Thoughts of Governor Miller" 19 February 1921, p. 1009 and *New York Times*, "Women's League Replies to Miller; Pushes Program" January 29, 1921, p. 1.

⁴³ *The Nation*, "Are Women A Menace?" Feb 9, 1921, p.198.

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925; Roosevelt, Eleanor, "Women Must Learn to Play the Game as Men Do" *The Redbook Magazine*. 50, no 6 (April 1928) 78-79, 141-142.

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⁴⁶ "Women Here Divide on Miller Speech" *New York Times*, Jan 29, 1921, p.7.

⁴⁷ "Women Here Divide on Miller Speech," p.7.

⁴⁸ "Miller Tells League of Women Voters It Is a Menace to Our Institutions," p1.

⁴⁹ *The New Republic*, "The Future of the League of Women Voters" 9 Feb 1921, p. 302 included in How Did Republicans Respond to Suffragists' Entry into Electoral Politics in New York, 1919-1926 by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Nicole Hunt in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds. *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 5/3/2005.

⁵⁰ "Plan of Work and Program for the National LWV, 1923-4" [c. 1923], Maud Wood Park Papers; Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 78.

⁵¹ Papers of the League of Women Voters Part III series A, microfilm reel 5.

⁵² *The Woman Citizen*, "The Carrie Chapman Catt Citizenship Course: Information Women Want," January 15, 1921, p. 1892.

⁵³ Eunice Fuller Barnard, "When New York Gave Woman the Vote" *New York Times*, November 5, 1927, pg SM4.

⁵⁴ 1927, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Courtesy of League of Women Voters of the United States; Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 46 Figure 8.

⁵⁵ Papers of the League of Women Voters Part III series A, microfilm reel 5; Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 49-53.

⁵⁶ Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

⁵⁷ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 49-53.

⁵⁸ “Vote as You Please – But Vote” Cover, *American Industries* 1924, available at the Hagley Museum and Library. Courtesy of the National Association of Manufacturers; Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, Figure 9.

⁵⁹ Peak, Mayme, Ober, “Women in Politics,” *Outlook*, January 23, 1924, p. 150.

⁶⁰ Maud Wood Park, “A Record of Four Years in the National LWV, 1920-1924,” [c. 1924].

⁶¹ “Governor Miller in his Albany speech merely gave frank expression to the fear which party politicians feel towards any movement which looks toward the reinvigoration of the local centers of political opinion and resolution.” *The New Republic*, Feb 9, 1921, p302.

⁶² Papers of the League of Women Voters Part III series A, microfilm reels 1 and 5.

⁶³ *New York Times*, “Mrs. Catt Queries Miller on Menaces” February 10, 1922, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 153.

⁶⁵ Papers of the League of Women Voters, Part III, series A, microfilm reel 5.

⁶⁶ Papers of the League of Women Voters, Part III, series A, microfilm reel 5.

⁶⁷ “Why a Homemaker Should be Interested in Voting” *Voters Campaign Information Service* NBC Radio, Feb 27, 1928; “Open Conference: Education in Government and Politics” April 24, 1924, Papers of the League of Women Voters, Part III series A, reel 5.

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, “Woman Criticises Miller” Feb 3, 1921, p. 3.

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⁷⁰ McShane, Clay, *Down the Asphalt Path*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 149-172.

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⁷³ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 69.

⁷⁴ A 1920 advertisement in the *New York Times* promotes a League book at Gimbels offering “Mrs. And Miss New Voter” information on how to vote: *New York Times*, Gimbel Brothers Advertisement, October 27, 1920, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 174.

⁷⁶ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 184.

⁷⁷ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 177-8.

⁷⁸ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 88.

⁷⁹ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 67-69.

⁸⁰ Papers of the League of Women Voters, Part III, series A, microfilm reels 1 and 5.

⁸¹ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 166.

⁸² Barnard, "When New York Gave Women the Vote," p. SM4

⁸³ Barnard, "When New York Gave Woman the Vote," p. SM4.

⁸⁴ Gidlow, *The Big Vote*, p. 28.

⁸⁵ Barnard, "When New York Gave Woman the Vote," p. SM4.

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Chapter 3

Feminists in Conflict: Competing Notions of Liberalism in the Debate over the Equal Rights Amendment

“Men and Women shall have Equal Rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction”¹

On July 19, 1923 the National Woman’s Party (NWP) met to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention.² The 1848 convention marked the beginning of the movement for women’s rights in America by decrying current grievances against women and establishing an agenda to remedy them. Modeled after the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the Seneca Falls Declaration proclaimed women’s right to equality with men in all areas of human endeavor. It outlined a set of legal, social, and political injustices that needed to be abolished in order that women might achieve equal status with men. In keeping with the tradition of Seneca Falls, the 1923 Convention of the NWP sought to set a new course for the women’s movement, which had, only three years earlier, achieved the first of its goals with the passage of woman suffrage. Announcing of the Lucretia Mott Amendment (also known as the Equal Rights Amendment, ERA, or Blanket Amendment), guaranteeing legal equality for women nationwide, the NWP committed itself to the cause of equality for women first adopted by the sixty-eight women and thirty-two men who signed the 1848 declaration.

In the evening pageant that followed the announcement of the ERA, a blaze of purple and gold streamers, flowers, and candles surrounded two classically clad women

personifying Justice and Liberty as they took to the stage in front of the Seneca River.³

These archetypal goddesses met three women dressed in the garb of the 1840s signifying Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony, the leaders of the Seneca Falls Convention. The river behind the stage was ablaze with candlelight as hundreds of members of the National Women's Party floated toward the stage in small boats. The scene was intended to suggest unity with the past and a powerful and enlightened future for women. *Equal Rights*, a monthly NWP publication, described it thus:

The brave banners held high, the perfect harmony of marching choristers, the changing masses of bright colors set against the blackness of the night, all winged the spirit to the world afar. The living dead, quaint in the costume of another year, entered the scene, bringing with them thoughts and hopes, old and yet new, familiar and yet unfamiliar like the faces of friends seen after a long parting. There in the darkness of the night the Past and the Future clasped hands and time stood still. For a moment in infinity human eyes beheld the purposefulness of the universe.⁴

Cloaked in the idealism of classical liberalism, the pageantry of the recently successful suffrage movement, and the solidarity represented by Seneca Falls, the NWP kicked off the second major campaign in the battle for women's rights. This battle would prove even longer, and more contentious than the fight for suffrage, in large part because it was contrary to the worldview of the mainstream women's movement of the period.

By announcing their intention to pursue a "Blanket Amendment" establishing legal equality for women, the National Woman's Party positioned itself as the direct descendant of Seneca Falls feminism and the ERA as the next step in an uninterrupted quest for women's rights that began in 1848. Yet the ERA set the NWP in ideological conflict with the social feminist movement of the day, represented during the suffrage

movement by the NAWSA and in 1923 by, among others, the League of Women Voters and the Women's Trade Union League. The NWP used drama and idealism in this presentation to assert their status as the lone standard-bearers of an ideology and a methodology that originated at Seneca Falls – the commitment to the cause of legal equality for women and the unwillingness to compromise to reach this goal. This pomp and circumstance was a false statement of gender unity, a necessary diversion to mask the fact that by promoting the ERA, the NWP was quite alone among women's organizations of the period. Every other major women's organization, from the League of Women Voters to the Women's Trade Union League, felt that legalizing women's equal status with men would undermine the legal protections that social feminists had won for working women throughout the progressive era.⁵

The introduction of the ERA cemented an ideological split in the NWP and the movement as a whole between the majority of rank and file members or “social feminists,” to use William O'Neill's term, and “radical feminists” who supported the ERA.⁶ Social feminists, who made up the majority of suffragists within both the NWP and all other women's organizations in 1923, believed that fundamental differences between men and women predicated that the sexes should have different social roles.⁷ They hoped to use the newly won vote to expand women's social roles by harnessing women's traditional strengths -- disinterestedness, moral rectitude, empathy -- to the creation of national domestic and foreign policy. Radical feminists, on the other hand, understood the differences between the sexes to be limited to a handful of biological characteristics. They viewed the extensive gender differences ascribed to men and

women to be socially and legally constructed.⁸ As such, they sought to undermine existing social norms and establish legal equality to free women to pursue all the avenues available to men. The ERA was fundamental to this goal.⁹

The notion of difference was critical to the NAWSA's campaign for suffrage. They argued that industrial capitalism, the dominion of men, was in need of reform and that women, with their superior moral constitutions could best oversee such reform.¹⁰ Nineteenth century domestic ideology, which arose in America during the industrial revolution, suggested that men had superior logic, far-sightedness, and physical strength, which were well suited to the public world of business and politics. Under this ideology, women's moral rectitude, which was protected within the home, provided an important check on men's amoral drive to succeed individually and on behalf of his race. The difference argument was used to win legislative protections for working women, such as work hour limits and safety regulations within the work place, under the guise that women were morally and physically vulnerable outside the domestic sphere.¹¹

Prior to suffrage, social feminists argued that women's lack of direct access to government through the franchise necessitated that government protect women. The latter argument was plausible and appealing to progressives and more conservation groups alike because it affirmed both the corruption of industry and the existing social order in which women's presence in the realm of industry was viewed as anomalous. Thus, elements of the suffrage movement and the women's labor movement made progress in the early twentieth century because the image of womanhood that they presented was consistent with contemporary views of gender roles as most Americans

understood them. Social feminists did not ask Americans to give up the notion that the differences between men and women were real and that they were based on sex. They merely suggested that American politics would benefit from the feminine perspective.¹²

This chapter will examine the ideological conflict between social and radical feminists over the ERA as a mechanism to improve the condition of American women. The social feminist camp will be represented here primarily by the Women's Trade Union League who led efforts by women's organizations to defend protective legislation for women against the threat posed by the Blanket Amendment. Beginning with a discussion of the practical and philosophical roots of their opposing views on the ERA, the chapter will consider women's involvement in the broad discourse regarding American liberalism in the early twentieth century. Having established the NWP as defenders of classical liberalism against the 'new liberalism' that social feminists endorsed, this study will explore the implications of the NWP's legal formalism, which in the 1920s was used by federal and state courts to thwart WTUL efforts to protect and expand legislation for women workers. This chapter will explore how each ideological camp addressed the concerns of both legislatures and courts over the competing issues of equal rights versus legal protections for women.

Lastly, this chapter will examine how the WTUL, an organization dedicated to improving industrial conditions for working women, committed itself to the consumerist compromise. These social feminists too needed to create an image of womanhood more appealing to the public at large than that of the NWP despite the fact that this image of womanhood was not particularly consistent with the experience of working women. By

embracing a consumerist image of civic womanhood the WTUL hoped to win mass public support for new liberalism, thereby revolutionizing Americans' expectations of their government, a view that gained as the Great Depression forced many Americans to look to government for aid.

The story of the opposition between the National Woman's Party and social feminist organizations begins with the creation of the NWP. The NWP was born in 1916 out of irreconcilable differences between NAWSA leader Carrie Chapman Catt and Alice Paul. Paul joined the NAWSA and was appointed head of the Congressional Committee in 1912 to spearhead the effort for a national suffrage amendment. Part of Catt's "Winning Plan" to achieve woman suffrage was to establish an office in Washington D.C. dedicated to lobbying for suffrage federally while state campaigns were waged simultaneously nationwide. Catt hoped that once enough states passed individual suffrage laws a federal amendment would be politically feasible.¹³ Still, most members of the NAWSA viewed the national effort as secondary to state campaigns for suffrage.

Paul led this Congressional Committee, later called the Congressional Union, which became under her leadership quite independent of the NAWSA leadership.¹⁴ Paul was ideologically committed to a federal amendment as the best means to obtain suffrage and sought to place the issue before the public using the methods of British suffragist and labor leader, Emmeline Pankhurst. Paul and co-founder of the NWP, Lucy Burns, had worked with Pankhurst in England at the Woodbrooke Settlement between 1907 and 1910. The NAWSA publicly disavowed the tactics of British suffragists, which included civil disobedience, raucous demonstrations in which they threw food and stones at

politicians who opposed suffrage, and protests against any member of the reigning political party whether they supported suffrage or not.

With Lucy Burns, Crystal Eastman, and a small cadre of suffragists, Paul arrived in Washington D.C. in 1912 and immediately set out to get some publicity. They organized a suffrage parade and pageant on March 3, 1913 to distract from the arrival in Washington of president-elect Woodrow Wilson. Between eight and ten thousand suffragists marched, including a group dressed in nineteenth-century attire, depicting the progress of suffrage since Seneca Falls. There were twenty-six floats, ten bands, and five squadrons of cavalry with six chariots. The event's crowning moment was said to be when the beautiful Inez Milholland, who thereafter became the symbol of enfranchised womanhood and the NWP, rode down the street dressed in brightly colored sashes and Greek robes atop a white horse, betokening liberty herself.¹⁵ The suffrage parade drew huge crowds away from the President-elect's arrival celebration and announced the attitude of the NWP toward Wilson for the whole of his presidency.

Central to Paul's strategy to win a federal suffrage amendment was the desire to garner the national spotlight by blaming the Wilson administration and the Democrats for their failure to grant women the franchise. As she put it at the NAWSA convention in 1910, "The essence of the campaign of the suffragettes is opposition to the government ... It is not a war of women against men, for the men are helping loyally, but a war of women and men together against the politicians."¹⁶ This strategy opposed that of the NAWSA, which viewed Wilson and the Democrats as allies in the fight for suffrage.

After several years of disagreement Paul and her fellows in the Congressional Union officially parted with the NAWSA and formed the NWP in 1916.

As an entity independent of the NAWSA the NWP embraced Pankhurst's strategies wholeheartedly, picketing the White House in protest against women's disenfranchisement even as the United States entered World War I in 1917. The quiet demonstrations by the "silent sentinels" became heated as many viewed their wartime dissent as unpatriotic or even treasonous. NWP picket signs drew on wartime rhetoric, calling the commander-in-chief "Kaiser Wilson." Incensed by the protesters' lack of respect for the American war effort, Wilson had NWP protesters, including Paul, forcibly removed from the gates of the White House by police and charged with obstructing traffic.¹⁷ Upon refusing to pay the resulting fine, Paul and her cohorts were sent to Occoquan, a federal workhouse in Virginia. Demanding to be recognized as political prisoners, they engaged in a hunger strike. In an incident that went a long way toward earning sympathy for woman suffrage, the NWP leaked information to the press regarding the harsh treatment they received, which included violent forced-feedings. As a result, they were soon freed and, of course, took full advantage of the event as further example of Wilson's abuse of America's female citizenry.¹⁸

While there is much debate about how great a contribution this incident made to the achievement of suffrage in 1920, the NAWSA came to see the antics of the NWP as a good counterpoint to their own efforts. The civil disobedience and generally rowdy and unladylike behavior of the NWP shined in contrast to the measured, reasonable, and

politically astute methods of the NAWSA, giving them frequent opportunity to highlight what valuable political allies they could be in thwarting radicalism of all kinds.¹⁹

Thus, by 1923 when Paul introduced the Equal Rights Amendment, the National Woman's Party already had a reputation as one of the "leading radical forces in American politics."²⁰ The standoff between the NWP and the other leading women's groups had begun as soon as the NWP decided to pursue the ERA as its sole objective at their National Convention in 1921. The event was announced to the many women's organizations who attended as both a celebration of their shared legacy as suffragists and an opportunity to participate in the recreation (or dissolution) of the party based on the collective needs of women in the aftermath of the franchise. Notably absent from the event was the League of Women Voters, whose leadership correctly assumed that Paul would be impossible to control.²¹

Ethel M. Smith, Legislative Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, saw the event as an opportunity to create coalitions among women's groups.²² She hoped the NWP would help to coordinate the efforts of these different groups by streamlining work and sharing resources.²³ The most important matter to many of the women present was disarmament, which in the aftermath of the recent devastation of World War I and with the question of the creation of a League of Nations still unresolved, was a pressing political issue. Like Smith, many thought that the NWP should develop a broad platform that incorporated all of the major issues of concern to the various women's groups. The spectrum of political issues requested for inclusion in the NWP platform included the Child Labor Amendment, World Court, Uniform Divorce Bill, Fess-Capper Bill

providing physical education for school children, immigration laws, and protections against racial discrimination for black women voters among others.²⁴

Leaders from many organizations, including the WTUL, spoke at the convention about the issues for which they were currently fighting and made suggestions about how the NWP could best assist their efforts. After a full day of such speeches, Alice Paul, Vice President of the NWP and its ideological leader, announced the Party's intention to direct all of their resources to pursuing equal rights for women through a blanket federal amendment. She suggested that the NWP would leave the issues discussed throughout the day in the able hands of the groups already addressing them. Many in attendance felt that their suggestions were not even briefly considered, that the decisions about the future of the NWP agenda had already been made before any of them had arrived or spoken a word.²⁵

Paul's unwillingness to consider any other course than the ERA left many NWP members outraged and resulted in a dramatic drop in Party membership. Likewise, it was the beginning of a major ideological split between the NWP and the majority of other women's organizations. The decision to pursue the ERA solely not only created a Party agenda that was not inclusive of most women's groups needs, but threatened to invalidate much of the protective legislation won by social feminists over the last quarter century. How then could two strategies both designed to improve the status of women be so divergent and, indeed, have such negative effects on one another? The answer to this fundamental question lies in how the two camps viewed the role of

government and the courts, and how they understood women's role in politics and society at large.

While both camps were interested in improving conditions for women, divergent class concerns drove them to embrace differing mechanisms to achieve this common end. Analyses of the suffrage movement have pointed to the fact that most members of the NWP following suffrage were professionally elite and/or financially independent women, a minority among American women indeed.²⁶ The NAWSA had by the early twentieth century a much broader appeal with millions of members from across social, economic and racial divides, although middle and upper class white women were over-represented in the organization's leadership. NWP leaders Paul and Burns were both lawyers and Paul held a Ph.D. in political science as well. Ava Belmont, President of the NWP, was an independently wealthy widow and many of the leading supporters of the NWP's ERA campaign came from among the ranks of women doctors, lawyers, journalists, academics and other highly educated professionals. This demographic partially explains the NWP's support of the ERA, which would directly benefit such women who had often experienced gender discrimination in their careers. Armed with the degrees to prove their skill, such women would have under the ERA the means to sue employers who failed to pay them a wage equal to male counterparts or failed to promote or admit them to elite programs. For unskilled women workers living in poverty, the lengthy and expensive process of suing for their rights individually was beyond reach. Collective action for legislative protection, either through unionization or through political coalitions with middle-class and elite women, was the only practical alternative for these women. Social

feminists, who joined forces with labor organizations to protect women workers, viewed the Equal Rights Amendment as an abstract ideal not practical in this “work-a-day world.”²⁷

Beginning in 1923, a number of publications invited leaders from the opposing camps to present their arguments regarding the ERA in order to give their readers the opportunity to make their own decision regarding the issue. *Congressional Digest*, *The Forum*, and *Good Housekeeping* published articles that explored the potential effects of the ERA on the lives of American women as perceived by both sides.^{28 29} The public debate over the ERA in these articles highlights differences between radical and social feminists that were rooted ideological differences regarding the role of class and gender in the battle for women’s rights.

One of the primary reasons why the National Women’s Party supported the ERA was because the Party felt it would be more expedient than pursuing issue-based legislation at both state and federal levels. With one broadly defined law establishing equality they hoped to improve the status of women in myriad areas, at once rendering illegal inequalities in citizenship, marriage, child custody, and wages. Paul claimed that a blanket amendment was preferable to state-by state campaigns because it was more inclusive, more permanent, a better use of resources, and was more dignified, thus befitting the importance of the issue.³⁰ NWP member Doris Stevens argued that the ERA was a definitive step toward granting the same rights to women as to men, including: equal control of their children, property, earnings, and government; equal right to make contracts; equal citizenship and inheritance rights; equal opportunities in schools,

government, professions and industries; and equal pay for equal work. The broad impact of the bill made it preferable to piecemeal efforts.³¹

Mary Van Kleek, Director of Industrial Studies at New York's Russell Sage Foundation, opposed this view, arguing that the current amendment was vague and therefore would require lengthy judicial interpretation, the preparation for which would draw vital energy away from efforts at the state and national levels to pass additional legislation on behalf of women.³² Sophonisba Breckinridge of the University of Chicago supported Van Kleek's argument in her discussion of the potential impact of the ERA on 'mother's pensions.' Breckinridge suggested that although the benefits were designed to assist children not mothers, opponents of social welfare legislation would use the Amendment as a means to halt aid via legal injunction while the courts determined how the Amendment applied to the program.³³ Florence Kelley of the National Consumers' League argued that state laws which addressed specific labor issues could be easily amended or replaced with new laws allowing more flexibility as labor conditions changed. In contrast, a constitutional amendment, intended to be general and far-reaching, was very difficult to amend, requiring a three-fourths majority to repeal or amend, and thus must be so broad and vague as to make them difficult to enforce. Furthermore, the process of ratifying a constitutional amendment was an extraordinarily long one during which time many state laws could be passed.³⁴

Expediency, however, was not the primary issue that opponents had with the ERA. The more fundamental problem was that by demanding equal treatment of men and women under the law it would legally invalidate existing laws and prevent future

legislation designed to protect women working in industry by limiting their work hours, and setting a minimum wage. Breckinridge illustrated how this might work with regard to the mother's pension. Because mothers were overwhelmingly the main recipients of the funds, and since agencies were unlikely to grant funds to children of fathers whom they deemed capable of supporting their children on their own, the program could be viewed as illegal under the Amendment because it unequally benefited the children of single mothers in need rather than those of single fathers.³⁵

Doris Stevens of the National Woman's Party argued against the need for special legislation protecting women, contending that despite the popular view that women's morality was threatened by exposure to the industrial workplace "women as well as men become more responsible in the realm of morals only when they are free to behave according to the dictates of social conscience."³⁶ Against the argument that women were physically unfit for industrial labor, she claimed that in the absence of protection "natural fitness" would determine the extent of competition. In other words, women who lacked the skill for such work would avoid it as men unfit for it did. Those women able to do physically strenuous labor should not be prevented from doing so because the majority of women could not. Stevens suggested that the arguments against women's labor were the same unfounded arguments that critics had raised against every gain made by women throughout history, and that their fears were never realized. Neither women's speaking in public, attending college, nor voting had caused the downfall of the race as feared by critics of those advances. So too could women rise to the occasion and contract their own labor freely without the protection of government.³⁷

Alice Hamilton, an expert in the field of industrial poisoning, brought her extensive knowledge of industrial welfare statistics to bear on the question of the need for protective legislation for women in industry. She argued that, in fact, women's health and welfare suffered more than that of men given the same industrial conditions. She suggested that one possible reason for this was the double burden women carried, adding household labor to their labor outside the home. Regardless of the root cause, she noted that studies conducted on mill workers indicated that women were more likely to die or become victims of tuberculosis than either male workers in the same industry or women outside the mills. While the increased rates of death and illness among men working in mills as compared to those working in other industries made Hamilton an advocate of protective legislation for men as well as women, she was not willing to give up existing legislation protecting women who were, in fact, in greater need. She felt that the inequalities remedied by the blanket amendment would not outweigh the mortal dangers women workers would face due to the loss of protective legislation.³⁸

Florence Kelley highlighted legislation that could be threatened by the passage of the Equal Right Amendment – including the Sheppard-Towner Act, which provided maternity and infant care, and New York and New Jersey laws prohibiting night-work for women. She pointed out that these laws as well as the mothers' pensions were supported by the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the largest women's organization in the nation, which had actively lobbied for their passage because the care for needy women and children fell soundly within the bounds of local charity that clubwomen viewed to be central to their civic duties. Kelley emphasized the dual efforts of men and women

workers to achieve industrial safety measures, suggesting that, like women, men also fought for shorter work days but that while women used legislation as their mechanism, men went on strike. She pointed to several fields of work, including mining and textiles, which were segregated by gender and criticized the proposed amendment for forcing men and women to accept equivalent rights without regard for the conditions of industry.³⁹

At the heart of the debate over protective legislation versus the equal rights amendment as mechanisms to improve the status of women lie divergent views about the role that government should play in society. Social feminists, in keeping with their progressive ideological roots, sought to expand the rights and responsibilities of both federal and state governments to protect the interests of American citizens.⁴⁰ Social feminists argued that laissez-faire liberalism that had dominated American political culture since the eighteenth century was inadequate to meet the challenged of modern American life.⁴¹ In response to the harsh conditions created by industrialization and urbanization, they envisioned a new liberalism in which government was called upon to ensure a basic level of economic, political, and social security for American citizens.

Classical liberalism, which was central to the founding fathers' articulation of American government in the Constitution of the United States, was predicated on the belief that the best way to guarantee freedom and ensure individual liberty was to protect citizens from the encroachments of government and other individuals. In other words, citizens should be free to act in their own best interest as long as their actions did not compromise the freedoms of others. First enacted prior to industrialization when American life was predominated rural and agrarian, classical liberalism embraced the

laissez-faire political philosophy. Literally meaning ‘to let do,’ the *laissez-faire* doctrine reflected the economic philosophies of Adam Smith who argued that the market system must be regulated by the interests of the participants rather than encumbered by government.⁴² Smith believed that markets functioned best and most equitably when free from governmental intervention. The Founding Fathers sought to ensure the stability of American financial markets but were even more concerned with ensuring that America would continue to be the “classless society” that they celebrated – free from the problems seen in Europe of having a society that included both the incredibly rich and powerful and the incredibly poor and powerless.⁴³ The European model of wealth distribution that the founding fathers sought to avoid was one in which wealth and political power were closely tied. In pre-industrial Europe wealth was tied to land, which had long been allocated by the Crown. In crafting an American political system, the founders sought to limit the ability of government to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few powerful men through the *laissez-faire* doctrine, which prevented government from intervening in American business. In keeping with this philosophy, the Founding Fathers sought to limit governmental action to national defense, administration of justice, and provision of certain public goods. The Bill of Rights enumerated those rights guaranteed by the Constitution and thus protected by government. Since then the existence of a bill of rights enumerating those rights explicitly protected by government has been interpreted by some courts to mean that those are the only rights the Founding Fathers intended to be protected by the Constitution. Therefore, all rights other than those specifically included are not protected.

Historians have pointed to the early twentieth century as an important moment of transformation in American liberalism although they disagree widely about its nature and implications.⁴⁴ In its most basic form, liberalism is essentially the idea that government is responsible for and to its citizens.⁴⁵ Over the course of American history the term has come to signify different types of programs as ideas about the appropriate role of government have changed. Beginning with the Progressive movement in the 1890s and ending with the enactment of New Deal policies in the 1930s this period bore witness to an expansion of American liberalism that dramatically increased government's role in regulating business and ensuring the welfare of its citizens, goals for which social feminists had long fought.

Twentieth-century progressive social movements challenged classical liberalism and worked to discredit *laissez-faire* philosophy by arguing that American life had changed and that the *laissez faire* doctrine was not relevant to the realities of urban industrial modernity.⁴⁶ Seeking to curb the many abuses they saw in modern industrial capitalism, they pointed out that America was no longer a classless society. Industrial capitalists had accumulated enormous wealth, monopolized markets, and virtually enslaved urban populations. Progressives believed that the U.S. Constitution, which was designed to protect the majority of small land owners from encroachments by government was, by the turn of the twentieth century, protecting a minority of industrialists from the need to give most of citizens a living wage and safe working conditions. An increasing number of Americans from all classes viewed this situation as intolerable. They argued in varied, and at times contradictory, ways that in the face of

industrialization, government needed to play a more active role in moderating excesses, curbing abuses, and mediating labor relations. Assisted by economist John Maynard Keynes, they argued that Adam Smith's notion that the markets could regulate themselves was clearly erroneous and that government must take responsibility for ensuring that citizens were able to exercise those liberties guaranteed them by the Constitution.⁴⁷

Social feminists were among those who challenged government to drastically expand its social and economic functions, altering governmental policies, establishing new government agencies, instituting new legal precedents that guaranteed new protections, and establishing new laws designed to protect the freedoms of American citizens in new ways.⁴⁸ They had long sought to establish legal protections for women such as minimum wage laws, work hour limits, prohibition of night work, factory health and safety regulations and many more. While these organizations supported men's efforts to improve working conditions, primarily through labor union negotiations and, when necessary, strikes, women sought to improve their own status within industry by pursuing legislation to protect them. Laboring women and children were widely viewed as being less able to protect themselves against the abuses of industrial capitalism than men in large part because they were viewed by unions to be a temporary workforce and therefore unworthy of organization.⁴⁹ In the early twentieth century, they won labor legislation on behalf of women and children that was believed to be impossible to win for laboring men at the time.

Laws like the Shepard-Towner Act, mothers' pensions, minimum wage laws and other forms of protective legislation were the fruits born of the efforts of social feminists and other progressives to extend the role of government over the lives of individuals. The WTUL and others felt that current industrial conditions necessitated a reevaluation of the relationship between government and industry such that government must protect the physical and economic well being of workers by regulating business.⁵⁰ The successful passage of these laws meant that a significant majority of American constituencies and their representatives in state and federal legislatures agreed with Progressives that the expansion of industry in the twentieth century was so great and so rife with corruption that government must step in to protect individuals en masse.

Yet the successes Progressives experienced in the first two decades of the twentieth century slowed and began to be rolled back in the 1920s as conservative courts rendered unconstitutional many progressive laws, staunchly defending the laissez faire political philosophy. The public, too, began to look less favorably on such reforms in the aftermath of World War I, as fears of communism caused many to view with suspicion workers and immigrants whom progressives sought to help. Reformers began to be suspected of communist sympathies and new government initiatives came to be viewed as socialistic efforts to centralize power.

Courts were able to thwart the expansion of government advocated by Progressives by arguing that the judge's role in court is to assure that the rules set forth in the system of laws and legal precedents were strictly followed. This legal formalism meant that judges should base decisions on a strict interpretation of the law.⁵¹ This long-

held view, which gave way temporarily to a broader interpretation of the law in the Progressive Era, was revived in 1921 when William Howard Taft became Chief Justice, and placed the Supreme Court at odds with state legislatures across the country. The Supreme Court upheld the ideals of laissez-faire capitalism within the U.S. Constitution, arguing for the supremacy of citizens' right to contract their labor over their need to earn a livable wage and work under safe conditions.

While protective legislation was continually being rendered unconstitutional because it violated women's freedom to contract their own labor, NWP advocates of the ERA celebrated the courts' conservative position. Unlike legislation that enumerated new rights for citizens and new responsibilities for government, the Equal Rights Amendment legalized women's inclusion in the body of citizens already protected under existing law. Despite the NWP's radicalism with regard to gender norms, their stance with respect to the laissez-faire political philosophy was relatively conservative as compared with their opponents. By conservative, I mean that they did not seek to alter existing laws or interpretations of those laws by the judiciary. One of the major benefits of the ERA as a method to improve the status of women in the eyes of the NWP was that it was ideologically and legally consistent with classical liberalism.

The NWP believed that by establishing legal equality for women within the U.S. Constitution they could plant the seed from which a widespread belief in the equality of women could grow. They argued that protective legislation set a legal precedent in which women, like children, were defined as dependents rather than as independent actors on their own behalf and that this precedent constituted a discriminatory act and

was detrimental to women as they began to stake their claims to equal representation in positions of power within government, the professions, and even the household. They urged men and women to fight collectively to improve labor conditions rather than pursuing alternate strategies that they argued placed men and women in competition with one another.⁵² The NWP recognized that by establishing equality as a legal imperative, it would not instantaneously become a fact of life for women across the nation. But, with the law on their side, the NWP could launch a nationwide campaign to fight the individual battles against discrimination. The Amendment would provide a legal shield to protect their victories from being overturned by conservative courts.

One example of the divergent ideologies at the heart of women's political strategies may be found in the debate regarding the April 1923 Supreme Court case, *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, which declared unconstitutional a District of Columbia minimum wage law. Justice Sutherland in the majority (5-3) decision stated that "[i]n principle there can be no difference between the case of selling labor and the case of selling goods."⁵³ One's labor, then, was deemed a form of property and as such could be freely sold under the terms of contract agreed upon by the two parties involved, in this case between the employer and the employee. States, or the District of Columbia in this case, were expressly prohibited from "impairing the Obligations of Contract" in Article 1, Section 10 of the United States Constitution. As such, the District's enactment of a minimum wage law was deemed unconstitutional by five of the eight judges who heard the case (Justice Brandeis was not present).

The National Women's Party applauded the Court's strict interpretation of the Constitution in *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, arguing that the minimum wage law did, in fact, prevent women from freely contracting their labor on their own terms.⁵⁴ Politically, they felt that this would strengthen their case for the ERA by allowing them to claim that protective legislation was not legally permissible and that, therefore, the ERA represented the best means to secure improvement in the status of women. In the aftermath of the *Adkins* decision, the NWP argued that the ERA was preferable to protective legislation because it would stand up to the legal formalism of the Supreme Court.

The Taft Court was not unanimous in its decision, however. Justice Holmes wrote that his dissenting opinion in the *Adkins* case "was intended . . . to dethrone Liberty of Contract from its ascendancy into the Liberty business." This was not to say, however, that Holmes personally agreed with the law. Rather it, and many other dissenting opinions he wrote in the 1920s, signified his belief in what has come to be known as judicial restraint. He believed "that legislatures are ultimate guardians of the liberties and welfare of the people in quite as great a degree as the courts." Therefore, the Courts should not apply an absolute or strict standard of interpretation to the law to uphold "the constitutional conception of 'liberty' . . . with theories of laissez faire."⁵⁵ In due time, Holmes doctrine of judicial restraint would provide the necessary legal foundation for the welfare state envisioned by Progressives.

Social feminists, of course, were disappointed by the Court's decision in the *Adkins*' case. They hoped to convince the Court, as they had with success in several cases during the previous decade, that the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution

could be interpreted to sanction governmental intervention on behalf of workers. Advocates of what came to be called legal realism hoped to preserve progressive victories by arguing that judges must be free to reinterpret laws to preserve the public welfare. Judges' freedom to interpret the Constitution in light of changes in modern society would ensure that the freedoms that the Constitution meant to preserve could be protected even in the face of changes, such as industrialization, unforeseen by the founding fathers.

The split decision in *Adkins*, as well as in several other decisions invalidating protective legislation (decided by just one vote) suggested to advocates of protective legislation that such a change in philosophy was imminent. These advocates cited the Fourteenth Amendment, which stated that "No person shall ... be deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" arguing that state intervention represented due process when necessary to prohibit the unlawful deprivation of life, liberty, and property by one's employer. This interpretation, which in the 1920s was held by a minority of Supreme Court judges, gained ground in the 1930s. In the 1920s, however, supporters of the minimum wage law were correct in their fears that the decision threatened minimum wage laws for women already in effect in fourteen states and would open the door to attacks on other progressive laws as well.⁵⁶ The Taft Court "served as censors of legislative attempts to enact regulatory laws, particularly those protecting the rights of labor."⁵⁷ The majority often used the Fourteenth Amendment, in the words of Justice

Holmes, “ to prevent the making of social experiments that an important part of the community desires.”⁵⁸

Legal decisions like *Adkins V. Children’s Hospital* revealed the beginnings of a transformation in American jurisprudence with regard to the regulation of industrial capitalism. Justice Holmes saw that the Court was out of step with the views of many Americans, and felt that it was a misuse of judicial power to prevent social changes desired by the majority. The apparent injustice of judicial power was brought home to supporters of progressive reforms in the *Adkins* case. The law was invalidated by just one vote, despite its approval by Congress and the President, and overwhelming popular support. Ethel M. Smith of the WTUL argued, “Something must be done to humanize the courts or else the Constitution.”⁵⁹ Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor stated, “All progressive men and women must resent the language used by the Court in this decision. It demeans humanity.”⁶⁰

The NWP had the upper hand over social feminists in the judicial arena because, unlike protective legislation, the ERA was consistent with the legal formalism of the Taft Court. However, this was of little value to them without the public support necessary to get the amendment passed in Congress and ratified in the States. The classical liberalism of the NWP was regaining approval among the general public in the aftermath of World War I while the Progressivism of social feminist reformers was losing ground.⁶¹ Yet the NWP was unable to win mass support for the ERA for one simple reason: it was obvious to most Americans that men and women were not equal. Neither the image of womanhood presented by the NWP nor the model of citizenship embodied by their

rowdy civil disobedience during the suffrage campaign were ideals that appealed to most Americans, male or female.

As discussed in chapter one, most people in the 1920s believed that men and women's social roles were significantly determined by their sex and that those roles were, for the most part, mutually exclusive. The NWP asserted that except for small differences in biology, men and women were the same and thus deserved the same rights and privileges. They saw the ERA as the next step in the evolution of women's emancipation from dependence on men within the confines of domesticity and domestic ideology. Legal equality was essential to women's full entrance into the public realm of the professions and politics as well as to equality within the family. As more women entered the public sphere, they believed, it would become apparent to Americans that women were as capable as men and that the separate spheres ideology was outmoded.

Because the NWP viewed the ERA as the catalyst to set in motion a revolution in Americans' views of gender, the NWP turned to publicist Hazel MacKaye to reinvent the images of both the NWP by replacing their radical identity with one more acceptable to the public. MacKaye developed a theatrical pageant that used classical imagery to align the ERA and the NWP with fundamental principles of American political culture. She argued that theatrical events were effective means of persuasion because Americans craved visual stimulation to escape the monotonous reality of industrial life. MacKaye suggested that as a result of their extraordinary focus on moneymaking and the practical matters of life associated with earning a living, Americans needed "an outlet for the sensuous emotions which have been repressed by the grind of the business world."⁶² Live

theatre provided one such outlet. Yet the explosion of new forms of visual and auditory entertainment in the 1920s meant that art, recreation, music, even religion and politics, must compete to win the attention of the public during their limited leisure time.⁶³ As noted earlier, political participation had declined dramatically by the 1920s and thus political activists adopted many of the methods of consumer culture to win an audience. Using cutting edge advertising, holding political activities in consumer spaces such as department stores, and offering citizens entertainment with their politics in the form of sponsored radio shows, the NWP contributed to the transformation of American political culture in the 1920s in the image of the marketplace.⁶⁴

Pageants drew public participation and press coverage because of their entertainment value. They were shows that tried to educate and influence as they entertained. Pageants increased membership and raised funds to allow the NWP to lobby for the ERA in Washington. MacKaye argued that the beautiful and awe-inspiring visual effects that brought audiences to pageants also made them vulnerable to the political message portrayed within.

“Through the pageants therefore we found that friends were made for Equal Rights who could never have been gained by any other method, at once so winning and so disarming... Their imaginations have been touched, illuminated. They were, for the moment, lifted to an unaccustomed but nonetheless pleasurable thrilling plane of idealism – where all the sordid, petty matters of the ordinary lives ceased to exist.”⁶⁵

The “Progress of Women” pageant, which took place during the Seneca Falls Convention on July 19, 1923 was the first of three such pageants that were held in preparation for the introduction of the ERA in Congress in December of that year.⁶⁶ The second pageant

was held at the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colorado in September and the last was held in November in Washington D.C. and marked the beginning of the NWP's campaign to lobby Congress for the passage of the Amendment.⁶⁷ The NWP planned to reproduce the pageants in every state to drum up support for ratification the following year, assuming that the Amendment passed.⁶⁸

Rich with classical symbolism and idealistic pageantry, NWP events were feasts for the eyes that depicted the ideal of equality in broad humanistic terms. Highly visual, entertaining, and abstract the pageant could win voters' approval by drawing on shared values rather than highlighting ideological differences. Like the advertising industry, which had earned its stripes reversing public opinion on America's entrance into World War I, NWP pageants used imagery and symbolism to inspire a sympathetic response from viewers despite their ideological opposition. They "sold" the ERA in the same way that advertisers sold their wares -- by suggesting that it felt good, looked good and thus was worthy of support.

Visual theory makes possible a comparison of the feminine ideals promoted by the NWP in these pageants and the rhetoric of social feminists. Judith Williamson's work on advertising and gender provides a useful model through which to analyze the NWP pageants.⁶⁹ Influenced by Marx, Barthes, Foucault, Gramsci, Lacan and Saussure, Williamson applies semiotic theory to the study of gender representations in advertisements by decoding the sign, signifier, and signified in ads. She begins by cataloging the individual signs -- words, objects or pictures, which represent an idea within a given ad. She then breaks each sign down into its component parts -- signifier,

the material object used to convey the sign and the signified, the meaning inherent to the sign. By looking at the collection of signified meanings behind the signs of a given ad, or in this case performance, one can translate the language of the visual representation as a whole. Williamson is one of a number of scholars of consumer culture, including Roland Marchand, who argue that the repetition of objects and meanings in advertising become incorporated into daily life, serving as a means of interpreting the world around us.⁷⁰ In just this same way, political imagery was used by the NWP to convey a visual message that rendered the ERA ideologically compatible with Americans' deeply held values.

Tracing the history of the suffrage movement from its origin at Seneca Falls, the pageants used dramatic imagery to establish the NWP as the direct descendent of the pioneers of the movement for women's rights and the ERA as the next phase of the agenda set forth at Seneca Falls, suggesting visually that "the program outlined by the women of 1848 was ... identical with that of the Woman's Party today."⁷¹ A description of part of the pageant reveals how this worked. In the silence following a chorus of women singing in unison, there appeared on the stage a woman portraying early feminist, Lucretia Mott. She reached out and clasped hands with suffrage pioneers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Together they read their 1848 Declaration of Sentiments. Trumpets then direct the audience's attention to a car drawn by white horses moving toward the stage, carrying a scroll upon which was inscribed the Equal Rights Amendment. The pioneers met the car and were surrounded on the stage and outward into the crowd beyond by a chorus of women.

“As the chorus sings, ... the vast red spires rising on either side, banner bearers will come—hundreds of girls in white, bearing aloft our beautiful purple, white, and gold banners.”⁷²

By bringing together visually the old and new manifestos of equality and the women who fought for them, the pageant conveys the feeling of historical continuity from Seneca Falls through the suffrage movement to the NWP's campaign for the ERA. With the lofty goal of erasing the public perception that the NWP represented the ill-behaved offspring of the NAWSA, the pageant asserted that the NWP were the rightful descendents of an old-fashioned movement for legal equality. The white-clad girls, bearing majestic banners of purple, white, and gold provided an alternate image of the women of the NWP to their well-publicized civil disobedience. Their white cloaks represented purity and their majestic banners suggested their designated role as the next generation of women united in their commitment to the cause of equality.

Beyond dramatizing the relationship between the NWP and Seneca Falls, the spectacle of the pageants was designed to elicit in viewers and in the hundreds of volunteers who took part in them an ideological sympathy divested of the controversy surrounding the issue of protective legislation, and instead infused with historical notions of justice and equality. The white cloaks worn by the women were reminiscent of the Greek toga. The classical image of goddesses Justice and Liberty (often referred to as Columbia during this period) suggested by their attire was familiar to Americans from their frequent use in public spaces and statuary, in World War I propaganda posters, and in art such as John Gast's famous portrayal of Manifest Destiny in his painting “American Progress.” These images, so central to American notions of just governance

and freedom, allowed the NWP to tie its vision for women to universally accepted notions of American political ideology in their most basic visual form.

Inherent in such representations of justice and liberty were feminine ideals. Justice embodied the ideals of freedom from corruption, avarice, prejudice, or favor. Liberty, exemplified by the Statue in New York Harbor, was a caring mother who opened her arms to the poor of the world, taking them in and caring for them. In both cases the qualities personified by these classical figures were consistent with traditional notions of female power. By tying the ERA to these images the NWP sought to soften current views of them as radical feminists who wanted to revolutionize woman's role in the society. Instead these images visually aligned them with traditional gender conventions espoused by social feminists, and more importantly, by the majority of Americans.

For Alice Paul, the use of pageantry in the ERA campaign solved several practical problems in addition to their public relations conundrum. Unlike conventions, which featured mass meetings of members to discuss publicly the direction of the organization, the NWP leadership sought to maintain control of the strategy and the message of the Party and mask the organization's low numbers.⁷³ Following the previously mentioned 1921 Convention, Paul was criticized for her failure to act on the suggestions of Party members regarding the group's agenda. She was accused of making the decision to pursue the ERA to the exclusion of other issues before the membership of the Party had met and voted on the issue.⁷⁴ By 1923, the NWP's lack of democracy in its organization as well as its singular focus on the ERA had led to a dramatic decline in membership. By holding pageants, they could create elaborate presentations using volunteers, eager to

perform, thus masking their organization's low numbers. Furthermore, given that the performance was orchestrated word-for-word in advance, key members of Party were able to dictate the message. The theatrical format meant that there would be no means for open discussion and thus no public opposition. Contrary to the NWP's actual position vis-à-vis women's political groups and American women in general, pageants allowed the Party to claim to represent all American women at that moment in time and, by recalling the glorious histories of democracy and the woman suffrage movement, bind their cause to women of all times.

The pageants were also an important fund-raising tool. *Equal Rights*, the official monthly publication of the National Women's Party, recorded the progress of their campaign to raise two million dollars for the ERA campaign. Immediately following each pageant monthly contributions at least doubled. The Capitol pageant on November 18, 1923 was their most successful fund-raising effort. Scheduled the day after a well-publicized meeting between an NWP delegation and President Coolidge at the White House, the event "end[ed] with an appeal for funds."⁷⁵ A cohort of wealthy, educated women provided the financial support needed to begin a major lobbying effort.

The NWP had a significant amount of success raising money and winning new members to their cause, in part because the pageants muddied the waters, temporarily camouflaging the legal and social complexities of the ERA. A news article from an unknown source, but almost certainly written by an NWP member, described the power of the Colorado pageant in terms that Pageant Director Hazel McKaye herself could not have improved upon. The pageant, it said

subtly interprets the feminist movement through the emotions, not alone through the intellect ... There were those present who did not even know that equality between the sexes did not obtain in this liberty-loving country of ours. There were others who did not know the history of the pioneers. To all of these the pageant spoke in tones of sympathetic realism... Proceed on your way, O ye who bear banners; let your marching feet encircle the world; tell your story as you told it in the Garden of the Gods, and all men will hearken unto you.”⁷⁶

One of the NWP members who participated in the Capitol memorial pageant described the experience thus

“across a void of more than half a century, from the rostrum of the first woman’s rights convention these great suffrage pioneers stretched out their hands to consecrate us to the purpose they had so ably advocated, offering the wine of the only true and complete democracy, that of equality between men and women.”⁷⁷

Although the NWP could maintain strict control over the message of the pageants, they could not control how the audience interpreted them and described them to others. Following the Seneca Falls Pageant newspaper articles covering the event seemed to focus on the pageant and conference as celebrations of how much women had achieved since 1848 rather than as indications of what remained to be done. The *New York Evening Post* suggested that the pageant “reminds us of the impressive fact that the whole enormous revolution in women’s position has occurred within memory of many people living.”⁷⁸ This interpretation could be construed to confirm the views of many of the NWP’s opponents who suggested that suffrage was enough and the ERA was unnecessary.

The NWP, under the leadership of Alice Paul, failed to exhibit the same finesse in their rhetoric in print debates on the issue as MacKaye did in the pageants. MacKaye

understood both the gender ideology of her audience and impact of consumer culture on political culture in the 1920s. Using visual media MacKaye could glaze over ideological differences regarding gender using feminine images long present in American political culture. And she could do so without explicitly contradicting the NWP's gender ideology. Alternatively, in print it was much more difficult to mask the ideological differences between the NWP and the majority. Alice Paul was unwilling to compromise her belief in the essential equality of men and women, despite the fact that this view was unpopular.⁷⁹ The NWP could have taken the "consumerist compromise," marketing the ERA to their audience, accepting a notion of womanhood that dominated consumer culture but was contrary to their own beliefs. They could have carried the themes suggested in the pageants, that women needed legal equality in addition to the vote to engage in a campaign to clean up American society and government by exercising their gender-based heightened social conscience. Under the leadership of Paul, however, they did not make this ideological compromise and thus they could not, in this first campaign, win enough political support to pass the Amendment in Congress.

The NWP's failure to adequately adapt their arguments in major media outlets to the values of their audiences provided social feminists the opportunity to publicly alienate them. A series of articles in *Good Housekeeping Magazine* illustrate both the NWP's failure here and social feminists' efforts to portray the NWP as a fringe group inconsistent with the ideals of the nation. The articles were read primarily by middle and upper class women who studied the issue either individually or, more often, as part of civic clubs in their neighborhoods. As noted in chapter one, these women tended to

understand their civic duty in terms of local social reform efforts that grew “naturally” out of their duties as homemakers and their status as the wives of local professionals.

A good example of the NWP’s failure to address the interests of clubwomen may be found in “The Equal Rights Amendment: Why the Woman’s Party Is For It.” Editor of NWP’s *Equal Rights*, Inez Haynes Irwin used the article as a forum to respond to criticisms by the NWP’s political adversaries. Irwin highlighted the NWP’s research on discrimination against women throughout the nation, including women’s inability to serve on juries, control their own and their children’s earnings, control their own and shared property within marriage, among others. She emphasized the expediency of a federal amendment to address these inequalities nationwide rather than attacking them individually. In a maneuver that would have been far more effective in a courtroom than in a popular magazine, she “call[ed] the attention of American women to the fact that all interpretations of the law involving women . . . are based upon the subject position of women under English common law instead of on the equal position of women with men.”⁸⁰ This abstract argument about the injustice of women’s legal status was weakened for the readers of *Good Housekeeping* by the fact that the people to whom women were subject, in this case, were their husbands. As noted in chapter one, women overwhelmingly acknowledged that they played different roles within the household than their husbands. They generally accepted a submissive position relative to their husbands in matters public and legal because they viewed men to be biologically predisposed to handle such matters better than women. This did not mean, however, that women felt subordinate to their husbands. Instead, they often viewed themselves to be superior to

their husbands in most matters pertaining to the management of a household and, except in cases of martial strife, most felt that they had some power to influence the will of their husbands. While women who had experienced divorce and battled for custody of property and children would acknowledge the importance of Irwin's point, most readers probably found it hard to believe that they needed to be protected from their husbands more than poor working women needed to be protected from corrupt employers.

Boldly stating that the Lucretia Mott Amendment would invalidate many laws addressed to women alone, Irwin acknowledged the grave concerns of labor leaders and many women's organizations, including the General Federation of Women's Clubs, an organization to which millions of *Good Housekeeping* readers belonged. She suggested that work hour limits and other "protective" legislation prevented women from competing freely and effectively with men. She did not, however present any evidence, either statistical or anecdotal, to support this assertion. She laid out her opponents' argument in sympathetic terms saying "that the Women's Party is trying to tear down the protective legislation which a band of noble-hearted, self-sacrificing men and women have been, for a quarter of a century, building up."⁸¹ She then presented a very weak premise for her own position, stating that the NWP was not opposed to the spirit of the laws, but felt that they should be applied to all workers, regardless of sex. Proponents of protective legislation likewise desired that protections for labor apply to men and women alike, but had found legislatures unwilling to grant such rights to men. Furthermore, men tended to organize in unions to a much greater degree than women, and therefore sought to negotiate better working conditions through unions rather than through legislation.

This article represented a failed opportunity for the NWP to tailor their argument to their audience. With its focus on the abstract legal benefits of the ERA as compared to the humanitarian benefits of protective legislation, Irwin did little to convince readers of *Good Housekeeping* that the ERA served the greater good.

A 1925 article opposing protective legislation for women illustrated how the NWP might better illicit sympathy from their audience. Rheta Childe Dorr, a well-known journalist and publicist, effectively combated arguments in favor of protective legislation by taking into account the identities and values of her mass audience and tailoring her argument to best appeal to them. She expressed a sort of maternal kinship with her readers, imagining that at club meetings throughout the nation women endorsed protective legislation out of their desire to “str[i]ke one more blow in defense of mothers, babies, and the home.”⁸² She compared women’s instinctive support of legislative measures designed to “protect” women to a beneficent but pernicious drug, which must be “well-mixed with intelligence before taking.” This allusion to patent medicine is well employed. Ethel M Smith of the Women’s Trade Union League frequently compared the ERA to a patent medicine that promised miraculous results but, upon use, achieved nothing. Dorr argued that propaganda surrounding the issue had clouded women’s judgment, but encouraged them to look beyond ages of prejudice. She argued that legally classifying women with children was discriminatory because it failed to account for the large population of permanent female workers. She claimed that this classification was justified by the belief that young women entered the work force temporarily, prior to marriage, and thus required much the same protection as children who were not

represented as men were by unions. Yet she argued that in fact over seven million women over the age of 18 were employed in industry and over two million of those women were married.

Dorr cited experts on the subject of women workers to suggest that the argument in favor of protective legislation was based on an erroneous and discriminatory belief in women's mental and physical weakness. She pointed to the 1908 Brandeis ruling that claimed that women were, by nature, unfitted to freely contract their labor. Dorr argued that this argument reflected a lack of understanding of the capabilities of women as evidenced by their successful leadership of industry in the absence of male workers during WWI. Dorr cited the work of Dr. Elizabeth Faulkner Baker, Ph.D. who stated that the reason why industrial labor appeared to be more detrimental to women than to men is that women who engaged in paid labor actually did double duty. They continued to bear the responsibilities of home and children in addition to their workloads outside the home. Dorr used anecdotal evidence to suggest that protective legislation was in fact harmful to women. Mrs. A, a well paid printer, who lost her job due to the passage of a law prohibiting night work for women, was forced to seek less skilled, less secure, lesser paid positions. Dorr also offered herself as an example. As a journalist, she argued from experience that night work was not a bad deal for women – cooler, less crowded (not, perhaps, as compellingly). Dorr argued that unequal wages and poor conditions in factories should be examined and rectified for the good of all workers, regardless of sex. Yet she argued that until woman competed equally with men for employment in those many unfortunate instances in which it was necessary for a women to work outside the

home they would never be able to win the battle for equal pay. By agreeing with her readers' view that employment outside the home was not ideal for women, she asked them to accept the reality of many women's permanent status as workers. Lastly, she pointed to the Women's Trade Union League as being one of the organizations responsible for putting 150,000 women in New York out of work with the night-work law. She suggested that WTUL's affiliation with the AFL whose workers were the recipients of the good jobs lost by women, compromised women's position in industry. She urged readers to allow women workers "a man's chance industrially."⁸³

In her argument opposing the Lucretia Mott Amendment, Florence Kelley, one of the most well-known and revered of the champions of protective legislation mentioned by Irwin, began by painting a portrait of herself for readers. She described herself first as a grandmother, then as a lawyer, and as Chief Factory Inspector of the State of Illinois, and, lastly, as the daughter, niece, and mother of lawyers. In doing so, she established her credentials to speak with authority on the topic of protective legislation as a person who had "acquired an attitude of sustained inquiry about methods to improve the law."⁸⁴ She established herself, first, as constituent of the millions of readers, who, like her were mothers and grandmothers, as well as concerned citizens. She then staked a legitimate claim to serve as an expert on the subject of labor and law.

This was a rather modest way for her to present her credentials, given that she might have claimed leadership, as secretary general of the National Consumers' League, over many of the successful campaigns for protective legislation nationwide. Instead, she chose to place herself above the fray of politics, describing herself as an observer of the

issue rather than as an active participant in the struggle. While many of her readers would, of course, have been aware of her affiliation with the National Consumers' League, her way of introducing herself and establishing her legitimacy suggested understanding of her readers. Rather than drawing attention to the extent to which her personal experience differed from that of her audience, she instead suggested that like the club women reading the article, she too was a woman whose concern as a citizen grew out of her family ties and who wished to share her knowledge of the issue with other women seeking to educate themselves.

In developing an argument against the Amendment, Kelley argued that although the federal Amendment was more broad in its reach than the "slow and wearisome" process of passing individual laws on behalf of women, the legal ramifications of the Amendment were unknown.⁸⁵ Kelley was careful not to assume that the constitutional amendment would automatically invalidate protective legislation but pointed to the possibility of its being overturned as a serious threat to the health and well-being of real women. By focusing her discussion on specific measures that helped women and children, Kelley sought to appeal to a middle class audience who understood their civic role to be an extension of their domestic one and pointed to the threat that the ERA posed to individual measures designed to improve the lives of women and children. She left the abstract notion of equality largely in the shadows of her argument, simply suggesting that the legal ideal meant very little without adequate means to enforce it.

The articles that appeared in *Good Housekeeping* suggested more than any others how very out of step the NWP was with their audience of American women. The editor

of *Good Housekeeping*, William Frederick Bigelow, stated his opposition to the ERA in the opening pages of the magazine.⁸⁶ He argued the position taken by most people outside the woman's movement, -- that the ERA simply did not reflect the reality that men and women were not the same. Relying on the gender ideology espoused by social feminists he argued that, in fact, women were in many ways superior to men, but that their superiority in traditional areas of feminine expertise did not mean they were the same as men. He pointed to Anderson's article as evidence that women workers needed protective labor laws.

While social feminists focused on protecting and extending legal protections designed to meet the immediate needs of women workers, the NWP sought a more ideal and permanent solution to the general problem of women's legal inequality with men. Through the introduction of the ERA the National Woman's Party called into question the primacy of gender as a category for labor legislation.⁸⁷ They viewed the need for women workers to pursue labor legislation differently than men did as a symptom of the inequality between men and women workers. They felt women workers should be viewed as a permanent part of the workforce, and organized into unions to fight for fair labor standards side by side with men. They felt that this would not only improve conditions for women but for men as well. Furthermore, their concerns stretched beyond the needs of workers to include all women in all aspects of their lives.

This rivalry between radical feminism and social feminism, which began with the suffrage movement and continued for decades over the Equal Rights Amendment, weakened efforts on both sides to improve conditions for American women. The

fragmentation of the woman's movement following the achievement of suffrage in the 1920s and the subsequent erroneous belief by many until the 1980s that the women's movement disappeared during this period has been attributed to the polarizing effect of the ERA debate on the movement as a whole.⁸⁸

This debate highlights the fact that in addition to having to thwart the radical feminist agenda, social feminists found themselves in the 1920s promoting a new form of liberalism to further their progressive agenda at a time when classical liberalism reigned in the nation's highest Court. Social feminists saw in the Court's split decisions in cases like *Adkins V. Children's Hospital* the imminent dawn of a new liberalism that would rise to meet the challenges of modern industrial America. Alternatively, the NWP saw in the Supreme Court's majority support of classical liberalism an opportunity to remedy women's legal exclusion from the rights guaranteed to male citizens. By placing the women's movement in the context of changing ideals of liberalism in the 1920s social feminists emerge as key figures in a drive to transform American liberalism that will accelerate as the twenties draw to a close on a nation gripped by economic depression.

The NWP's failure to "sell" Americans, particularly American women, on the benefits of the ERA during its initial introduction in 1923 reflects the incongruity of the ERA with the ideals of the majority of Americans at the time. While the NWP were masters at drawing the attention of the press, they were often unwilling to compromise their portrayal of modern womanhood in order to win the necessary support for the ERA. While social feminists' progressive reforms received less support in the 1920s than previously, the notion of womanhood and civic identity that stood at the heart of their

activism was much more attractive to Americans than was that of the NWP. Thus, social feminists sought to heighten the distinctions between them while the NWP sought to diminish them with such public relations maneuvers as the pageants.

Social feminists' accomplished this by drawing into public view the radicalism of the NWP and making their image of American womanhood appear masculine, overly intellectual and abstract, while they aligned themselves visually and ideologically with images of femininity promoted in consumer culture. Organizations like the Women's Trade Union League which were dedicated to improving conditions for women workers nonetheless directed their appeals to the attitudes of middle class audience drawing on club women's desire to protect their unfortunate sisters who were torn from the family hearth and forced to work outside the home in a dangerous world dominated by men.

Employing the images of justice and liberty, the National Women's Party sought to connect with Americans in much the same way that modern advertising did. Through the pageants, they hoped to downplay ideological differences by distracting their audience with traditional American democratic values and gender norms. By making an emotional connection with their audience the NWP took their cues from consumer culture as they tried to infuse their cause with qualities that would earn them the support of their audience even though those qualities were truly consistent to their ideals.

As a social feminist group the WTUL employed the consumerist compromise in much the same way that the League of Women Voters did in chapter 2. Given the WTUL's status as a women's labor organization ideological compromise required of social feminists emerges all the more clearly. Magazine articles promoting protective

legislation over the ERA assume a middle-class consumer-based image of womanhood in which work outside the home was viewed as an unnatural state for women. In contrast, the NWP's use of tenets of modern advertising in the pageants reveals that it was possible through visual cues to entertain an audience and win public sympathy without overtly accepting the views of that audience. The following chapters will explore both social feminists' continuing commitment to the consumerist compromise as well as opposing groups' employment of the modern public relations methods to isolate them ideologically.

Endnotes

¹ The Lucretia Mott Amendment, introduced in U.S. Senate, Dec. 10, 1923; introduced in U.S. House of Representatives, Dec. 13, 1923.

² Emma Bugbee, "Women Open Campaign for Equal Rights" *Equal Rights*, July 28, 1923, p.189; *The Youth's Companion* "Equal Rights for Women" August 23, 1923, p. 97; *New York Times*, "The Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Fight for Women's Rights," June 24, 1923, p. XX3; "Commemorating Woman's Party" *New York Times*, July 15, 1923.

³ Bugbee, "Women Open Campaign for Equal Rights," p.189.

⁴ Bugbee, "Women Open Campaign for Equal Rights," p.189.

⁵ "Women at Odds on Laws for Them" *New York Times*, March 25, 1923, p. XX3; Smith, Ethel M. "Labor's Position Against the Women's Party Amendment" *Life and Labor Bulletin*, 2 (February 1924), p 1-2; "Senate Judiciary Hears Arguments Against the National Women's Party Amendment" *Life and Labor Bulletin* XI (March 1924, p. 2-3; Bent, Silas, "The Women's War" *New York Times*, January 14, 1923, p. SM4; Kelley, Florence, "Why It Should Not Pass: The Blanket Equality Bill Proposed by the National Woman's Party" *New York: National Consumers' League*, May 1922.

⁶ William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969, p.x, 51.

⁷ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p 174.

⁸ Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism" in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Eds. McCann, Carole R. and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, New York: 2003, pps. 378-390.

⁹ Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*, New York: New York University Press, 1986, p.28.

¹⁰ Jane Addams, "The Modern City and the Municipal Franchise for Women," NAWSA Convention, Baltimore, MD, February 7-13, 1906 in Vol. 3: 178-79. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, et al. *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols.

¹¹ Reynold A. Spaeth, "Differences Between Men and Women" *Equal Rights*, XI, April 19, 1924, p. 77-79; Alice Paul and Mary Van Kleeck, "Is Blanket Amendment Best Method in Equal Rights Campaign?" *Congressional Digest*, March 1924, p198-204; Mary Anderson and Rheta Childe Dorr, "Should There Be Labor Laws for Women?" *Good Housekeeping*. September 1925, p. 52-53, 156-64, 166-80; Alice Hamilton and Doris Stevens, "The Blanket Amendment – A Debate" *The Forum*, 72, August 1924, p145-152.; Bigelow, William Frederick, "The Bills for 'Equal Rights'" *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, Vol. 78, Number 3, March 1924, p.4; Florence Kelley "The Equal Rights Amendment: Why other Women's Groups Oppose It" *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, Vol. 78, Number 3, March 1924, p. 19.

¹² Some examples include: "The Spider and the Fly" *The Suffragette*. November, 1920, p. 269; Elisabeth Marbury, "Women in Politics" *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1925, p.53; Eleanor Roosevelt, *It's Up to the Women*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1933.

¹³ Maud Wood Park, *Front Door Lobby*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1960, 15-18. Carrie Chapman Catt, "Report: Campaign and Survey Committee," Papers of the NAWSA, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ Buhle, Paul and Mari Jo Buhle, *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005 or Stanton, Elizabeth Cady et al, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Co., 1985, p.427-429.

¹⁵ Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*, New York: New York University Press, 1986, p.28.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, et al, *History of Woman Suffrage* Volume V, p. 280-281, and, Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Linda G. Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's party, 1912-1920*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991.

¹⁸ Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels*, p. 169-196, 225-252.

¹⁹ Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels*, p. 244-245.

²⁰ *Liberator* quote reprinted in *Suffragist* March 2, 1918.

²¹ Amy E. Butler, *Two Paths to Equality: Alice Paul and Ethel M. Smith in the ERA debate, 1921-1929*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 56.

²² Butler, *Two Paths to Equality*, 55.

²³ Butler, *Two Paths to Equality*, 55

²⁴ *New York Time*, "Women Line Up for Congress Fight," (May 6 1923): pX12.

²⁵ Butler, *Two Paths to Equality*, 58-60.

Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels*. p. 253-258. Ford disagrees with this characterization of the suffrage fight by Cott, Du Bois, and Buechler, however the drop in membership described here left the membership more elite.

²⁷ Ethel M. Smith, "Working Women's Case Against 'Equal Rights'" *New York Times*, January 20, 1924, pg. XX12.

²⁸ Paul and Van Kleek "Is Blanket Amendment Best Method in Equal Rights Campaign?" p. 198-204; Sophonisba Breckinridge and Mrs. Harvey W. Wiley. "Could 'Mothers' Pensions' Operate Under Equal Rights Amendment?" *Congressional Digest* (March 1924): 202.; Inez Haynes Irwin, "The Equal Rights Amendment: Why the Woman's Party Is for It" *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, Vol. 78, number 3 (March 1924): p. 18; Kelley, Florence "The Equal Rights Amendment: Why Other Women's Groups Oppose It" *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, Vol. 78, Number 3 (March 1924): p. 19; Hamilton and Stevens, "The Blanket Amendment;" Anderson and Dorr, "Should There Be Labor Laws for Women?" p. 145-152.

²⁹ *Congressional Digest* was founded in 1921 by Alice Gram Robinson in order to give newly enfranchised women an "impartial view of controversial issues in Congress." The rapidly growing public affairs journal, *The Forum*, featured an extensive debate about the ERA in August 1924. In the 1920s, *Good*

Housekeeping was one of the most widely circulated women's magazines among middle-class households along with *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Woman's Home Companion*.

³⁰ Paul and Van Kleek "Is Blanket Amendment Best Method in Equal Rights Campaign?" p. 198-204.

³¹ Hamilton and Stevens, "The Blanket Amendment," p. 145-152.

³² Paul and Van Kleek "Is Blanket Amendment Best Method in Equal Rights Campaign?" p. 198-204.

³³ Breckinridge and Wiley, "Could 'Mothers' Pensions' Operate Under Equal Rights Amendment?" p. 202;

³⁴ Irwin, "The Equal Rights Amendment," p. 18; Kelley, "The Equal Rights Amendment," p. 19.

³⁵ Breckinridge and Wiley, "Could 'Mothers' Pensions' Operate Under Equal Rights Amendment?" p. 202;

³⁶ Hamilton and Stevens, "The Blanket Amendment," p. 145-152.

³⁷ Hamilton and Stevens, "The Blanket Amendment," p. 145-152.

³⁸ Hamilton and Stevens, "The Blanket Amendment," p. 145-152.

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Chapter 4

Conscientious Consumers or Conspiring Reds: The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Campaign to Ratify the Child Labor Amendment

I. That the Congress shall have the power to limit, regulate and prohibit the labor of persons under the age of eighteen years, and to prescribe the condition of such labor.

Section II. The reserved power of the several states to legislate concerning the labor of persons under the age of eighteen years shall not be impaired or diminished except to the extent necessary to give effect to legislation enacted by Congress.

Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution
The Child Labor Amendment

On May 12, 1924 the Child Labor Amendment passed 297 to 69 in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹ The resolution passed the Senate 61 to 23 three weeks later on June 2, 1924.² Drafted by Florence Kelly of the National Consumers' League and Grace Abbott of the Children's Bureau, this victory was the culmination of efforts by a broad coalition of organizations to secure the right to regulate child labor federally. Encouraged by their success in Congress, a coalition of social feminist groups united under an umbrella organization, the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, and initiated state campaigns to ratify the amendment in the summer of 1924.

The Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC) was a Washington, D.C.-based lobby formed in 1920. Its purpose was to pursue a social feminist legislative agenda. Members of each organization's legislative committee joined the WJCC to share information, coordinate efforts, and pool resources. The WJCC was a powerful lobby in Washington in the early 1920s when the impact of woman suffrage was yet unknown. In

1921 they lobbied successfully for the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infant Protection Act, which earmarked federal funds for the health and welfare of women and children.³ An important step in the social feminist agenda, the act represented an expansion of federal jurisdiction over the well-being of its citizenry. Furthermore, the Sheppard-Towner Act placed regulatory power in the hands of social feminists who administered the program through the Children's Bureau.

When the campaign for ratification of the Child Labor Amendment began in 1924, members of the coalition included twenty-one organizations, including the National Consumers' League, National League of Women Voters, General Federation of Women's Clubs, Women's Trade Union League, Women's Christian Temperance Union, and YWCA among others. All told, the WJCC boasted a membership of over 11 million women.⁴ The WJCC viewed the Child Labor Amendment as much more than an effort to abolish child labor. It was fundamentally an effort to set the precedent for broadening the role of government to include regulating industry as a means to better secure the welfare of American citizens. They sought nothing less than to redefine American liberalism, replacing the eighteenth-century laissez-faire political philosophy with a social democracy in keeping with the complexities of twentieth-century industrial capitalism.⁵

For progressives of all stripes, the Child Labor Amendment represented the perfect vehicle to establish the legal precedent for a new kind of liberal state. The terrible conditions of urban industrial labor were generally viewed to be harmful to children. Most Americans were in agreement that industrial child labor was abusive and cruel. While some politicians questioned the use of the constitutional amendment as a

mechanism to protect children, they overwhelmingly agreed that children were in need of protection. With the intent of the Amendment viewed favorably both in Washington and throughout the nation it seemed that progressives had found an issue that would allow them to redefine the role of government in relations between labor and industry.

The *New York Times* explained the trend toward seeking national solutions to the problems of industrial labor, arguing that,

“The public has turned to the federal government more and more of late for two reasons: first, because of the failure of some of the States to do certain things which it is in their power to do and which the people as a whole think should be done; and second, by reason of the greater efficiency with which a federal authority can deal with multifarious enterprises and activities which extend across the continent ... a national evil must have a national remedy.”⁶

This argument highlighted the *Times*' support of the progressive agenda generally.

Rather than asking members of the opposition to comment for the story, the *Times* asked Grace Abbott, head of the Children's Bureau, to explain and then refute the opposition's position. Using Children's Bureau statistics on child labor in thirty-four industrial cities in the U.S., Abbott described the focus of the Amendment. “We propose only to establish a national standard and to cooperate with the states in enforcing it.”⁷ Abbott downplayed the increase in federal regulatory power permitted by the Amendment, arguing that opposition to a federal solution to the child labor problem from manufacturers was rooted in their financial interest rather than in concern for states' rights. She stressed that rural farm labor was not targeted by supporters of the measure, but that the Amendment did reserve the right to protect children from large scale industrial farm work should it become widespread in the U.S. Yet the *New York Times*

cast the Child Labor Amendment in light of an overall trend among Americans to look to the federal government to do more. This trend was precisely what opponents most feared.

This chapter will examine the rhetoric employed in the debate over the Child Labor Amendment.⁸ Congressional hearings examined the many facets of the issue, using statistical analyses and expert testimony in the areas of child welfare and constitutional law, as well as brief statements on the issue from interested organizations such as churches, political parties, and civic clubs. The hearings introduced procedural arguments for and against the Amendment and revealed the practical and ideological underpinnings of both sides. As compared to this testimony, the rhetoric that would dominate both sides of the campaign for ratification could only be referred to as political propaganda. With its widespread use of national magazines and daily newspapers as well as a pamphlet war, the opposition campaign flooded the nation with tracts demonizing both the Amendment and its supporters and ultimately defeated it by reversing public opinion on the issue.

The WJCC changed their rhetorical strategy during the ratification campaign from a reliance upon a gendered authority to an appeal to the consumer conscience. After addressing mothers and newly enfranchised voters during the hearings, they now called on all Americans, not just women to refuse to accept the labor of children in the production of American goods. The image of the consumer citizen employed in this campaign was consistent with the consumerist compromise used by other social feminist groups. In fact, the National Consumers' League, which played a leading role in WJCC

efforts, was the first women's organization to tie consumerism to politics by encouraging conscientious consumption as a civic act. The image of a consumer citizen disgusted by the evils of child labor but complicit in it through their consumption of goods produced by children was designed to win mass support for the Amendment in the states.

This strategy was inadequate to combat the negative image of social feminists and the Amendment promoted by the opposition. Portraying social feminist supporters of the CLA as either politically inexperienced dupes or closet communists, opponents of the Amendment argued that, as a blatant violation of states rights, the Amendment was an attempt by Soviet communists to overthrow America from within. The ferocity of the campaign against the Child Labor Amendment revealed both how far manufacturers would go to prevent the intrusion of government into their business practices and the important role that modern public relations would play in a twentieth-century political culture now dominated by competing lobbies. Ultimately, the efforts of the social feminist groups included in the WJCC to develop a positive public image of female citizenship were seriously damaged by this campaign.

Before examining the rhetoric employed during the campaign for ratification it is important to introduce the players involved and the stakes of the game as they were viewed at the time. The stakes were, indeed, the very highest for both sides in this intensely negative campaign. For social feminists it represented their best chance at creating a new American liberalism that reflected women's contribution to American politics as an extension of a gendered civic identity. The National Consumers' League and Children's Bureau, who led the campaign, exemplified the gendered civic identity of

social feminists. Social feminists' efforts were organized by the WJCC under the guidance of Florence Kelley of the NCL. The WJCC worked in conjunction with many other groups who supported the Child Labor Amendment including the National Committee for Child Labor (NCCL), another umbrella organization. For industry, as represented by the National Association of Manufacturers, the issue was not so much protecting their right to employ minors as it was preventing government from gaining control over the interests of business generally. They would be joined by the publishers of *The Woman Citizen*, and the Sentinels of the Republic, led the opposition to the Amendment. Both sides approached the battle as if the fate of laissez-faire liberalism was on the line.

Begun in 1888 in New York by Leonora O'Reilly, a group of prominent New York socialites joined forces with the New York Working Women's Society to form the New York Consumers' League. Uniting working women with middle and upper class female consumers, the NCL created and maintained a list of local employers who used fair labor practices and one that listed exploitative employers. Using the "White List" printed in newspapers, they asked shoppers to frequent those stores and buy those products that were produced fairly and avoid those shops and manufacturers that were exploitative. They also developed a "white label," first used on muslin undergarments, to identify products using fair labor practices. Their goals were to reward good employers with increased sales and encourage exploitative businesses to change their ways to meet the public demand for better working conditions. In 1899, the National Consumers' League was formed to unite the state leagues.

Florence Kelley was named the first secretary general of the National NCL.⁹ By the early 1890s, she was regarded as an expert in tenement labor and factory inspection through her work at Hull House. In 1893, she had become the first woman to head a state labor department in Illinois. After earning a law degree from Northwestern, Kelley moved to the Henry Street Settlement in New York and began pursuing labor legislation through the NCL. Her activities were guided by a notion of evolutionary socialism, which held that capitalism could be gradually civilized beginning with redistribution policies that would pave the way for a shift from liberal democracy to social democracy. Social democracy was a vision of America particularly consistent with the goals of NCL because it held that consumers should play the role “as arbiters of the interest of the community or ‘general welfare.’”¹⁰

Although Kelley’s political views were further to the left than most social feminists, her efforts fell squarely within the bounds of social feminist ideology. Elite members of the NCL tended to view their activism as “social housekeeping,” meaning that they viewed reform efforts outside the home as extensions of their domestic responsibilities.¹¹ Ensuring that cities were safe places and that workers were healthy and fairly treated benefited their own families as well as the families of urban workers. Furthermore, the NCL’s notion of female consumerism was consistent with modern notions of womanhood promoted within consumer culture, which stressed women’s unique ability to choose wisely between product options.¹² Going beyond the tenets of consumer culture, the National Consumers’ League promoted ethical consumption, urging women to think of their consumption as more than work on behalf of their

individual household, but rather as an act of female citizenship promoting the good of society as a whole. The NCL, like other social feminists, embraced a modern ideal of American womanhood in which consumer culture was central and encouraged women to view their consumption as a political act – a vote to be exercised in good conscience on behalf of the public welfare. By politicizing the marketplace NCL sought to bring politics within the modern feminine sphere of influence.¹³

Many members of the NCL and certainly many of the female consumers to whom they appealed were themselves workers. They viewed women's consumption of the products that they produced or sold to be a means through which they could secure better working conditions for themselves and other workers. Like the Women's Trade Union League, which fought hard for social welfare measures for women workers, Florence Kelley viewed sex-based labor legislation as an "entering wedge" for establishing the role of government in regulating industry.¹⁴ Sex-based legislation that legalized work hour limits and wages for women were expected to affect men as a result of the interdependence of work. Furthermore, unions, which primarily protected the rights of male workers, could use laws pertaining to women as a means to negotiate better contracts for their members.

NCL's emphasis on legislative action under Secretary Kelley highlighted how yet another group of social feminists found their way into politics through an expanded notion of the female domestic sphere of influence. As wives and mothers as well as consumers, NCL argued that women were compelled to make the production of goods safer and more equitable for workers. Like other women's organizations, NCL members

found legislative action to be the most effective mechanism for achieving their goals. Furthermore, the agencies developed to administer such regulations and reform programs, such as the Children's Bureau, the Women's Bureau, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics among others, provided a place within the bureaucracy of government for women of the NCL to utilize their expertise. Thus, NCL members sought to establish a place for themselves in government protecting labor from abuses by industry.

By 1924, when the Child Labor Amendment was introduced, members of the NCL were considered to be experts in the fields of industrial health and safety, having worked for over forty years to improve the conditions of labor through governmental regulation of work hours, wages, and health and safety standards in department stores, factories, mines, and tenements. They investigated working conditions in large American cities like New York and Chicago by visiting and interviewing workers, keeping records of industrial accidents, and obtaining information from unions and manufacturers. Members of the NCL provided expert testimony in Congress regarding industrial conditions, led governmental agencies, and taught in social welfare programs at universities throughout the nation. League members like Clara Berger, Elizabeth Brandeis, Eleanor Roosevelt, Molly Dewson, Emma Guffey Miller, and Francis Perkins rose to prominence in government, being called upon to lead the regulatory boards and commissions established to enforce the legislation that they had promoted.

Opposition to the Child Labor Amendment was spearheaded by three organizations, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), Sentinels of the Republic, and the publishers of the *Woman Patriot* (WP). In addition to being united in

their opposition to the Child Labor Amendment, they shared a conservative political perspective that was a reaction against progressive attempts to expand the role of the federal government through social welfare legislation. NAM was a manufacturing lobby that provided the majority of the funding and much of the organizational infrastructure for the opposition campaign. NAM was a key player in the creation and distribution of pamphlets and helped secure negative press in magazines and newspapers nationally. While NAM's network of resources and financial commitment was essential to the success of the opposition, the *Woman Patriot* and Sentinels of the Republic, which were both civic organizations, sought to disguise their affiliation with NAM on ideological grounds. They did not want their disinterestedness to be questioned by their public affiliation with manufacturers. However, NAM adopted the anti-leftist rhetoric of their allies.

Organized in 1895 by a group of small businesses, NAM had become by the 1920s the largest organization of manufacturers in the nation, including representatives from many of the most powerful manufacturers nationwide. Their mission was to “unify efforts of manufacturers toward the promotion of domestic industrial concerns and foreign trade.”¹⁵ Their underlying purpose, however, was to thwart governmental regulation and oversight of business practices.¹⁶ During the Progressive Era they had combated attempts by reformers to regulate industry, developing an extensive and well-funded network designed to oppose legislation prescribing work-hour limits, guarantee open shops, oppose exemption of unions from Sherman Anti-Trust Act, and limit the powers of the Supreme Court to settle labor disputes.¹⁷ Thus they were directly opposed

to the mission of the National Consumers' League. NAM described the Child Labor Amendment as a

“revolutionary grant of power to the Congress as repugnant to our traditional concept of local responsibility and self-government, tending to stimulate the growth of enlarged and extravagant bureaucracy and serving to defeat the very humanitarian purpose which its disguise suggests.”¹⁸

Dedicated to the eradication of suffrage, socialism and feminism in America, the publishers of the *Woman Patriot* avidly opposed “ ‘welfare bills,’ which, if enacted, would undermine the sturdy self-reliance of our people.”¹⁹ They viewed protective legislation for women and children as “radical” and its supporters as “tools of communism.”²⁰ They took umbrage at the idea that social feminists represented American women as a whole, which weakened attempts by social feminists to lobby Congress by using women voters as leverage.²¹ Established in 1918 to oppose woman suffrage, The *Woman Patriot* were active participants in many of the red scares of the 1920s focusing their alarmist rhetoric in particular on anti-war organizations with international ties, and social movements that sought an expansion of federal regulatory power.²²

The Sentinels of the Republic vowed to “keep an eye on every suspicious legislative proposal, and guard against propaganda calculated to poison the springs of American democracy.”²³ The mission of the Sentinels of the Republic was

“To maintain the fundamental principles of the American Constitution; To oppose further Federal encroachment upon the reserved rights of the States; To stop the growth of socialism; To prevent concentration of power in Washington through the multiplication of administrative bureaus and a perverted interpretation of the General Welfare Clause.”²⁴

Membership in the organization was free and, like *The Woman Patriot*, its purpose was to mobilize anti-progressive sentiment. In pamphlets arguing against various legislative measures, they suggested that progressives sought to overthrow the government rather than reform it.

These groups were three among many that arose out of the conservative political backlash following World War I and contributed to anti-progressive sentiment throughout the 1920s. The Ku Klux Klan and other nativist groups, anti-immigration proponents, the eugenics advocates, and religious fundamentalists celebrated in the famous Scopes trial are just a few examples of the many conservative groups clamoring for attention in the 1920s. As mentioned in previous chapters, World War I ushered in a period of political and social conservatism. NAM was particularly influenced by WWI political propaganda, learning the art of persuasion from the U.S. Committee on Public Information, the government agency responsible for turning the tide of public opinion in favor of America's entrance into WWI.²⁵ The nationalism articulated by Wilson and echoed in many of the CPI's publications, from the four-minute men's speeches to patriotic ads, suggested that loyalty to the nation superseded the needs and opinions of the individual. NAM rode the coat tails of the CPI, using patriotic rhetoric as a means to thwart labor unrest during WWI, encouraging workers to stay at their jobs for the good of the country and put aside labor disputes over hours and wages.

CPI propaganda was characterized by simplistic, highly emotional appeals, inspiring fear and pity in viewers. Posters demonized the German threat and portrayed women in idealized terms as either hapless victims of enemy cruelty or as inspired

mothers selflessly caring for the worldwide victims of enemy aggression. Continued use of political scare tactics in conjunction with the continuation of the wartime crack down of political dissent spurred post-war red scares. Together, the wartime discouragement of labor unrest, the increase in xenophobic nationalism, the rise of fear-inducing propaganda, and the emergence of anti-communist sentiment created a post war environment in which the progressivism of the teens was ripe for attack. Shaped by the success of the Advertising Division of CPI's campaign, NAM and the *Woman Patriot* launched a campaign that painted the Child Labor Amendment red.

The founding of the Soviet Union during the war caused many Americans to begin to view progressive ideals with suspicion. Notions of greater government oversight of business and protection of the working class appeared communistic. Progressive reforms, like those proposed by social feminists, lost ground they had won in the teens as courts struck down legislation protecting women workers. State's rights' arguments gained strength in legislatures that had previously been sympathetic to the plight of women workers.²⁶ Historian Robyn Muncy argues that the victory of Calvin Coolidge in the 1924 Presidential election signaled the rise of the political philosophy of the associative state. Promoted by Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, the notion of the associative state was predicated on the continuation of the laissez faire political philosophy, which held that business must remain independent of government intervention in order that market forces could operate freely and ensure the health of the economy.²⁷ This philosophy, which stood in conflict with the progressive notion that government ought to be responsible for social welfare and the far-reaching regulations of

the war years, became more popular among white Americans who came to view progressive reforms as aimed at helping foreigners at the expense of the middle class.²⁸

The Hearings of the Judiciary Committees on the proposed Child Labor Amendment took place in this highly charged ideological climate. Beginning in January 1924, both camps mobilized their forces, calling expert witnesses and collecting written statements from interested political, civic, and religious organizations. Both sides mounted moral, economic, and political arguments. Those in favor of the amendment focused on the evils of child labor, the inadequacy and inequity of current state regulations, and the quantity of political support for the measure. The opposition's argument challenged the federal amendment as a mechanism to address the problem of child labor, calling into question the constitutionality, the effectiveness, and the precedent of a federal solution.

Supporters of the Child Labor Amendment pointed to the history of child labor and attempts at regulation in America as evidence of the need for federal intervention. Child labor had long been considered one of the most heinous byproducts of industrialization. By 1880, 1.1 million children, approximately 16% of America's children between the ages of ten and fifteen, were gainfully employed. A 1910 federal report on child labor argued that children were far more likely to fall victim to industrial accidents than adults. Also, children were found to suffer permanent ill health from the impact of repetitive motion and poor working conditions on their growing bodies.²⁹

By the 1920s these statistics remained largely unchanged despite forty years of attempted reform. According to the 1920 census, over one million children between the

ages of ten and fifteen years of age were still gainfully employed in the United States.³⁰

Grace Abbott pointed out that the figures for agricultural work in the 1920 census did not accurately represent the actual number of children laboring in agriculture that year, especially as compared with the 1910 census.³¹ The 1920 census was taken in January, a time of year when the demand for agricultural labor was low as compared to April when the 1910 census was taken. She argued that had the 1920 census been taken in spring instead of winter it would have revealed a rise in the number of children laboring in agriculture as compared to 1910.

Advocates of child labor regulation had won child labor laws in many states from legislatures and constituencies sympathetic to the injuries resulting from industrial accidents and the debilitating effects of industrial work on children's health. As a result of their efforts, by 1900 twenty-eight states had enacted some form of legislation limiting child labor. Yet disparities in state laws, including some states without any form of child labor regulation, convinced advocates that the problem demanded a national solution. Even among the states that did limit child labor, regulations differed dramatically in terms of age and work hour limits as well as the methods and effectiveness of enforcement. Reformers interpreted the statistics to mean that existing regulations did not adequately protect children from the ill effects of industrial labor.

The economic argument against child labor focused on irregularities in state regulations that gave manufacturers in state's without child labor laws an unfair economic advantage over manufacturers in states with stringent ones. The southern textile industry utilized child labor extensively to undercut northern competitors who

were subject to regulations in their states. North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama were noteworthy for the absence of any child labor laws as well as for their laxity regarding compulsory education. Not surprisingly, these states had the highest illiteracy rates in the nation. Industrialists had successfully lobbied to prevent state regulations detrimental to their economic interests, including the abolition child labor. Northern textile industries in states such as Massachusetts were subject to child labor laws established by reformers there. Textile manufacturers in states with child labor regulations felt that Southern textile manufacturers had an unfair advantage because they employed children at much lower cost. The American Federation of Labor stressed that “national intervention is required” to balance interstate competition. Technology and communications advancements, they agreed, had made states’ rights arguments irrelevant in the national industrialized marketplace.³²

Regulation across state lines was also a problem. Children residing in states that significantly limited child labor simply worked in nearby states that were more lenient. Abbott observed that New York, where employers of home workers moved their operations to New Jersey when state regulations were passed limiting home working in New York.³³ Advocates of the Amendment argued that the nature of interstate commerce made existing state solutions inadequate to solve the problem created by unequal state laws.

In order to bridge the gaps between different states’ regulations, two federal laws regulating child labor had been passed in the teens with widespread public support but both were struck down by the Supreme Court. The Keating-Owen Act

“prohibited the shipment of interstate commerce of the products of any mill, factory, workshop, cannery, or manufacturing establishment in which children under 14 were employed, or children between 14 and 16 years were employed more than 8 hours a day or 48 hours a week or 6 days a week or in which children between the ages of 14 and 16 were employed between the hours of 7pm and 6am and prohibited the shipment of any product of a mine or quarry in which children were employed who were under 16.”³⁴

On June 3, 1918 the Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional by a 5-4 vote. Since the products traveling across state lines were not themselves harmful, they ruled that Congress did not have the power prohibit their transfer.³⁵ In response to this defeat, a second federal child labor law was passed on February 24, 1919 establishing an excise tax of 10% on the annual profits of companies not meeting child labor standards enumerated in the bill. The Supreme Court unanimously struck down the law on May 15, 1922 on the grounds that Congress did not have the right to use its power to tax interstate commerce as a weapon to enforce its will over industry.

After many years of largely unsuccessful attempts at reform, advocates of the abolition of child labor concluded that the only effective solution was a federal amendment. The Child Labor Amendment would “grant power to Congress to establish a national minimum of protection for all children and also to preserve to every State its right to pass laws giving its children even greater protection.”³⁶ By establishing a provision in the Constitution for Congress to intervene in business practices pertaining to child labor, reformers ensured that future child labor laws could not be rendered unconstitutional and overturned by the Supreme Court. In doing so, they also set the

precedent for Congressional regulation of other business practices that had previously been overruled by the high court.

Many of the depositions feature highly sentimental arguments bemoaning the evils of child labor. Agnes G. Regan, of the National Council of Catholic Women, argued that, “Child labor is a greater menace than slavery because in child labor the children who are to be our future citizens are practically slaves.”³⁷ Implicit in this argument was the notion that abuse of white children was worse than abuse of black children, because whites were to be the future leaders of the nation. Advocates of the Amendment argued that child labor regulation was a national public interest because the United States “will survive or perish according to our treatment of the children of today and the standards that are bequeathed to them.”³⁸ They argued that it was a national duty to cultivate future citizens who were educated and healthy not undernourished, illiterate, and physically broken from labor.³⁹ Representative Dallinger, who introduced the Amendment, compared the Child Labor Amendment to the slavery amendment saying, “There are things which are so contrary to the interests of humanity and to the welfare of the Nation that the National government ought to step in.”⁴⁰ Representative M. Clyde Kelly agreed saying that “the future of the nation and modern civilization as a whole depended on ‘enlightened, self-governing American citizen.’”⁴¹

E.O. Watson of the Federal Council of Churches in Christ in America stated that nothing has more support from the 29 leading Protestant churches represented by the Council than “efforts to secure the abolition of child labor.”⁴² Supporters of the Amendment also made a gendered political argument, claiming to represent the interests

of the huge new constituency of American women that politicians were eager to win.⁴³ In keeping with the social feminist political ideology, they suggested that the nation's mothers, the best judges of issues pertaining to children, overwhelmingly supported the measure.⁴⁴ Phrases like the "mother bloc," and "the wrath of American mothers" swayed politicians eager to cash in on the vast new constituency of women voters. Members of the WJCC were quick to remind Congress that they represented over eleven million women who would appreciate their political support. In response to this argument, Representative Sumners, who viewed the amendment as a violation of states' rights, expressed his strong desire to win the favor of the ladies despite his reservations about the Amendment as a mechanism.⁴⁵

Opponents of the Amendment argued that they loved America's children no less than advocates of child labor regulation. Most critics of the amendment were, in fact, opposed to child labor. However, they questioned the trend among reformers of using the Constitution as a means to bypass long and costly campaigns at the state level. Furthermore, they feared the expansion of the federal government beyond the level of its effectiveness and wanted to protect the rights of individual states to legislate for themselves. They argued that child labor regulations should be determined individually by the states, which were most responsive to the needs of their citizens and best able to enforce such regulation. Underlying the states' rights argument was the desire to protect individuals and businesses from government regulation. Critics knew that the amendment would open the door for future regulation of business by government, a goal central to 1920s reformers' agenda and anathema to proponents of the laissez-faire

political philosophy upon which the American political system was based and under which American business had enjoyed unprecedented prosperity.

Several aspects of the Amendment's wording raised serious concerns during the Congressional Hearings. The eighteen-year age limit was viewed as particularly high. The use of the word "labor" instead of "employment" was suspect because many feared that this would include unpaid labor within one's own household, farm, or family business. In this same vein, the failure to exempt agricultural work from regulation raised concern. The 1920 census stated that over sixty percent of children employed in the United States were working in the field of agriculture. While proponents of Amendment frequently argued that they did not intend the amendment to prohibit children from assisting on the family farm, they refused to exempt agriculture because large-scale, industrialized farms remained a possible target for reform. The fact that 61% of child labor employment was in agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry suggested to some opponents that the amendment would pave the way for the federal government to usurp control of child rearing from farm-owning parents. Opponents viewed laws regulating such labor as constituting "coercive legislation to control the power of the parents over their children."⁴⁶ The WJCC's failure to exempt agricultural labor from the Amendment allowed opponents of the Amendment to win vital support from rural America during the ratification campaign.

The Hearings reintroduced concerns first raised by the Supreme Court about whether Congress legitimately had the right to regulate child labor. Representative Charles Sumners was the most vocal of several Congressmen who feared that the

Amendment was not the appropriate vehicle by which to achieve child labor regulation because it overstepped the rights of states to regulate themselves. Sumners feared that by transgressing the states' right to regulate child labor themselves the federal government would be doing the states' jobs for them, encouraging them, like lazy children, to leave the work to the higher authority to accomplish. The argument that the Child Labor Amendment violated states' rights had extensive support during the hearings. Mrs. Ruben Ross Holloway of the Women's Constitutional League of Maryland stated, "We stand for the preservation of the principles of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of the States and the U.S. in letter and in spirit, against violation, whether by direct assault or indirect invasion, whether in the name of socialism, feminism, or in the name of humanity, or in whatever guise the effort is made."⁴⁷

Taking exception to the political argument made by the WJCC that they represented American womanhood, Mary Kilbreth, publisher of the *Woman Patriot*, and a number of other female members of antifeminist organizations, sent written statements and provided testimony against the measure. In anticipation of the strategy that the NCL would employ during the ratification campaign, Kilbreth based her organization's legitimacy as opponents of the Amendment on their membership in "the consuming public."⁴⁸

In the spring of 1924 the Child Labor Amendment passed both houses of Congress by strong margins despite significant concerns by many members of Congress that the Amendment violated states rights. The Amendment then required ratification by a three-fourths majority of the States. Supporters of the Amendment entered into the

ratification campaign in the summer of 1924 with guarded confidence. An editorial in the *New York Times* in June predicted, “the chances for ratification, looking five years ahead, are good, but evidently there will be a stiff fight in the States.”⁴⁹ Members of the WJCC were encouraged by popular and Congressional support of the amendment and rallied their forces to undertake a campaign in the states that utilized their vast networks of local women’s groups. Opponents, on the other hand, had the Herculean task of flipping public opinion on the issue. A July article in *Current Opinion* urged the opposition, which they argued had “been weak,” to develop “intelligent and disinterested arguments” to thwart this measure, which had the power to fundamentally alter the law of the country.⁵⁰

Over the summer of 1924 both camps organized their resources at the national and the state levels and began unrolling their ratification campaigns in the states. Florence Kelley, as head of the WJCC, spearheaded a national publicity campaign in magazines including *Scribner’s*, *Delineator*, *Pictorial Review*, *Woman’s Home Companion*, *Collier’s*, and *North American Review*. The WJCC deployed member organizations with local chapters in the states to rally local support for the Amendment. The General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the PTA, Women’s Trade Union League, the National Consumers’ League, NAACP, and the League of Women Voters spoke at club meetings, church services, seminars, and workshops; sent out pamphlets, letters and petitions; and lobbied for the Amendment in state legislatures. The opposition began work on a national publicity campaign that included the publication and distribution of

thousands of pamphlets and a series of press releases in all of the nation's major newspapers and many smaller ones as well.

The ratification campaigns on both sides were highly gendered. The WJCC relied primarily on member women's organizations and popular magazines and journals to promote the Child Labor Amendment. The magazines that featured pro-Amendment articles tended to be either women's magazines (*Pictorial Review*, *Delineator*, and *Woman's Home Companion*) or muckraking journals known for their progressive leanings (*Collier's*, *North Atlantic Review*, and *Scribner's*), which meant that the articles reached an audience already sympathetic to the cause.⁵¹ NAM, in contrast, utilized their network of business contacts as well as their extensive ties to American newspapers to lobby against the Amendment and thus reached an audience that included both businessmen as well as the broad cross section of the nation who read newspapers. The *Woman Citizen* reached a relatively small number of antifeminists but they also received national news coverage of their inflammatory articles in the conservative *Dearborn Independent*.

In addition to being gendered in their distribution of information, the ratification campaigns also featured gendered messages. The WJCC's national magazine campaign consisted of both sentimental arguments against the evils of child labor and a consumerist argument that stressed Americans' complicity in the abuses of America's children through their consumption of cheap goods produced via child labor. Notably, the WJCC altered their gender strategy somewhat during the ratification campaign – attempting to awaken male consumer consciousness in articles in muckraking journals like *Collier's*.

The opposition's heavy-handed use of red scare tactics was far more successful, arguing that women's groups generally and proponents of the Child Labor Amendment specifically were unwitting dupes to communist infiltrators seeking to establish a socialist state in America by promoting initiatives that concentrated power in the hands of the central government. Dominating news coverage of the issues with scathing editorials, the opposition successfully defeated the Child Labor Amendment in the states.

Kelley's strategy for the ratification campaign followed the tradition long employed by the National Consumers' League as embodied by their motto: "Investigate, Agitate, Legislate."⁵² She sought to generate public outrage over industrial abuses against children by publishing accounts gathered by NCL experts in the fields of child welfare and industrial health and safety in journals known for investigative reporting. This strategy relied on a delicate balance between statistics and sentimental rhetoric regarding the value of children to a nation. At the heart of NCL's plan to raise a public outcry against child labor was the notion that citizen consumers were responsible for the ethics of the production process and must therefore demand that their government ensure that the products they consumed were produced fairly and humanely. Describing the NCL's traditional notion of the consumer citizen in a 1914 article, Florence Kelley wrote,

"Intelligent mothers prefer not to buy the products of the labor of children. But after fifteen years of effort by the Consumers' League, and ten years' work of the National Child Labor Committee, it is still impossible to learn whether a supply of cotton goods comes from a mill in Massachusetts working under the children's 8-hours law, or from the southern branch of the same mill working under the odious, new, sham law of Georgia. Women are still unable to keep their consciences clear of sharing indirectly as consumers in the employment of young boys ... They are, therefore, in no faltering terms asking Uncle Sam to safeguard ... all his children precisely"⁵³

Pro-amendment articles sought to personalize the consumers' connection to the issue by tying their purchase of goods to the process – child labor – by which those goods were produced.

The NCL used Children's Bureau statistics and pitiful anecdotes to galvanize public outrage at child labor. They also stressed the inefficiency of state solutions to handle the problem of child labor. *Collier's* magazine ran a series of articles in favor of the amendment in the summer and fall of 1924. At the behest of publisher O.H. Blackman, Harold Cary wrote the articles to arouse sympathy for the Amendment. Blackman was avid in his support, distributing information to newspapers, congressional districts, and churches, and convincing the *Washington Post* and the *New York Evening Post* to run articles in support as well. *Collier's Weekly* was one of the most widely circulated magazines of the day, reaching millions of households nationwide.⁵⁴

Written from an overtly masculine perspective and appealing to the consumer consciousness of the audience, the articles distanced themselves from the gendered political argument used in the Congressional Hearings. Recognizing the need to establish the proposed amendment as more than a women's issue, the articles represented a change in strategy that sought to define a male-oriented consumer consciousness and use it as a vehicle to rally political support for the Child Labor Amendment.

In an effort to expand the notion of consumer citizenship to include men as well as women, Cary highlighted his masculine persona saying that he was not a "sentimentalist" or a "softy," but argued that he refused to wear a shirt produced by a fourteen year-old boy.⁵⁵ He suggested that Americans were "forced" to purchase shirts

produced using child labor due to their ignorance of the production process and despite the fact that most disapproved of the practice of child labor. A minority of parents and employers who condoned the practice were “pulling one over” on the unknowing majority who opposed child labor.⁵⁶ This point was emphasized in the opening of the article in which three men, including the author, discussed the rise of civilization. One man waxed poetic about the achievements of current society and denied the existence of child labor in the United States. The author pointed out that the very shirt on the man’s back was a product of child labor.⁵⁷

Cary repeatedly stressed his use of “facts, not sentiment.” Although his articles on the subject were filled with sentimentality, his repeated claims to be himself “unsentimental” suggested that women were not the only ones who needed to stand in support of this issue.⁵⁸ Trying to distance themselves from the political argument employed in the hearing and from the gendered arguments used by the opposition during the ratification campaign, Cary’s articles stressed that child labor was not just a women’s issue. Citing Children’s Bureau analysis arguing that children were far more likely than adults to fall prey to industrial accidents, he again highlighted the need for men to take a stand against child labor, arguing the risks of child labor permitted “no man to stay on the fence. The cost of child labor to-day is tremendous, tremendous in money, in stunted children, in deformed lives.”⁵⁹ Cary concluded that one “need not be a sentimentalist to object to child labor.”⁶⁰ Consumer activism had long been central to the NCL model of activism but what made Cary’s strategy new was that the generic consumer represented here by the author, who was no “softy,” had a distinctly masculine connotation.

In keeping with NCL's long time strategy of promoting moral consumption, Cary claimed to have "seen enough of [child labor in urban tenements] to find it revolting in its effect on the children and those who consume the things they work upon"⁶¹ He implied that diseased children's handling of commercial goods threatened the health of consumers as well. He commented that pneumonia, influenza, mumps, typhoid fever, measles, whooping cough, bronchitis, eczema, cough, tuberculosis, and syphilis were common in tenements and that more research was required to determine if these diseases could be transmitted to consumers via the products produced by infected workers.

In an article on agricultural labor, Cary again stressed his consumer consciousness saying that his salad upset his stomach as he pondered the child labor used to produce it.⁶² He also noted that products sold for the same price regardless of whether they were produced by children or adults. Thus there was no additional cost for making a conscientious choice.⁶³

Many articles like these sought to place child labor in contrast to American notions of civilization and childhood. An article in *The New Republic* chronicled the life of eleven-year-old Wlad, a Polish immigrant who began working in the beet fields at age six. The ironic tone of the article heightened the contrast between Wlad's tragic life as an agricultural laborer with the adventures expected of a "normal" American kid. The article referred to a six year old as a "man" and describing how "it was exciting to see how many tons of beets you could pull before you dropped over from sheer exhaustion." He also noted that "two shortened fingers in his left hand will always bear testimony to the valiant efforts of a six-year-old."⁶⁴

The nation's clergy as well as experts in the emerging profession of public health were highly sympathetic to the civilization argument. They supported the Amendment by giving sermons on the issue as well as writing newspaper and journal articles on the subject. "There should be no compromise with child labor; it is a crime against the race, a drag on the progress of the American democracy and an evil that must not be permitted to exist ... Let no straining of constitutional principles or shadowy interpretation of law thrust the child into industry for in the industrial immolation of childhood we foster the decrepitude of the state."⁶⁵ The Commission on Social Service supported the measure saying, "Child labor as distinguished from wholesome after school and vacation assistance in home and on the farm, stunts growth, handicaps the future, and produces illiterates."⁶⁶

A number of pamphlet and articles also supported the Amendment on economic grounds. Samuels Gompers' leaflet, *What the Country Wants*, was widely distributed both among union members and WJCC members. The AFL argued that the abolition of child labor would force manufacturers to pay adults an adult wage for labor previously done by children for less. This would bring more money into working-class households. An article in *Collier's* illustrated the problem of interstate recruitment in vivid detail. It described "breaker boys" inhaling coal dust and working with swollen and bleeding hands. Recruited from across state lines to avoid violating state compulsory education laws, kids suffered back injuries, lost fingers, suffered general ill health and grew to be uneducated, unskilled, physically disabled adults who moved from state to state relying on charity or state-sponsored social services.⁶⁷

The New Republic featured an autobiographical article by a former child laborer who described himself as “a rivet in the huge industrial machine.” He began working at age 8 or 9 in the coalmines and by early adulthood was unable to work due to poor health caused by early and unhealthful labor. He concluded that, “the industrial system is, economically speaking, wasteful of its human material, and humanly speaking, criminally negligent.”⁶⁸ He didn’t want charity; he wanted to be a productive adult but argued that child labor robbed him and the nation of a productive adult life. He suggested that the state must take the initiative to protect children, “If it is not responsible sooner, it will have to be later. If it had been sooner, my value to the state would more than have repaid my cost to the state” as a disabled adult.⁶⁹ This article argued that not only was child labor inhumane, it did not make economic sense.

An article in *Literary Digest* took this idea even further, claiming that the 1,000,000 child laborers who would grow up unfitted for adulthood would therefore be far more likely to fall prey to vice and bolshevism.⁷⁰ Collier’s writer Harold Cary concurred, noting that street vending children were typically behind in school and were four times as likely to end up in up delinquent and in court than their peers who remained in school, according to an investigation conducted in Philadelphia.⁷¹ The Children’s Bureau confirmed that as adults, former child laborers were least trained, most unskilled, and most likely to be laid off.

Pro-amendment arguments tended to focus on urban industrial labor rather than agricultural labor. They also tended to feature immigrant child laborers. By identifying child laborers as immigrants NCL hoped to de-emphasize potential usurpation of parental

control among white farmers. Progressive era measures like Prohibition and compulsory education laws were supported by white middle and upper-class Americans eager to promote “middle-class values” regarding childhood, education, work and gender roles as the rule of law for immigrants with different cultural assumptions and economic needs.

Cary interviewed a social worker that laid the blame for child labor on working class, immigrant parents who “regard the children as assets to be used.”⁷² He quoted a mother, whose broken English suggested that she was an immigrant, who argued that her family needed the money. Yet the social worker argued that greed motivated parents to send to work children who did not wish to attend school. She referred to such parents as “stupid and greedy.”⁷³ Portraying the offending parents as immigrants, social feminists hoped to provide an alternative to the image developed by the opposition of white kids being deprived of character-building work on the family farm. In “No Chores for Jimmie: He’s a Laborer,” Cary compared illiterate child workers to Russian peasants and African-American slaves.⁷⁴ He claimed that children’s doing chores at home was as important to their development as were school and play. But “industrialized agriculture” was another matter.⁷⁵ This strategy did not adequately take into account the changed political climate of the 1920s. The focus on immigrants, in particular those from Russia, instead connoted leftist labor organizations and thus played into the hands of opponents who offered the same as evidence of the communist sympathies of social feminist promoters of the Amendment.

Opposition rhetoric cloaked concerns about the expansion of federal control and possible abuses of the Amendment process in highly emotional language that preyed on

the fears many Americans harbored regarding rising Soviet power in the aftermath of WWI. Although they clearly stretched the truth in their claims about the connection between supporters of the Child Labor Amendment and the Soviet Communist Party, this strategy proved quite effective at undermining public support for the Child Labor Amendment. Anticommunist rhetoric was highly gendered, invoking women who relied too heavily on state intervention due to their political inexperience.⁷⁶ This lack of political savvy made women easy prey for communists seeking a means to infiltrate American politics. In addition to developing a highly effective argument, the opposition drastically outgunned advocates of the Amendment in the sheer volume of published material they sent out in the states during the ratification campaign. The largest manufacturing lobby in the nation by the 1920s, NAM took advantage of connections at newspapers across the nation, keeping anti-Amendment editorials regularly in the news throughout the ratification campaign.

The *New York Times* provides a good example of the disparity in the coverage of the issue. A flurry of articles in favor of the amendment appeared in the spring of 1924 during the Congressional Hearings but during the summer and fall of 1924 the paper was dominated by anti-Amendment editorials and announcements of various organizations' opposition to the Amendment, including the Sentinels of the Republic and various manufacturing lobbies.⁷⁷ Early in the summer several articles reported early successes in states where the amendment was ratified, beginning with Arkansas. But by July pro-Amendment articles appeared most frequently as letters to the editor opposing much more prominent anti-amendment editorials.⁷⁸ As the summer wore on, reports of the

Amendment's defeat in many states added to the negative picture portrayed in the *New York Times*.

The opposition's campaign stressed the threat to states' and parental rights and the expansion of the federal government rather than the threat to business. A pamphlet composed by NAM and distributed by the thousands in the states, described the threat to states rights by using communist rhetoric, claiming that it "confer[ed] control over the labor and education of all persons under 18."⁷⁹ The pamphlet suggested that advocates did not wish to submit the measure to referendum because of "a growing realization that amendments take vast power from the people without the opportunity for their approval or disapproval."⁸⁰ Unlike descriptions of the amendment in either pro- or neutral sources, author James Emery called the amendment a "revolutionary transformation of the relations of federal to local government" with a "tendency toward centralization."⁸¹ Vastly overstating the amount and kind of control over individuals and states conferred by the amendment, he also referred to it as a "grant of Congressional authority over the most intimate of relations within the family. From conception to death the citizen's now moving under a body of rules emanating from Washington."⁸²

On several occasions the pamphlet called upon antiwar fervor kept alive in the post war period by the most contentious issue of the day – the proposal regarding American entrance into the League of Nations. Emery compared the grant of power in the Child Labor Amendment to Congress' power to declare war. He also likened the financial commitment required in the Child Labor Amendment to increased federal spending since the Civil War, almost all related to military expenditures. He compared

the grant of power in the Child Labor Amendment to the Sixteenth Amendment, establishing the income tax, which Congress quickly used once granted, and which was very unpopular. He also quoted the founding fathers on the need to limit central government. Using a contrary tactic, but one used with success by states' rights advocates during the hearings, he argued that the federal government could not effectively control the lives of 100 million people. Together, these rhetorical devices won the support of many states rights' advocates.

Playing on farmers' fears about the regulation of small-scale agriculture, Emery argued that the amendment was contrary to the laws of God, "dethron[ing] parents and subvert[ing] family government."⁸³ This represented a very real concern because the Amendment was simply a grant of power, which meant that Congress would be free to establish federal laws pertaining to the labor of persons under eighteen, as they deemed necessary. Thus, Congress would be free to include family labor if they chose because advocates of the measure refused to formally exempt agriculture from inclusion in the Amendment. By describing the issue using religious rhetoric Emery implied the supposed Communist origins of measure, as Marxist ideology was notably anti-religious.

An anti-Amendment cartoon illustrated the issue, showing an adolescent girl and boy lounging lazily outside their home with parents unable to compel them to help around the house. The daughter, portrayed in the foreground of the cartoon, lies reclined in a hammock reading a book. Her bobbed hair and short, waistless dress as well as her demeanor are clear indications that, denied the character-building benefits of hard work, she's fallen prey to the moral decrepitude characterized by the archetypal flapper. The

son, reclined and smoking, has the slicked hair and suit indicative of the modern dandy.⁸⁴ The cartoon suggested that the Child Labor Amendment would free children from household chores forcing their parents to serve them and thus making them spoiled and lazy.⁸⁵

Opponents used a gendered argument in which they characterized the amendment as a “women’s issue” and argued that supporters were “surface-minded sentimentalists” and “unthinking enthusiasts” who lacked the political savvy to understand the implications of a federal solution.⁸⁶ Citing female political inexperience as the reason why women turned to the federal government to enact social welfare reform as in the case of the Child Labor Amendment “The Feminine Taste in Legislation” argued that “American Women are leaning heavily on Uncle Sam” and advocated that women learn to stand on their own politically.⁸⁷ The *Boston Transcript* warned against “introducing into the Federal Constitution a clause inspired merely by emotional sentiment ... shingled and trimmed and plastered with each succeeding blast of sentiment and emotion that, however sincere and, however credible, none the less are emotion and sentiment and therefore volatile and changeable.”⁸⁸ And, given this description, undeniably feminine.

The Woman Patriot, created for the dual purpose of defeating feminism and social welfare measures, was consumed with the notion that communism was thriving in women’s organizations and that measures like the Child Labor Amendment would signal the death knell of democracy. Explicitly linking the social feminism political agenda with socialism, articles like “Shall Bolshevik-Feminists Secretly Govern America?”⁸⁹ “‘Welfare’ – The New Socialist Gateway,”⁹⁰ “Kollontay Three Years Ahead of Mrs.

Kelley”⁹¹ dominated the journal. It called the Child Labor Amendment a “ ‘straight socialist measure’ by radicals under direct orders from Moscow”⁹² designed “to obtain central control of the minds of American youth, to destroy their love of country and willingness to defend her.”⁹³

The Women Patriot reprinted and widely distributed the slanderous articles from the *Dearborn Independent*, a conservative Michigan publication owned by Henry Ford that attacked female reformers and peace activists, by suggesting that they were tied to the Soviet Communist Party. These articles first appeared in the *Dearborn Independent* in March 1924 prior to the Congressional Hearings on the Child Labor Amendment. The first, entitled “Are Women’s Clubs ‘Used’ by Bolshevists?: Interlocking Directorates Used Effectively to Disseminate Propaganda,” claimed that “[l]eadership of women’s organizations has fallen into the hands of radicals to an alarming extent.” Quoting a proclamation from the Communist International, the article stated that members of American women’s organizations were “drawn in through all sorts of camouflage interests – their dislike of war, their sympathies for prisoners, most of all by the frothy eloquence which depicts a woman’s crusade against all evil” to coalitions, like the National Council of Women, which were run by radical communists. The article argued that radicals used appeals to the care of mothers and babies to which people would, of course, be sympathetic as a means to “vote away individual freedom and Constitutional government.”⁹⁴ This last was a reference to both the Sheppard-Towner Act, for maternity and infant care, and the Child Labor Amendment.

This article was followed, a week later, by the “spider web chart,” compiled by Lucia Maxwell of the U.S. Chemical Warfare Bureau, under the auspices of the department of War. Headed with the caption, “The Socialist-Pacifist Movement in America Is an Absolutely Fundamental and Integral Part of International Socialism,” the spider web chart was meant to expose the “interlocking directorates” described in the previous article. It was a list of major American women’s organizations in the center and key members along side with lines connecting member names with the various organizations with which they were affiliated.⁹⁵ The organizations shared so many members that the connecting lines made the chart resemble a spider web. As mentioned previously, many of the leading members of the major women’s organizations formed coalition groups, such as the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee, to pursue common goals. The primary purpose of the chart was to show the connection between all of the listed organizations and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), an international organization that included socialists. Implicit in the structure of the chart was the idea that all of the major women’s political organizations were connected ideologically to what the chart referred to as the “socialist-pacifist” movement. This was a misrepresentation both of leading social feminists’ affiliation with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and of WILPF’s ideological link to socialism. The chart likewise inaccurately suggested that the listed organizations were affiliated with the National Council for the Prevention of War, another peace organization.

The opposition also sought to block this and other general welfare measures by making it much more difficult to amend the Constitution.⁹⁶ The Wadsworth-Garrett resolution was designed to combat the Child Labor Amendment and other social welfare amendments by altering the Amendment process, requiring nearly unanimous support nationwide for passage.⁹⁷ Kilbreth and Sentinels of the Republic strongly supported the Wadsworth-Garrett Amendment, sharing Wadsworth's view that the enactment of federal social welfare legislation was leading to the "obliteration of the States as political entities."⁹⁸ While this measure did not pass it provided the opposition yet another source of opposition news coverage.

The unexpected success that opposition scare tactics had in altering public opinion proved to many at the time that political victories would now be determined primarily by the size of one's advertising budget. A comment during the hearing to this effect proved prophetic, "In many states public opinion is governed by newspapers, and it is the man who has the money who can regulate public opinion."⁹⁹ Senator Walsh of Montana was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that "no proposition ever submitted to the States has been more grossly misrepresented than this one."¹⁰⁰ He went on to name the National Association of Manufacturers as the source of the opposition campaign, saying that "revolting, sordid motives back much of the effort to accomplish the defeat of the Child Labor Amendment."¹⁰¹

While Florence Kelley hardly disagreed, her interpretation sheds greater light on the lasting impact of the campaign. She viewed the defeat in terms of a battle of American liberalism between advocates of social democratic protections for citizens and

proponents of laissez-faire protections for corporations. At the November 1925 meeting of the National Consumers' League, she stated

“I do not believe the national manufacturers would have spent the enormous sum of money and gone to the lengths they did ... just to defeat the 20th Amendment. I think it went deeper. I think they were bound and determined there should be no more interference with their business by the federal government.”¹⁰²

Nothing better illustrates how the ratification battle played out than the campaign in one of its most pivotal states, Massachusetts. As discussed earlier, Massachusetts was one of the northern states that had a large textile industry, subject to significant state child labor restrictions. During the Congressional Hearings, proponents of the Amendment argued that Southern textile manufacturers who were not subject to such laws had an unfair economic advantage over those in Massachusetts. As such one would expect that Massachusetts would be eager to pass the Child Labor Amendment, which would level the playing field.

The Massachusetts campaign in the fall of 1924 followed on the heels of the first successful ratification of the amendment in Arkansas and the defeat of the amendment in North Carolina, Louisiana, and Georgia, three of the southern states without state child labor restrictions.¹⁰³ In keeping with their claim that supporters of the amendment sought to wrench control from states and parents, opponents argued that lobbies like the WJCC used their political influence in Congress to pass legislation that did not have popular support. They pointed out that although amendments required approval of two-thirds of the state legislatures, they did not require a popular vote. To address this concern, NAM successfully campaigned to have the Child Labor Amendment put up for referendum,

giving the people of the state the opportunity to assert their will. While the legislature still retained ultimate decision-making power, it would have been political suicide to decide against the expressed wishes of the electorate. Despite their belief that they had public support, proponents of the Amendment worried that a referendum would be decided in favor of the side that spent the most money on advertising their interpretation of the issue.¹⁰⁴

The Massachusetts referendum set the tone for the ratification campaign as a whole. The Massachusetts Public Interests League, the state organization that worked with national opposition groups to defeat the Amendment, reprinted and distributed statewide as a pamphlet an article from the *Dearborn Independent* called “The Responsibility of Being Led.”¹⁰⁵ The article argued that most women were not called upon to be leaders but rather to “bear the responsibility of being led.” That responsibility included, according to author Margaret Robinson, making sure that leaders were worthy of their posts and led the nation in the right direction. She argued that “a few ambitious women” mounted a propaganda campaign in Congress, claimed to represent twelve million American women, and sought to pass the Child Labor Amendment, without public approval.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, *The Women Citizen* reprinted the two *Dearborn Independent* articles discussed earlier that claimed WJCC members were communists. NAM’s pamphlet outlining the socialist implications of the measure and reiterating possible alliances between supporters of the Amendment and the Soviet Union also flooded Massachusetts. Together, this barrage of red baiting turned public distaste for

child labor in Massachusetts into fear of communist revolution. The people of Massachusetts voted down the Child Labor Amendment 3 to 1 in the referendum.

An investigation of Massachusetts textile manufacturers reported in *The Woman Citizen* claimed that six of the major Massachusetts textile manufacturers, who were members of NAM, had significant financial interests in southern cotton mills. Thus, they too had a vested interest in defeating the Child Labor Amendment in order to protect their Southern industries from regulation. Supporters of the amendment publicized their findings following the defeat in Massachusetts, arguing that NAM was not concerned with states' rights but rather with personal financial gain.¹⁰⁷ Organizations Associated for Ratification (OAR), which had been formed to unite statewide and national efforts in favor of ratification, argued that opponents like NAM were eager to profit from the labor of children, despite evidence that such labor was harmful. However, all of this information followed the well-publicized defeat of the Amendment and did little to turn the rising tide of public opinion.¹⁰⁸

Called by supporters of the Amendment a “monstrous campaign of misrepresentation,” the opposition had found a strategy in Massachusetts to successfully defeat the Amendment nationwide.¹⁰⁹ Although supporters of the Amendment still held out hope that they could overcome the set back in Massachusetts, defeat in New York soon dashed any serious hope of passing the Amendment. Along with prominent New York supporters State Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins and rising star in democratic politics Eleanor Roosevelt, Florence Kelley felt personally betrayed as Governor Smith of New York succumbed to political pressure and recommended a referendum on the

issue. Dorothy Kirchwey Brown concluded that the referendum was “striking lesson on ‘the private control of public opinion’ and yet another example of “how a small group with much money and no scruples can put over a tremendous publicity campaign of misrepresentation, and can deceive a majority of the public with absolutely baseless propaganda.”¹¹⁰ The NY referendum signaled that the opposition had successfully taken control of the rhetoric of the debate. Supporters of the Amendment were unable to get the issue back in focus. As a result in January 1925 the necessary thirteen states had voted against ratification thereby defeating the Child Labor Amendment.¹¹¹

Using modern public relations techniques they had learned during World War I, NAM led the opposition to the Child Labor Amendment by using the most effective political tool of the period – fear of communism. The battle over the Child Labor Amendment also represented a continuation of the debate over American liberalism discussed in previous chapters. At the outset the Child Labor Amendment appeared to social feminists to be the most likely path to establish a precedent for governmental intervention in American business because Americans were overwhelmingly opposed to child labor. Opponents likewise clearly understood the stakes and as such came out in full force against the Amendment. While NAM provided the bulk of the monetary and organizational support for the campaign against the Amendment, the *Woman Citizen’s* gendered characterization of social feminists as political dupes to soviet aggressors played beautifully into existing views that politics was outside the realm of traditional female expertise.

The opposition's successful use of political propaganda as exemplified in the Massachusetts campaign illustrates the increasing importance of the tenets of modern advertising in American political culture as lobbies asserted greater influence on the political process. WJCC member organizations, which promoted nonpartisan issue-based lobbying, contributed substantially to this transformation in the body politic in the 1920s that resulted in a loss of party power and the rise of powerful political lobbies. Unfortunately for them in this case, money and the publicity that came with it became the key factors in political influence under this new political culture.

The WJCC's campaign in favor the Child Labor Amendment highlights a significant moment in the development of the notion of the consumer citizen in American public discourse. Tracing the notion of the consumer citizen from its gendered roots in the activism of the National Consumers' League, we see that the campaign for the Child Labor Amendment marked a shift in the portrayal of ethical consumption from one limited to the domain of the female consumer to a broader definition that included men and women as illustrated in the series of articles in *Collier's Magazine*.¹¹²

NCL member Maud Nathan enumerated this new view of consumer citizenship, which stressed the need for a "triple alliance" between labor, capital, and the consumer in her 1926 history of the National Consumers' League. "The league must continue to encourage consumers to throw their weight and power consistently on the side of justice and fairness. Consumers must recognize their own power and, through the force of public opinion, must not only insist upon high standards in industry, on the part of both capital and labour, but must maintain their own rights in regard to good service, free from

exploitation of either of the other factors.”¹¹³ New Deal policy makers were highly influenced by the NCLs notion of “consumers’ political power and legitimacy.” In the 1930s NCL members were well positioned to take an active role in the creation of the New Deal. The Department of Labor, with its corollary departments – the Children’s Bureau, Women’s Bureau, and the Dept of Labor Statistics were led by NCL members and their allies in the Child Labor struggle. Eleanor Roosevelt, an advocate of the Child Labor Amendment and active member of several organizations in the WJCC, would, as First Lady, become the ideological leader of social feminists whose social reform agenda finally won both popular and governmental support.

Endnotes

¹ 167 republicans, 128 Democrats, 1 Independent, and 1 Socialist voted in favor

² 40 Republicans, 19 democrats, and 2 Farmer-Party voted in favor

³ Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

⁴ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 176.

⁵ For social feminists' efforts to transform American liberalism see Landon R.Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: the National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Elizabeth Anne Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robbin and the Women's Trade Union League*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Louise and Ralph Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. For more on liberalism, generally, see Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995; Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement: A short History of the Agrarian Movement in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*. New York: Random House, 1955; Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York: Basic Books, 1995; William Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963; Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in the Progressive Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998; Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippman and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961; Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988; Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-interpretation of American History, 1900-1916*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.

⁶ *New York Times*, "Child Labor Fight Reaches the Senate." May 4, 1924, p. XX10.

⁷ *New York Times*, "Child Labor Fight Reaches the Senate." May 4, 1924, p. XX10.

⁸ A bibliography of relevant articles and pamphlets on the issue is available in Julia E. Johnson, *Child Labor*. New York: The H.W Wilson Company, 1925.

⁹ A member of a prominent political family that had long supported woman suffrage, Kelley was encouraged to pursue an education. She received her undergraduate degree from Cornell University in 1882 and studied law and government at the University of Zurich. She became a socialist during her time abroad and married a Russian medical student. She left her abusive husband and, with their three children, went to live at the Chicago settlement, Hull House.

¹⁰ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 18.

¹¹ Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism*, p. 41-60.

¹² Historically, feminine domestic ideology as well as women's political disenfranchisement led to the widespread belief that women were politically disinterested. But as women began to expand their role as

caretakers into the broader community as reformers in the nineteenth century they frequently used the argument that they were uncorrupted by political self-interest to justify their involvement in politics to promote social welfare measures. Simultaneously, the rise of consumerism provided women a public space to inhabit and dominate in the early twentieth century.

¹³ In advance of the demand-based economic theories of the New Deal, the NCL campaign – “right goods, rightly made” – stressed that demand determined the value of goods. Following a series of economic recessions in the teens, some economists blamed under consumption for periodic economic decline. Such theories emphasized the importance of “mass purchasing power” to a robust and stable economy. They encouraged consumption among the working class as a solution to the problem of periodic recession. Henry Ford put this theory into practice early in the century by raising the wages of his workers and lowering the price of automobiles to make them affordable to the vast population of American workers. His success and the widespread use of credit enabled Americans to purchase more than ever before and earned manufacturers unprecedented prosperity. This notion that mass purchasing power was critical to the national economy made consumption a national issue and made American’s, particularly women’s, consumption an overtly political act.

¹⁴ Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism*, p. 42.

¹⁵ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 104.

¹⁶ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 104.

¹⁷ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 104.

¹⁸ James A. Emery, “An Examination of the Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States,” August 1924.

¹⁹ *Woman Patriot*, 15 Nov. 1921, p.4.

²⁰ *Woman Patriot*, 15 Nov. 1921, p.4.

²¹ The *Woman Patriot* was a journal that represented the anti-feminist movement. Following suffrage, anti-feminists dedicated themselves to opposing “expansion of social welfare programs, women’s peace efforts, and foster[ed] a political culture hostile to progressive female activists” because they felt that women’s leadership of government was detrimental to the American family and the nation. Made up primarily of upper-middle-class educated women, the antifeminist movement combined antifeminist sentiment with antiradicalism. For more on antifeminism, see Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, editors, *Opposition to the Women’s Movement in the United States, 1848-1929*. New York: Garland Publications, 1997; Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, editors, *Antifeminism in America: A Reader*. New York: Garland Publications, 1997; Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, *Redefining the New Woman, 1920-1963*. New York: Garland Publications, 1997.

²² Kim Nielsen, Introduction to “How Did Women Antifeminists Shape and Limit the Social Reform Movements of the 1920s?” edited by Kim Nielsen in *Women and Social Movements* (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2004).
<http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com/was2/was2.object.details.aspx?dorpid=1000678983>

²³ Kim Nielsen, Introduction to “How Did Women Antifeminists Shape and Limit the Social Reform Movements of the 1920s?” in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements*

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²⁴ *The Woman Patriot*. 1921. Sentinels of the Republic. December 15 included in How Did Women Antifeminists Shape and Limit the Social Reform Movements of the 1920s? by Kim Neilsen in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 3/16/2007.

²⁵ For more on CPI see – Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; James R. Mock, *Words that Won the War: The Story of CPI, 1917-1919*; George Creel, *How We Advertised America*. New York: Arno Press, 1920; Alfred E. Corneise, *War As Advertised: The Four Minute Men and America's Crusade, 1917-1918*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984; Stephen Vaugh, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

²⁶ For more on attitudes towards states rights and the political/economic policies of the 1920s see: Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Economy: Public Policy and Economic Change in America, 1900-1930*; Willaim J. Barber, *From New Era to New Deal: Herbert Hoover, the economists, and American economic policy, 1920-1933*; Robert F. Himmelberg, editor, *Business-Government Cooperation, 1917-1932: The Rise of Corporatist Policies*. New York: Garland Publications, 1994; Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935*; Gordon Lloyd, editor, *The Two Faces of Liberalism: How the Hoover-Roosevelt Debate Shaped the Twenty-first Century*. Salem, MA: M & M Scrivener Press, 2006; Robert F. Himmelberg, editor, *Antitrust and Regulation during WWI and the Republican Era, 1917-1932*. New York: Garland Publications, 1994.

²⁷ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, p. 134.

²⁸ For more on 1920s red scares see: Kim Neilsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001; Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: A History of American Anticommunism*” New York: Free Press, 1995; Melvyn Leffler, Editor, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origin s of the Cold War, 1917-1953*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994; Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007; Michael Miller Topp, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Marcel C. La Follette, *Reframing Scopes: Journalists, Scientists, and the Lost Photographs from the Trial of the Century*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008.

²⁹ Raymond G. Fuller, *Child Labor and the Constitution*. New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1923, p. 1-32.

³⁰ Well over half of those were fifteen years of age while the remaining 378,068 were between the ages of ten and fourteen. Over half of all child laborers were employed in agriculture. Fuller, *Child Labor and the Constution*, 1-32.

³¹ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, pps 15, 59.

³² Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 15, 59.

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- ³³ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923.
- ³⁴ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 20.
- ³⁵ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, pp. 18-19.
- ³⁶ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, pps. 61.
- ³⁷ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 72.
- ³⁸ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 75.
- ³⁹ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 84.
- ⁴⁰ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 9.
- ⁴¹ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 84.
- ⁴² Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 72.
- ⁴³ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 82-83.
- ⁴⁴ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 82-83.
- ⁴⁵ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 65.
- ⁴⁶ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p.8
- ⁴⁷ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, pps. 105-7.

⁴⁸ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923.

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, "The Child Labor Amendment," June 4, 1924, p. 20.

⁵⁰ *Current Opinion*, "Another Constitutional Amendment in Sight." July 1924, p. 13.

⁵¹ For more on Muckraking see: Rodger Streitmatter, *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008; Ann Bausum, *Muckrakers: How Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, and Lincoln Steffens Helped Expose Scandal, inspire reform, and invent investigative journalism*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2007; Carl Jensen, *Stories that Changed America: Muckrakers in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000; Robert Miraldi, *The Muckrakers: Evangelical Crusaders*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000.

⁵² Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p.15.

⁵³ Florence Kelley, "Women and Social Legislation in the United States," [*Women in Public Life: The Annals, Vol. 56*](#), James P. Lichtenberger, editor, Philadelphia, PA: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1914, p. 65-66.

⁵⁴ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 239.

⁵⁵ Harold Cary, "To Set a Million Children Free," *Collier's, The National Weekly*. New York: July 28, 1923, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Cary, "To Set a Million Children Free," p. 10.

⁵⁷ Cary, "To Set a Million Children Free," p.10.

⁵⁸ Harold Cary, "Work Never Hurt Any Kid Yet," *Collier's, The National Weekly*. New York: November 17, 1923, p. 15.

⁵⁹ Cary, "Work Never Hurt Any Kid Yet," p. 15.

⁶⁰ Cary, "To Set a Million Children Free," p. 10.

⁶¹ Harold Cary, "What is Home to These Children?," *Collier's, The National Weekly*. New York: September 1, 1923, p. 15.

⁶² Harold Cary, "No Chores for Jimmie: He's a Laborer," *Collier's, The National Weekly*. New York: August 11, 1923, p. 10.

⁶³ Harold Cary, "Must Our Children Do Hard Labor?," *Collier's, The National Weekly*. New York: December 15, 1923, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Frances B. Williams, "Wlad of the Beets," *The New Republic*, August 8, 1923, p.285.

⁶⁵ *Current Opinion*, "Another Constitutional Amendment in Sight" July 1924, p. 14.

⁶⁶ *New York Times*, “Open Fight on Child Labor: Churches Are Cooperating to get a Federal Amendment.” April 20, 1924, p. 1 E5.

⁶⁷ Cary, “No Chores for Jimmie: He’s a Laborer,” p. 10.

⁶⁸ A Worker, “On the Industrial Scrap Heap,” *New Republic*, 35:329-30, Aug. 15, 1923

⁶⁹ A Worker, “On the Industrial Scrap Heap,” *New Republic*, 35:329-30, Aug. 15, 1923

⁷⁰ *Literary Digest*, “The Child Labor Amendment,” 74:12 Sept 16, 1922

⁷¹ Cary, “What is Home to These Children?,” p. 15.

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⁷³ Cary, “To Set a Million Children Free,” p. 10.

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⁷⁵ Cary, “No Chores for Jimmie: He’s a Laborer,” p. 10.

⁷⁶ *Current Opinion*, “The Feminine Taste in Legislation,” September 1, 1924, p.345.

⁷⁷ A representative but not exhaustive list includes: Calvin Slagle, “Objection Is Raised to the Proposed Constitutional Amendment” *New York Times*, June 13, 1924, p. 18; Everett P. Wheeler, “Child Labor Amendment,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1924, p. E4; John Franklin Crowell, “Child Labor Amendment” *New York Times*, June 22, 1924, p. XX19; Calvin Slagle, “Opponent of the Amendment Fears Control of Congress Over Minors” *New York Times*, July 14, 1924; “Oppose Child Labor Amendment – Sentinels of the Republic” *New York Times* July 19, 1924, p. 20; Thomas F. Caldwell, “Congress or Parents: Child Labor Amendment Believed to Give Unlimited Authority” *New York Times*, July 26, 1924, p. 8; “Denies Child Labor is a Federal Affair – NAM Opposes proposed Amendment” *New York Times*, August 18, 1924, p. 16; Everett P. Wheeler, “The Right of Youths to Work” *New York Times*, September 17, 1924; “Sees Joker in Plan to Curb Child Labor” *New York Times*, November 12, 1924; Ban on Child Labor Opposed by Grange” *New York Times*, November 22, 1924, p. 20.

⁷⁸ “Child Labor Bill Is Urged by 78,419” *New York Times*, May 7, 1924, p. 35 (endorsement of American Insurance Union prior to ratification campaign); “For Child Labor Control” *New York Times*, July 4, 1924, p. 13 (endorsement of Home Economic Association and PTA); “The Chicago Defender Endorses Child Labor Amendment” *New York Times*, October 25, 1924, p. 12; “Women’s Clubs Favor New Child Labor Laws” *New York Times*, November 14, 1924, p. 19 (endorsement of New York Federation of Women’s Clubs).

⁷⁹ James Emery, “An Examination of the Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States,” pamphlet issued by the National Association of Manufacturers, August, 1924.

⁸⁰ James Emery, “An Examination of the Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States,” pamphlet issued by the National Association of Manufacturers, August, 1924. The pamphlet relied on inflammatory rhetoric in its discussion of the Amendment, words and phrases used to describe it include: scheme, super parental, lurking, revolutionary, control, socialistic, bureaucratic, increasingly expensive, unnecessary, evil, monstrous, promoting “a tendency to centralization,” excit[ing] sectional dissensions, and “open[ing] the way to Congressional regulation of production, especially novel in its application to agriculture.”

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- ⁸¹ James Emery, "An Examination of the Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States," pamphlet issued by the National Association of Manufacturers, August, 1924.
- ⁸² James Emery, "An Examination of the Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States," pamphlet issued by the National Association of Manufacturers, August, 1924.
- ⁸³ James Emery, "An Examination of the Proposed Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States," pamphlet issued by the National Association of Manufacturers, August, 1924.
- ⁸⁴ "Under the Twentieth Amendment," (1924) clipping in Julia Lathrop Papers, folder: Papers, Child Labor, 1925, Rockford College included in How Did Women Antifeminists Shape and Limit the Social Reform Movements of the 1920s? by Kim Neilsen in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 3/16/2007.
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- ⁸⁶ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 86.
- ⁸⁷ *Current Opinion*, "The Feminine Taste in Legislation" September 1, 1924, p.345.
- ⁸⁸ *Current Opinion*, "Another Constitutional Amendment in Sight" July 1924, p. 14.
- ⁸⁹ *The Woman Patriot*, "Shall Bolshevist-Feminists Secretly Govern America?" November 1, 1921, p 1.
- ⁹⁰ *The Woman Patriot*, "Sentinels of the Republic" December 15, 1921, p 2.
- ⁹¹ *The Woman Patriot*, November 1, 192?, p 14.
- ⁹² Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 99.
- ⁹³ Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 99.
- ⁹⁴ *The Dearborn Independent* "Are Women's Clubs 'Used' By Bolshevists?" March 15, 1924, p. 2.
- ⁹⁵ Maxwell, Lucia, "Spider Web Chart: The Socialist-Pacifist Movement in America Is an Absolutely Fundamental and Integral Part of International Socialism," *The Dearborn Independent*, XXIV, March 22, 1924, p. 11.
- ⁹⁶ Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism*, p. 42.
- ⁹⁷ As mentioned in chapter 2, Senator Wadsworth of New York was such vocal opponent of the social feminist agenda that the League of Women Voters mounted a campaign to defeat his bid for reelection to the Senate in 1924.
- ⁹⁸ *New York Times* "Fears for States Rights," May 30, 1924, p. 30.

⁹⁹ Child-Labor Amendment to the Constitution: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on S.J. Res. 200, 224, 232, 256, and 262, Sixty-Seventh Congress, fourth session, on Jan. 10, 15, 18, 1923, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Times*, “Sordid Propaganda on Child Labor Law,” January 9, 1925, p.16.

¹⁰¹ *New York Times*, “Sordid Propaganda on Child Labor Law,” January 9, 1925, p.16.

¹⁰² Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 131.

¹⁰³ Ethel M. Smith, “Child Labor Foes Ready for Drive” *New York Times*, November 17, 1924, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*,p. 121.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Robinson, “The Responsibility of Being Led,” *The Dearborn Independent*, 23 May 1925.

¹⁰⁶ The WJCC, which included 17 national women’s organizations, including the two largest, the League of Women Voters and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, boasted twelve million members from among these organizations.

¹⁰⁷ *Current Opinion*, “Another Constitutional Amendment in Sight.” July 1924, p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism* ,p. 123-4, Blackwell, “Massachusetts-‘No,’” 14 and Organization Associated for Ratification, press release, November 24, 1924, National League of Women Voters Papers, Series II, Box 34, Library of Congress & Smith, Ethel, “Let the Facts Be Known: A Plain Statement Concerning the Proposed Child Labor Amendment to the Federal Constitution,” 14, 147,and “The Shame of Massachusetts”

¹⁰⁹ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*,p. 123; Organization Associated for Ratification, “Child Labor Amendment Not Lost, Friends Say,” Press Release, January 13, 1925, National League of Women Voters Papers, Series I, Box 6, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁰ Wilson, *The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*, p. 119-20; Dorothy Kirchwey Brown, “What Happened in Massachusetts?” pamphlet issued by LWV, National League of Women Voters, Series II, Box 35, Library of Congress.

¹¹¹ One more than one-quarter of the States. “Child Labor Curb Defeated by Votes of Thirteen States,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹² Storrs, Landon R.Y., *Civilizing Capitalism: the National Consumers’ League, Women’s Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000, p. 19.

¹¹³ Nathan, Maud, *Story of an Epoch-Making Movement*. New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1926, p. 124-125.

Chapter 5

Catching a Star: Eleanor Roosevelt as the Archetypal Social Feminist

Immediately following Franklin D. Roosevelt's (FDR) inauguration on March 4, 1933 Eleanor Roosevelt (ER) gave an exclusive interview to Associated Press reporter, Lorena Hickok, in which she served notice to the American people that she intended to be a new kind of First Lady. Two days later, she provided evidence of her intentions by presiding over the first White House press conference ever given by a First Lady. This unprecedented step into the public sphere was just one of many that would characterize ER's career as first lady. She would also be the first to have her own radio show, her own syndicated newspaper column, her own magazine column, and the first to earn money on the lecture circuit.

Due to her unparalleled public presence she also received more mail from her American constituents than any other First Lady and even more than many former U.S. presidents. More popular than the president himself according to a 1935 Gallup poll, ER was viewed by the American people as "a god mother to the world" and "first mother of the land."¹ Her popularity stemmed not only from the fact that, through the media, she was a daily presence in most American households but from her dedication to alleviating human suffering, and raising the status of women, workers, African-Americans, and the young in a nation suffering from a crippling economic depression.

In a dissertation that has, up to this point, focused on coalitions of women who sought unsuccessfully in the 1920s to make government responsible for curbing the social

ills that arose out of the industrial revolution, why focus now on the extraordinary career of one woman whose status was inexorably linked to the power of her husband rather than to her own position within the government? The answer to this question lies in ER's ties to women's groups both during the 1920s and in the 1930s when her celebrity brought social feminist ideals into the national spotlight. The 1930s represented the pinnacle of social feminist's success and ER was their leader.

This chapter places ER's career within the context of progressivism and consumerism generally and establishes her as exemplary of the influence of social feminism on the New Deal described in studies of the 1930s. ER's relationship with the women's organizations discussed heretofore in this dissertation including the League of Women Voters, Women's Trade Union League, National Consumer's League, City Club of New York, and Women's Division of the Democratic Party played a formative role in her development as a social feminist. The values and allegiances that she developed in the 1920s remained central to her political agenda as she ascended in the 1930s to a position of power unique and unmatched by any American woman prior to that time. It was through her association with these social feminist organizations in the 1920s and the New Deal in the 1930s that ER's history dovetails with that of consumerism, women's social reform, and the New Deal.

In *A Consumer's Republic*, Lizabeth Cohen traces changes in the way that consumerism related to citizenship, chronicling its gradual elevation in importance throughout the twentieth century.² She asserts that the "citizen consumers of the New Deal and World War II eras put the power of the consumer to work politically, not only

to save a capitalist America in the midst of the Great Depression, but also to safeguard the rights of individual consumers and the larger ‘general good.’”³ She argues that during the 1930s New Dealers, women, and African Americans worked together to create the idea of the citizen consumer as a “new way of upholding the public interest.”⁴

Establishing a premise for the importance of progressivism in the New Deal, Alan Dawley suggests in *Struggles for Justice* that the combination of conditions created by industrialization in the late nineteenth century led to intense social and political unrest. Labor sought to organize to earn fair wages and safe working conditions. Women tried to claim new political rights, and African Americans sought to exercise the liberties promised them by the Fourteenth Amendment but were increasingly denied them by racism. Dawley describes the growing demand by many Americans for increased government intervention to curb the worst abuses of an increasingly complex and powerful corporate capitalism. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 precipitated a paradigm shift in dominant attitudes toward American politics from the post-WWI conservatism to the new liberalism of Roosevelt’s New Deal, which acknowledged the need for government intervention to protect the nation’s most vulnerable citizens.

While Dawley suggests that changes in the conditions of American society gradually came together to force government to accept a new role in defending the liberties of workers, Cohen points to changes in the workers themselves as the root cause of labor’s success. In *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, she argues that divisions among workers across geographic, ethnic, racial, and skill lines within the AFL and in their daily lives prevented lasting successes by labor prior to 1920.

The rise of a mass consciousness among industrial workers, precipitated in part by a homogenizing consumer culture, allowed them to achieve greater success, winning better pay, improved working conditions, and recognition of the right to organize in the 1930s.⁵

Women's historians have pointed to the important role that women's activism played in identifying urban social problems and demanding national solutions, many of which were institutionalized in the New Deal.⁶ Susan Ware's *Beyond Suffrage* describes the development of a network of women reformers created during the conclusion of the battle for suffrage. Ware argues that this network of female reformers sustained the ideals of progressive reform, garnered political experience during the 1920s, and played a vital role in the development of the social policies of the New Deal. Eleanor Roosevelt provided social feminists vital access to the White House during the creation of the New Deal. Ware's notion of a female network based on shared experience, ideals, and membership in social organizations is the foundation of this discussion of women's contributions to the New Deal as exemplified by the career of Eleanor Roosevelt.

Ware calls the women of the network "social feminists" arguing, as William O'Neill first did and as I do, that gender was fundamental to their vision of their political and social identities. Yet unlike radical feminists, who tended to view improvement in the status of women worldwide to be their primary goal, social feminists had a broad agenda, seeking to defend human rights and improve social and political conditions for humanity generally, including such causes as disarmament, fair labor standards for men and women, and the abolition of child labor.

The social feminist ideology described by Ware matured in the second decade of the twentieth century when a new generation of suffragists sought to develop an argument that would appeal to the men who held the power to win it for them. They grounded their argument for woman suffrage in traditional gender values, arguing that women's moral superiority and concern for home and family were the perfect remedies for a corrupt and impersonal political culture. This argument did not ask men to alter their views of women and did not even significantly challenge men's views on politics. It merely asked them to let women perform in the halls of government the services they rendered so well at home. This dissertation argues that the availability of modern consumer conveniences including ready-to-wear clothing, washing machines, and the like were essential to women's entry into public life. According to social feminist doctrine, household appliances and other time-saving products rendered less time-consuming woman's role as housekeeper and thereby granted her the opportunity to pursue causes outside the home without threatening their primary roles as wives and mothers. This consumerist compromise was a rhetorical strategy that allowed social feminists to advocate women's political participation without stepping outside the bounds of contemporary gender norms.

In their studies of women's contributions to reform efforts, women's historians have exposed the limitations of social feminism. In *Pitied, But not Entitled* Linda Gordon traces middle-class reformers' attempts to secure governmental aid for single mothers and their children. Highlighting the limitations of middle-class sympathy for worker-class women, she argues that by failing to win federal entitlements middle-class

women's reform organizations were complicit in the institutionalizing of women's second-class status in the welfare state. Unlike unemployment insurance and social security, which are federal entitlements "earned" by working Americans and are therefore free from the stigma of charity, welfare benefits for single mothers and children are viewed as a drain on society, and are subject to budget cuts. Gordon sees the limits of women's reform efforts as an example of sex, class and race-based discrimination.

In her study of women's political and professional networks in the 1920s and 1930s, Robyn Muncy also speaks to the issue of women's disadvantaged position in politics. She suggests that the homosocial nature of social reform in the 1920s allowed women to gain professional and political experience and develop a full-scale agenda of social reform that would have been impossible had they attempted to work within the male-dominated political infrastructure. Muncy suggested that the reform agenda developed by women during the 1920s played a significant role in the ideological foundation of the New Deal but that the 1930s marked women's loss of control over the institutions of reform, as they were gathered under the authority of New Deal programs. This ultimately meant the decline of women's leadership within those institutions because the gender-based political culture developed within the "female dominion" marginalized their political experience in the eyes of male New Dealers.

This chapter builds on existing historiographies by examining the rhetorical development of the notion of the social feminist in the public domain and how ER used mass culture to garner political power for the network of women described by Ware. In contrast to Cohen's exploration of the impact of economic policies regarding

consumption throughout the century, this chapter will focus on the impact of changes in the rhetoric and imagery of consumption that likewise stemmed from governmental responses to the New Deal but which had more immediate effects on the political aspirations of women's groups struggling to exercise their newly won citizenship. Influenced by media historian Maureen Beasley's study of ER's relationship with the media, this chapter will explore how ER self-consciously used her public image to advance social feminist causes.⁷

ER's career illustrates the fate of social feminism in the 1930s and the unique impact of consumer culture on women's civic identities in the early twentieth century. ER used her public image to establish herself as a leading figure within the New Deal and used her position to further the social feminist agenda among New Deal policy makers. Finally, the chapter will illustrate the declining influence of social feminism in the post-World War II period and identify how ER developed a modern liberal ideology that transcended the gender-based identity politics of social feminism.

Eleanor Roosevelt's career exemplifies both the opportunities created for women reformers by locating their political legitimacy in their gender and the limitations they ultimately suffered because of it. While Gordon is certainly correct that the welfare state created by the New Deal was inadequate to fairly address the needs of women, this chapter suggests that this failure was more rooted in political roadblocks that forced women to compromise rather than in their ideological complicity with unequal treatment for women.

By the time she became first lady of the United States in 1933, Eleanor Roosevelt was already a nationally known advocate for women's political participation, a leading member of a number of social feminist political organizations and a vocal supporter of organized labor. It was during the 1920s that she developed the progressive sympathies, democratic political ties and media savvy that allowed her to become in the 1930s the most visible proponent of her husband's New Deal and a political force to be reckoned in support of social feminist causes within his administration.

The eldest child of Elliott Roosevelt and Anna Hall, ER was raised in an affluent New York family that was among the oldest and most prominent in New York. Despite her privileged birth, ER's childhood was not a happy one. A plain child in the eyes of her beautiful mother, ER was always self-conscious about her appearance and was never the social butterfly her mother was. Orphaned early by the successive deaths of her parents, ER lived with relatives including her uncle, President Theodore Roosevelt, for much of her childhood.⁸

Upon her return from a distinguished English boarding school, eighteen-year-old ER was introduced to American social reform by one of the leaders in the field National Consumers' League (NCL) Secretary General, Florence Kelley. ER greatly preferred traveling around New York City performing industrial inspections for NCL to the demands of New York society. This first experience of life outside her social class was a significant one, instilling in ER sympathy for working-class Americans and a lifelong belief in the need for regulation of industry on their behalf.

In 1905 she married a distant cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The subsequent births of six children, five of whom survived infancy, consumed her for the next twelve years. Although she was not active in reform circles during this period she and her husband shared a concern for the plight of urban workers that drew FDR into the progressive New York Democratic Party.⁹ His appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1913 brought the Roosevelt's to Washington D.C. and represented the beginning of FDR's political career and ER's civic education.

World War I presented ER with the opportunity to work outside her home once again. In Washington, ER worked for the Navy League, the Red Cross, the Navy Relief Society and a Washington D.C. naval hospital. She was able to utilize her extensive organizational skills running a canteen for returning soldiers. ER appreciated the opportunity to be useful and the joy of a job well done. She recalled this experience as fundamental to her development as a social reformer: "Out of these contacts with human beings during the war I became a more tolerant person, far less sure of my own beliefs and methods of action but more determined to try for certain ultimate objectives."¹⁰ As in the case of her work for NCL, ER's experiences with people outside her social class contributed to her belief that all human beings deserved a basic level of social and economic security in their lives.

It was while FDR was Assistant Secretary of the Navy that ER had her first experience with the media. Recommended by the Department of the Navy as a model for wartime conservation in large homes, ER was interviewed regarding her household management.¹¹ ER's attempt to enumerate how she saved resources instead illustrated

the extravagance of her household as compared to the overwhelming majority of American homes. The resultant article proved an embarrassment to both Roosevelts and made ER shy of contact with the press for the next several years.

Afterward ER hoped to take refuge in the custom passed down by her grandmother that women's appearances in the press should be limited to social functions (weddings, birth announcements and the like). This first encounter with the press highlighted the growing contradiction between the traditional gender views of ER's grandmother and the modern demands of American political culture. In the aftermath of suffrage, political parties sought to attract female audiences to political issues; interviewing the wives of prominent politicians was a popular method. ER's first such interview proved a painful lesson in public relations and encouraged her to make a conscious effort to develop her media savvy when it became clear that her husband's political career would regularly place her in the public eye.

Louis Howe, a long-time friend and advisor to the Roosevelts, was critical to the development of ER's public persona. During World War I, when the young Assistant Secretary of the Navy was first being introduced in Washington political circles, Howe was already preparing a strategy to make him president of the United States. A former newspaper man, Howe understood the critical role that the media could play in Roosevelt's rise to prominence in American politics. He felt that the underdog Democratic Party could benefit from the changes in political culture occurring in the 1920s. Modeling his efforts on the methods of consumer culture, Howe sought to market the Roosevelts to the American public. Through his skilled use of the press Howe would

turn the couple into celebrities during the 1920s as part of his strategy to wrest political dominance from the reigning Republican Party. Howe felt that the female electorate, who were not yet strongly affiliated with either party, would be key to the ascension of the Democratic Party in the coming years and that ER could be a valuable asset in securing that vote.¹²

During FDR's 1920 bid for the vice presidency, Howe began his tutelage of ER in the art of media relations, encouraging her to take part in the campaign and become friendly with the press. ER's cousin, Corrine Alsop, wrote in an unpublished diary that "Louis Howe was not only the 'kingmaker' for Franklin but he was the inspiration for Eleanor to find the substitutes outside of the home which in the end made her a great world leader."¹³ Likewise, in her autobiography ER credited Howe with transforming her attitude toward the press. She wrote that "[l]argely because of Louis Howe's early interpretation of the standards and ethics of the newspaper business, I came to look with interest and confidence on the writing fraternity and gained a liking for it which I have never lost."¹⁴ Howe's guidance played a vital role in ER's acceptance of a modern view of the role that women could play in politics via the media.

Howe recognized in ER much more than a female face to attract women voters. On the campaign trail he requested her help in developing speeches for FDR and asked her opinion on a variety of subjects. Howe valued the contributions of women activists in political campaigning and felt that ER in particular had a personable quality that would win votes. An early observer of the power of putting a friendly face on a political issue, Howe used the concept of celebrity developing during this period to sell a modern vision

of liberalism and the Democratic Party by tying these ideals to the rising Roosevelt stars. ER noted later how significant the 1920 campaign had been for her, saying that she received “an intensive education on this trip, and Louis Howe played a great part in this education from that time on.”¹⁵ Howe’s farsightedness in both the role of the media in modern politics and the role that women could play in the New Deal were vital to his encouragement of ER as a public persona.

Upon the defeat of the Democratic ticket by Republicans Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge, Narcissus Vanderlip chairman of the New York League of Women Voters (NY LWV) sought to put ER’s recent education in national politics to use and asked her to join the board and be responsible for reports on national legislation. ER hesitantly agreed and in so doing embarked on an enterprise that reignited her career as a social reformer. Lawyer and NY LWV member Elizabeth Read introduced ER to proposed legislation of interest to the League. Eager to educate herself in the details, ER visited Read’s office once a week to study the bills and ask questions about them before making her reports. Read, and publicist/educator Esther Lape, became close friends of ER during the 1920s and “played a great part in what might be called the ‘intensive education of Eleanor Roosevelt’ during the next few years.”¹⁶

The New York League of Women Voters also offered ER the opportunity to acquire the journalistic skill upon which she would rely heavily later. By August 1921, ER’s “Comprehensive Digest of Proposed Changes on the State Primary Law” was published in the League’s *Weekly News*. For the next several years, ER was a frequent contributor to *Weekly News* writing about a variety of legislative issues including

“Common Sense versus Party Responsibility” (Sept 1921), “The Fall Election” (Summer 1922) and “Organizing County Women for a Political Party” (Summer 1922).¹⁷ These articles reflect an understanding of political campaigning unique to social feminists that ER gained during this period. She argued for a social feminist legislative agenda from the non-partisan stance of the League and advocated a long-term campaign strategy that differed from that of the political parties both in terms of its length (social feminists tended to campaign year around while the parties began campaigning just several months before an election) and in its gendered appeals (social feminists appealed strongly to women’s organizations).

In 1922, ER also joined Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL). Her first contact with the organization had been at the 1919 International Congress of Working Women where, using her extensive knowledge of foreign languages, she had volunteered to translate for delegates who did not speak English. WTUL leader Rose Schneiderman familiarized ER with the labor movement. Based in part on her experience with the NCL, ER sympathized with the League’s positions on “a variety of social legislation: 48 hour work week for women, a child labor law, better treatment of blacks and U.S. membership on the World Court.”¹⁸ She took part in fundraising activities for the organization, contributing a good deal of time and resources to raising funds for a WTUL clubhouse in New York. For the WTUL and the City Club of New York, ER campaigned for a 48-hour five-day work week, condemned the Equal Rights Amendment, and lobbied to stop bills that would weaken child labor and compulsory education laws testifying at a hearing on the subject in Albany.¹⁹ She also supported a birth control bill and took the

side of labor in two radio debates with prominent Republican women. ER participated in nearly all of the major legislative campaigns undertaken by social feminists in the 1920s. Her involvement in these efforts reflected her strong sympathies with social feminist attitudes toward women's political participation, social welfare reform, and American liberalism. They also provided her the opportunity to use her organizational skills and develop her media savvy.

During this period FDR was stricken with infantile paralysis, also known as polio. Acutely ill throughout the second half of 1921, ER attended him continually. A testament to ER's oft-stated belief in the primacy of women's roles as wives, she stood ready to abandon her career as a social reformer and accompany FDR into forced retirement due to his illness. Her career up to that point had brought her much personal fulfillment and she looked with great regret on the possibility that FDR's illness might end her work as a social reformer.²⁰ Still, she remained willing to sacrifice her own happiness and her sense of social purpose to her role as wife.

ER's support of FDR's decision not to retire from politics instead brought her further into public life. Impressed by her work for the League of Women Voters, Louis Howe suggested that ER become active in the Women's Division of the New York Democratic Party in order to keep FDR abreast of Democratic issues as he convalesced and keep the Roosevelt name alive in party circles until he returned to politics. ER claimed to have undertaken this new role in the interest of her husband despite reservations about her qualifications.²¹ This view of ER's entrance into partisan politics, promoted by ER in her autobiography, paints a picture of her as a traditional wife forced

to stand in for her husband rather than as an independent political actor. Historian Allida Black calls into question this view, arguing compellingly that ER often clothed her political aspirations in the homespun fabric of wifely duty in order to avoid being ostracized.²²

ER's leadership of the Women's Division of the Democratic Party in the mid-1920s provided her a new means to advocate the social feminist agenda, transforming her from a non-partisan lobbyist to a party insider. Looking for a recognizable name to give a speech at a funding-raising luncheon in the spring of 1922, Nancy Cook of the Women's Division of the New York Democratic Committee took the advice of Howe and asked ER to give her first political speech. Howe advised her on this and many subsequent speeches, eventually helping ER to manage her nervous giggle and high-pitched voice. It would take a long time for her to become proficient and, although she never became a great orator, she persevered and became a much sought and well-remunerated speaker.²³

ER's friendship with Democrats Nancy Cook and Marion Dickerman, like her friendship with Read and Lape before them, provided ER an education that helped her become a major figure of influence in New York politics. ER helped Cook, along with Dickerman and Caroline O'Day, to expand dramatically the reach of the Democratic Party to women in upstate New York where Republicans had long dominated. ER, Cook, and O'Day followed Republican Teddy Roosevelt Jr. (ER's cousin) around the state in a car adorned with a gigantic teakettle "a steaming reminder of the Teapot Dome scandal."²⁴ The ladies of the Women's Division visited the homes of women throughout

upstate New York, listening to their concerns and attempting to convince them that the Democratic Party was the place where women's voices would be heard. They established Democratic clubs in all but five counties in New York. ER's extensive lobbying in upstate New York would later be cited as a critical factor in FDR's historic victory in upstate counties in the gubernatorial election of 1928, undermining the Republican stronghold on rural New York.²⁵

Like other leading Democratic women, ER brought the skills she'd learned as a social feminist lobbyist to her work for the Democratic Party. For the Women's Division as well ER was acknowledged as a skilled fundraiser. "Women never had it so good," claimed journalist and friend Lorena Hickok, as when ER worked for the Women's Division because her social and political ties brought in money that allowed them to work independently of the men of the Democratic Party.²⁶ This was particularly important because the Women's Division campaigned year-round while men, according to ER, were unable "to comprehend the value of sustained organization."²⁷ ER claimed that men sought to organize a vote six months before the election, cashing in on the Women's Division's ties to local women's organizations throughout the state to win women's votes. ER and other leading female Democrats brought to party organizing the practices they had acquired as lobbyists in social feminist organizations, hoping that their efforts would bear fruit when they submitted the women's planks to the party platform committee at the 1924 Convention.

The 1924 National Democratic Convention taught ER a valuable lesson on women's limited influence in party politics. The New York Women's Division

organized in support of New York Governor Alfred E. Smith as the Democratic nominee for President. FDR nominated him at the convention and ER presented the resolution pledging New York's delegates. Women's support for Smith was based on his progressive record in New York and his promise to appoint women to important posts in his administration.²⁸ As chair of the women's subcommittee at the convention, ER led the battle against Tammany leader Charles F. Murphy to win the right for women to name their own delegates and alternates. Her joy over winning the delegates from Murphy was short-lived, however, as ER and her delegates were locked out of the platform committee meeting where the women's planks were soundly defeated. Adding further insult to injury, Al Smith was defeated and John W. Davis, a virtual unknown, was named the Democratic nominee.

Frustrated at women's lack of policy-making power within the Democratic Party, ER stated in a speech at the 1924 convention:

“To many women, and I am one of them, it is extraordinarily difficult to care about anything enough to cause disagreement or unpleasant feelings, but I have come to the conclusion that this must be done for a time until we can prove our strength and demand respect for our wishes.”²⁹

ER's experience at the 1924 Democratic Convention mirrored those of many social feminists³⁰. Her statement here reflects the understanding reached by many social feminist organizations in the mid 1920s that women would need to act outside the bounds of stereotypically feminine behavior to achieve their goals. It was not enough to rally women together to ask men in politics to grant them their agenda; they needed to place themselves in a position to demand it. This moment in ER's political education

highlighted the incongruity between existing notions of feminine behavior and the demands of politics. As ER stated in her speech at the convention, women would only win political equality with men by stepping outside the bounds of conventional feminine behavior.³¹

The 1924 convention taught ER that significant limitations remained to be overcome in women's quest for political equality. Inspired to step outside the bounds of ladylike behavior, ER led the Women's Division to success at the New York State Democratic Convention, aggressively campaigning for and winning the adoption of women's planks favoring child labor legislation, and an eight-hour day and minimum wage for women. This experience was fundamental to ER's subsequent drive to get women into important positions of influence within traditional bases of power in government administration and the Democratic Party, causes in which she engaged with social feminist groups including the League of Women Voters, the Women's Trade Union League, and the National Consumers' League.

Following her experience at the 1924 Democratic Convention, ER sought to increase female voter participation in New York in order to rally support for the social feminist political agenda in the 1928 election. ER directed policy at the Women's Division and designed a flyer distributed to upstate women voters based on her knowledge of their concerns from her many visits throughout the state. As mentioned earlier, her positive image upstate was particularly beneficial for FDR, who in 1928 was elected governor of New York. FDR's campaign chair, James Farley, said she had a "genuine gift for organization work" and "above all a real 'sense of politics.'"³² ER was

not particularly involved in FDR's campaign however. Instead she was involved in the national campaign, co-chairing the Women's Division's National Campaign, at the New York headquarters of Democratic Presidential nominee Al Smith as well as traveling throughout the country giving speeches supporting Smith.³³

ER's efforts on behalf of the Women's Division of the Democratic Party proved not only the importance of women voters to the Democratic Party in the 1920s but also the ability of the Women's Division to get out the vote. As a result of her leadership, ER won membership on the influential Platform Committee at the 1928 Democratic National Convention. Finally, a woman was in the room where the decisions about the direction of the Party were made. This was due, in part, to ER's very public criticism of women's exclusion from the platform committee published in *The Redbook Magazine*.³⁴ She argued that women lacked real power or influence among leaders in local communities, state committees, and the national organizations of both political parties. This lack of power was illustrated foremost by women's failure to be included in important meetings, political offices, and major decisions. Clearly influenced by her experience at the 1924 Democratic Convention, she said, "In those circles which decide the affairs of national politics, women have no voice or power whatever ... At the national conventions no woman has ever been called to serve on the platform committee."³⁵ ER's efforts to increase female voter participation, her contributions to the national campaign, as well as her vocal criticism of the party's failure to grant women a voice in party decision-making, established her as the leading female Democrat by 1928.

ER's position on the Democratic Platform Committee in 1928 had great symbolic importance for social feminists. Social feminists including ER felt that women had a unique agenda, and, through previous disappointments like the 1924 convention, had learned that men could or would not represent their concerns. As a result, ER urged women in New York and throughout the country to organize within the parties and elect their own leaders to meet with male party leaders and ensure that women's issues were raised and included in party platforms.³⁶

This strong message in favor of the expansion of women's influence in politics was countered however by other statements during the same period in which ER deemphasized her own political influence and stated that women were ill-suited to the highest political offices.³⁷ This disparity reflected the discordance inherent in social feminist rhetoric, which sought to maintain traditional views of women's moral superiority, which rested upon their disinterestedness while at the same time seeking a mechanism to achieve women's political goals.

This contradiction between social feminist rhetoric and agenda is illustrated in ER's decision to resign from the Women's Division, the City Club of New York, and the WTUL upon FDR's election as Governor of New York in 1928. A high profile member of the Democratic Party, "ER was better known among the faithful party activists than was FDR."³⁸ Fearing disapproval of her continued partisanship while serving as first lady of New York, ER publicly took leave of her own political offices in order to assume the role of governor's wife. Overtly bowing to convention through her public resignation, she remained active behind the scenes, working extensively on the Women's

Division publication *Women's Democratic News*, writing unattributed articles, editing the work of others and laying out the journal for publication.³⁹ ER thus privately flouted convention in order to continue the work to which she was dedicated.

Stripped of official political authority, ER relied on traditional feminine methods of influence to advance her politics during this period, often acting as an advocate, who brought women's issues to the attention of the newly elected governor.⁴⁰ She acquainted FDR with leading women by literally bringing them to the table. In 1927 and 1928, ER hosted events for both the Women's Trade Union League and the League of Women Voters at the Roosevelt estate in Hyde Park, New York.⁴¹ This gave the leaders of each organization the opportunity to meet with FDR and share their agendas with him. FDR's early exposure to issues of concern to women and labor influenced his thinking, both as governor and later as President, and gave women's groups entry into the White House that they never would have had otherwise. In her autobiography, Mary Anderson, head of the Women's Bureau, stated that she was "closer to the White House because of Mrs. Roosevelt's interest and friendship."⁴² ER also promoted legislation favored by social feminists by speaking with the governor directly. She strongly advocated child labor legislation, which was passed as part of the New Deal's Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as well as Prohibition, the League of Nations and the World Court all of which FDR did not support.⁴³ As noted previously by Ware and Muncy social feminists relied heavily on traditional networks of female association to further their political agendas. ER's initial withdrawal from her political positions forced her to rely on more traditional

means of influence and encouraged her to develop innovative strategies to expand her political influence.

During her tenure in the Executive Mansion of New York ER developed two important skills that would help her to transform the nation's understanding of the role of first lady and which, by the time she reached the White House four years later in 1933, made her a national figure, poised to be the symbol of governmental concern and outreach to a nation gripped by the Great Depression. First, she honed her skills as a keen observer of social and industrial conditions first developed prior to her marriage when she inspected factories for the National Consumers' League. Visiting New York's public institutions as first lady of New York and reporting her findings to FDR, ER developed both an eye for detail and a vivid reportorial manner of speech. Second, she also took advantage of her position to develop a public persona in national women's magazines. In interviews and articles, ER became a model of modern womanhood as envisioned in the popular press – she was both a conscientious wife and mother and an active citizen. Both of these skills would be vital as the Roosevelt administration developed and administered the New Deal.

The first skill that ER developed during this period was that of investigative reporter.⁴⁴ During his tenure as executive of New York, FDR made trips each summer to the public institutions of New York – prisons, hospitals, and schools. In part due to his disability and in part to his political status, FDR spent these visits primarily touring the facilities by car with the superintendent of the facility. ER accompanied the governor on these trips and, per his request, served as his “eyes and ears,” entering the facilities,

asking questions of the inmates, even looking inside the closets and cooking pots to learn what these places were really like. Upon leaving, she provided FDR with detailed reports of her findings. In her book, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor under FDR, suggested that this system of reporting played a vital role in FDR's decision-making in the White House. FDR sent ER throughout the country during the Great Depression and abroad during WWII. She logged 30,000 miles in her first three months in the White House alone. Perkins recalled,

“From the time that he campaigned for governor, he turned instinctively to her to find out what was going on in places he could not go himself. For the rest of his life he relied on her for this kind of co-operation. It was as though he had another self.”⁴⁵

ER became such a keen observer of people and situations and FDR trusted her reports so completely (although his ideas on how to solve the perceived problems did not always reflect hers) that, according to Perkins, “[h]e often insisted on action that public officials thought unnecessary because Mrs. Roosevelt had seen with her own eyes and reported so vividly that he too felt he had seen.”⁴⁶ By the time the Roosevelts reached the White House, ER had established herself as a vital source of information to FDR and women in Washington understood that by making their case effectively to her they could gain the ear of the President.

The second set of skills that ER developed as first lady of New York emerged from her interaction with the mass magazine market for women. ER wrote over 20 articles for mass publications from 1928 to 1932. She was also the subject of a number of articles written by others for popular magazines. Writing mostly for a female

audience, topics discussed in her articles included – marriage, housekeeping, schools, the role of older women, preparation for careers, wives of great men, and her own philosophy of life and politics.⁴⁷ In the era when Americans like Amelia Earhart, Shirley Temple, and the Rockefeller's became the nation's first celebrities, with all the notoriety that entailed, ER's status as both a member of an elite New York family and the wife of a prominent politician made her attractive as a subject for women's magazine.

ER's writing reveals how social feminists used traditional gender mores to establish a voice for women in American politics. Locating her authority squarely within the traditional female sphere of influence, ER assumed the role of wise matron offering advice to new grandmothers, young mothers and recently married women. She celebrated the vital importance of the traditional role of women within the family, saying "the women, the wives and mothers, are the inspiration of the homes, the persons for whom the men really work. They have it in their power to make life gracious and pleasant, or by bickering and nagging to make it an ugly thing."⁴⁸

Yet even as she celebrated woman's role as wife she acknowledged that modern life had changed the requirements of the job. She advised women to become "accustomed gradually and while they are still comparatively youthful, to having lives, interests, and personalities of their own apart from their household. . . Home comes first. But – in second and third and last place there is room for countless other concerns"⁴⁹ Her advice to women echoed the words of advice columnist Dorothy Dix as she argued that a modern wife's most important job was to be a partner to her husband, rather than a housekeeper. She must share his interests and develop her own in order to be both a

valuable asset to him in business but also a stimulating companion in leisure.⁵⁰ Like the Listerine ads that likewise appeared in women's magazines, ER suggested that women had a vital responsibility to promote their husband's interests by creating a rich social environment favorable to business. In order to fulfill this role it was "essential for a woman to develop her own interests – in music, literature, club life, church, community activities and hobbies for instance so as not to lose the possibility of being a stimulating personality" both to her husband and to his friends and business associates.⁵¹

The public persona ER developed during this period represented a perfect example of the social feminist consumerist compromise. In her own work and by her example, ER advocated a model of modern womanhood in which marriage and family remained central but operated in a new way. She cited modern consumer conveniences as critical to changes in women's lives. She wrote "in one respect a revolution has been going on in this country, and I think it is going to spread more and more. We are coming to count largely on modern inventions, which simplify the work of running a home."⁵² Modern consumer culture, as represented in women's magazines, made housekeeping much less time consuming for middle-class and elite women and thus gave them free time to pursue interests outside the home. She argued that a woman's "first interest and her first duty is to her home, but her duty to her home does not of necessity preclude her having another occupation. . . the necessity [of manufacturing clothing and the like at home] has gone to-day and therefore there are few women . . . who are not able to do something besides keeping their home."⁵³ She urged women to be organized and

efficient to make time for pursuits outside the home by “using as many labor-saving devices she can afford.”⁵⁴

By publicly acknowledging her continued political and philanthropic activities, ER blazed a trail for herself and other women who sought to balance careers with their responsibilities at home. In a feature article in *Good Housekeeping*, a series of pictures of ER reveal the many activities among which she divided her time. She was depicted as wife, mother and grandmother; a charity worker; participant in social affairs; a public figure; political committeewoman; and as furniture manufacturer. The caption of a full-length photo of ER in the Executive Mansion read, “The First Lady of New York State believes that modern conditions compel the wise woman to change her methods in the job of wifehood.”⁵⁵ Eager to promote a modern version of womanhood in keeping with the consumer culture that pervaded popular magazines, articles about ER held her up as an example of a modern ideal of womanhood that successfully mingled political and social activism, paid labor, and family life. ER exemplified the varied life possible for a modern woman and challenged the gender norms that had forced her to resign her positions in the Democratic Party and other political organizations when she became first lady of New York.⁵⁶

Having suggested that modern life provided women with free time to pursue interests outside the home, ER challenged women to turn their attention to the state of the national household through political participation.⁵⁷ “I want to see women taking an interest in politics, taking active part in campaigns, organizing their strength for proper legislation and proper legislators. But I cannot say too often that taking an interest in

politics is not synonymous with holding political office. It is more important for a million women to know whom to vote for than it is for one to hold office.”⁵⁸

ER suggested that politics was an extension of a woman’s domestic concerns. Job security, health care, and even national defense directly affected the home lives of American women and therefore warranted their consideration. “If ten million women really want security, real representation, honesty, wise and just legislation, happier and more comfortable conditions of living, and a future with the horrors of war removed from the horizon, then these ten million women must bestir themselves.”⁵⁹ She, thus, urged them to make time to become active and informed citizens. ER argued that “women must learn to play the game as men do.”⁶⁰ She suggested that they needed to develop the political skills acquired by men over generations of political participation in order to move into positions of power.⁶¹ ER called on women to organize within the parties and elect their own leaders to meet with the men. She argued that, “while women now have the vote, they have not received serious consideration from men leaders. There are virtually no women who have any actual influence or say in the things that really count, in either party.”⁶²

ER held out great hope that women’s entry into public life would improve American life, mirroring the hopes of social feminists. She wrote “perhaps we are going to see evolved in the next few years not only a social order built by the ability and brains of our men, but a social order which also represents the understanding heart of the women.”⁶³ In order to achieve this goal, ER urged women to educate themselves on current political affairs, become active in civic organizations, and vote. Promoting social

feminist notions of the modern expert citizen, she wrote “I personally believe that it is well for all young people to belong to nonpartisan organizations before they join any political party in order that they may really make a study of the principles for which the various parties stand before affiliating themselves definitely with any one of them.”⁶⁴

ER’s tenure as first lady of New York was an awakening of sorts. She came to accept and promote a greatly broadened sense of women’s responsibilities in American political life and her own responsibility as a leader among women in the Democratic Party. A believer in the social feminist ideal notion that women’s roles as wives and mothers were primary, ER embraced the consumerist compromise, believing that by working efficiently and taking advantage of modern consumer conveniences women in the twentieth century could and should become active in politics. ER became highly skilled in public relations as a means to promote her ideals, and by the time FDR was nominated as the Democratic nominee for president in 1932, began to understand the vital role she would play as an icon for both the New Deal and social feminism.

FDR benefited from ER’s growing celebrity in much the way that social feminists did. Howe, who long had had his sights set on the White House for FDR and who valued ER as a political asset in that quest, urged her to write for women’s magazines to establish herself as a representative of American women.⁶⁵ The strategy of having ER pave the way into American households ahead of FDR, which had served him well in the New York gubernatorial campaign, propelled ER into the national spotlight in order to win women’s votes for FDR in the Presidential election of 1932. This was just one

component of a strategy that resulted in ER's becoming First Lady of the United States in 1933.

ER's ascension to First Lady made her the undeniable leader of the social feminist movement in the 1930s. The 1930s represented the pinnacle of many activists' careers begun during the suffrage campaign (while ER was busy with childbirth and childrearing).⁶⁶ Having fought hard throughout the hostile 1920s to expand American liberalism to include greater concern for general welfare, these feminists had long advocated the changes in American politics represented in the New Deal. They were eager to participate in remaking the federal government into a social democracy equal to the challenges of a modern urban industrial America. As First Lady, ER provided a vital link between social feminists and the Roosevelt administration.

The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 turned the tide in American political culture.⁶⁷ The rise of unemployment, the decline of the stock market, the collapse of real estate values, and mid-western drought precipitated a change of point of view in many Americans who in the 1920s had felt that their hard work had helped them achieve the American dream. By the early 1930s middle class Americans who had previously viewed governmental intervention on behalf of the poor with suspicion now looked to government to bail them out. No longer did red-baiting turn public opinion against reform (as it had in the 1920s); now mainstream Americans sought the aid of their government to remain in their homes and put food on the table. In 1932, FDR's New Deal promised a reform agenda that would dramatically expand the role of the federal government in order to rescue a nation clutched in the grips of major economic decline.

For social feminists, this was the opportunity to craft a new American liberalism that promised freedom from want for all Americans that they had long envisioned.

ER served social feminists extraordinarily well as an ideological leader. She exercised greater influence within the administration than any other first lady up to that point (with the possible exception of Edith Wilson who played a significant role in running the nation during her husband Woodrow Wilson's prolonged and secret illness). As first lady, ER promoted her husband's New Deal, lending to many New Deal programs an appearance of motherly concern. Beyond and, at times, in conflict with her role as an advocate of her husband's goals, ER advanced the social feminist agenda, publicly endorsing social feminist legislative measures and securing employment for leading social feminists in the Roosevelt administration. ER placed the social feminist model of female political identity in the national spotlight. She also focused media attention in the direction of other social feminist leaders, granting them opportunities to share their ideas with a national audience. ER's vision of democracy, which was rooted in the social feminist consumerist compromise, ultimately grew beyond the limits of a gendered view of citizenship. Aided by her celebrity status, ER articulated a post-war liberalism that transcended social feminism -- no longer dependent on a gendered political ideology.

Central to ER's influence as first lady was her mastery of the media. Her attempts to self-consciously develop a national identity to suit her political agenda began before she entered the White House. With the help of Howe and Associated Press reporter Lorena Hickok (Hick) ER began to develop and promote a vision of herself as a modern

First Lady. Consistent with social feminist doctrine and with the role of First Lady, ER promised to be a helpmeet to her husband. But her vision of this role was a modern one that went far beyond White House hostess to ambassador of her husband's policies to the nation and personal advocate of the people in the White House.

Up until FDR's election as President of the United States, ER was one among a number of politically active, socially elite women in the public eye. The public persona that she was developing was noteworthy but she was not alone in her celebrity status. Other women like Ava Belmont of the NWP, Carrie Chapman Catt of the LWV and even flying ace Amelia Earhart shared the spotlight with ER. These women shared a sense of the responsibility for the improvement of their sex that came with such fame. The onset of the Great Depression and the 1932 Presidential election, however, set ER apart and allowing her to become the most famous, most beloved and among the most controversial women in America.

The 1930s was the period in which the notion of celebrity was solidified within the mass culture of the United States. Mass culture is used here to describe those images and ideas that were broadcast nationally through the radio and the print media such that they could be readily recognized and understood by the majority of Americans. Indelibly linked to consumer culture, such images and ideas were consumed by the viewing public with increasing intensity in the 1930s. While not necessarily developed for the marketplace, the images and ideas of mass culture often used the same methods of influence as advertisements – vivid visual images, and simple emotional messages designed to elicit sympathy or “sell” an idea.

Celebrity endorsement had become a popular way to win the approval of the American public. Prior to the 1920s just a handful of individuals saw the media's potential to sway public opinion. But foresighted politicians began to realize during this period that Americans would be more interested in political issues if they had a personal stake in them and that a recognizable and sympathetic personality could make people feel connected to and invested in a candidate or issue. The National Woman's Party used this strategy both during the fight for suffrage and the campaign for the ERA, as it held up the stately Inez Mulholland as an example of what equal citizenship for women could be. As early as the turn of the century, such tactics had been used to political advantage by ER's uncle, Teddy Roosevelt, when he struck an iconic if militarily dubious pose as a rough rider.

By the 1930s, however, American periodicals and radios were overrun with such images and Americans were addicted to them. Celebrities hailed from various avenues of life – European royalty, American high society, sports, film and radio, politics, science and industry (like Charles Lindberg and Amelia Earhart), and the notorious such as bank robbers Bonnie and Clyde and gangster Al Capone. Americans in the 1930s thrived on a daily supply of news, photos, film footage, and radio reports chronicling the adventures of their favorite people as sales for magazines, newspapers, movies and radios soared and the overall economy nosedived. The adventures of real life celebrities stood side by side with those of fictional characters in movies and on the radio, and together they allowed Americans to escape for a while from the trials of real life.⁶⁸ This first generation of “stars,” which included ER, was characterized not only by an appreciation of the

importance of public opinion but also by a working relationship with professional media outlets designed to maximize profitable public exposure for both the celebrities and the publications that featured them.

Celebrity status was a double-edged sword however – it was at once a rare opportunity and a huge responsibility. ER and Amelia Earhart shared a common sense of purpose in promoting their own celebrity status. Both actively sought the attention of the press and worked closely with leaders in publishing to develop their public images, conscious that they were expanding the limits of female accomplishment. Together they indulged in a publicity stunt in which they flew together from Washington DC to Baltimore (a distance easily traveled by car or train) dressed in evening gowns and with a reporter in tow.⁶⁹ Both were acknowledged as paving the way for women in their respective fields. They worked hard to promote their own celebrity status such that their example would be beneficial to the women who came after them.⁷⁰

ER was quite groundbreaking in her use of the media. A 1984 article in *Advertising Age*, an advertising trade publication, cited ER's willingness to endorse products as paving the way for national leaders to view celebrity endorsements as useful public relations strategies rather than political liabilities.⁷¹ ER accepted paid radio spots sponsored by Simmons Mattress, Pond's Cold Cream, Selby Shoes, a local DC roofing comp, and the typewriter industry. Paid \$500 per minute to discuss national news, child-rearing, family life, and White House vignettes, ER earned a significant income, which she donated primarily to the Women's Trade Union League and the American Friends Service Committee but also to scores of other charities as well.⁷² While these activities

drew some criticism, particularly from Republicans who viewed them to be below the dignity of the First Lady of the United States and as a cheap trick to campaign for her husband, the general public tended to view ER's commercial enterprises to be consistent with the image she was attempting to develop as a woman of the people, who shared their values and used her resources to help others in need.⁷³

Associated Press journalist Lorena Hickok, who met ER while covering FDR's bid for the democratic nomination for President of the United States in 1932, played a major role in helping develop and promote herself as a modern first lady willing and able to play a political role in her husband's administration. In *Reluctant First Lady*, Hickok recalled the moment she realized that ER would be a very different first lady than the nation had experienced before.⁷⁴ Several reporters, including Hickok, followed ER into the kitchen of the executive mansion immediately following the announcement of FDR's nomination for the Presidency. Taking note of the disdainful glance she shot at a reporter, who suggested that she should be excited about living in the White House, Hickok suggested to her editor at Associated Press that ER be assigned a reporter to follow her activities throughout the campaign. Hick seemed to understand immediately that ER was reluctant to abandon the career she'd worked so hard to resurrect after entering the Executive Mansion in Albany. By the time ER reached the White House, "Hick" was an important part of the ER's publicity machine.⁷⁵

The article that resulted from this first encounter, published as "Wife Prepares a Supper," marked the beginning of a friendship that proved instrumental in the crafting of ER's public persona for her own political purposes.⁷⁶ The striking image of a tall,

elegantly dressed woman making a humble meal of scrambled eggs for her husband set the stage for future representations of ER during the Presidential campaign. Describing ER as calm as she retreated from the fanfare of the nomination to prepare a simple meal for her husband, Hickok subtly implied ER's ambivalence about the impact of FDR's nomination on her own life. She reported that ER "will take no active part in her husband's campaign" but instead would continue her own career as a teacher at New York's Todhunter School.⁷⁷ Asked if she planned to continue to teach if her husband was elected, she replied, "it will be like everything else in the world. I'll have to wait to see what I can do."⁷⁸ Through her sensitive portrayal of ER's desire to maintain her own life as long as possible, Hickok suggested an internal dichotomy between a devoted wife and a woman who longed to follow her own path.

Hickok's favorable articles helped ER win acceptance as a helpmeet that also longed to make her own contribution independent of her husband.⁷⁹ In "Daily Work Goes on for Mrs. Roosevelt" Hickok described ER's return to Todhunter School just six hours after FDR's election, saying that although she would no longer be teaching following the inauguration "Mrs. Roosevelt does not intend to relinquish her editorship of "Babies, Just Babies," [a parenting magazine established in 1932] after her husband assumes office." While Hickok acknowledged that that sacrifices would have to be made as ER assumed the role of First Lady, she laid the groundwork for ER to assume a dual identity rather than being subsumed by her husband's pursuits, calling her a "school teacher-First Lady."⁸⁰

Hickok navigated between conventional and modern gender expectations in her portrayal of ER during this critical period. Hickok recalled ER planning to “serv[e] notice on the American public not to expect her to be the sheltered, conventional White House mistress to which it was accustomed and of which it approved.”⁸¹ Trusting in Hick’s ability to present her in the most favorable light, ER could express her true feelings without fear that they would be used to paint her unsympathetically. Choosing to introduce the public to the real ER gradually, the resultant article expressed the opposite sentiment, saying that when ER was deluged by reporters at Todhunter, she “took refuge in the tradition which holds that the wife of the President may not speak on political topics for publication.”⁸² But Hickok assisted ER in striking down this tradition upon ER’s arrival at the White House.

Hickok’s interview of ER at the White House immediately following the inauguration, the first of many unprecedented acts by a first lady of the United States, set the tone for her tenure there. In “Crowd Mind Read by Mrs. Roosevelt” Hickok described the White House as “cold and impersonal,” stripped of the personal belongings of the previous occupant whom, in contrast to ER, was “already on her way to private life and freedom.”⁸³ This description helped readers to identify with ER’s feelings of confinement within the social constraints of the role of First Lady. But, by attributing the impersonal nature of the experience to the physical space of the White House and the desire for freedom to the outgoing First Lady, she shielded ER from criticism.

Hickok hinted at the ways in which ER would politicize her role as First Lady, describing her plans for the Presidential household. “The woman of many interests who

became today by virtue of her husband's position the nation's "first lady" will be herself chiefly occupied in the next few weeks, she said today, 'with housekeeping.'"⁸⁴ White House housekeeping emerged as a political act under ER's care, however. Paring down the social affairs at the White House in response to the Great Depression, Hickok reported that ER planned to cut spending in the household by twenty-five percent, trying out new foods developed at Cornell to meet dietary needs at low cost, and developing menus comprised entirely of domestically cultivated and produced foodstuffs. Rather than exemplifying American hospitality to visiting foreign governments, ER was more concerned with sharing the burden of national want and setting an example of household thrift for her constituency of American women.

As would become characteristic of the new first lady, ER addressed herself directly to American women as a fellow wife and mother but also as a role model, an example of the social feminist political identity. She stated, "We women have to go about our daily task of home-making no matter what may happen, and we needn't feel that ours is an unimportant part, for our courage and our willingness to sacrifice may be the spring board from which recovery may come."⁸⁵ As she had in her earlier writings, ER stressed her shared experience of homemaking with the women of America, and argued that one's work within the household was directly related to the business of government and the prosperity of the nation.

Hickok suggested that as First Lady, ER embraced the American people, understood the trials they were going through, and would act on their behalf in the White House. Hickok reported that ER planned to open the White House up to the nation

because as taxpayers it belonged to them but also because she longed to continue the occupations she so loved teaching, writing, and being an advocate for people in need. “I hate the idea that I might ever lose touch with people,” ER stated.⁸⁶ This first interview set the precedent for ER’s self-appointed role as the White House ambassador to women and representative of the New Deal.

Hickok’s articles were just one of several ways that ER used the media to promote her own celebrity status and advance her political agenda. In addition to developing her public persona ER also sought to earn money by making public appearances, speaking on the radio, and endorsing products. She donated the money she earned, about \$30,000 annually, to various social causes to which she was dedicated, which included everything from major political and social causes to simply handing out five dollar bills to impoverished people she passed on the street.⁸⁷ The Women’s Trade Union League, and American Friends Service Organization were two among many organizations that benefited from her generosity.⁸⁸

ER’s embrace of consumerism evidenced by her endorsement of products was critiqued by Republicans, conservative politicians and pundits who accused her of petty commercialism.⁸⁹ Bowing to criticism by the *New York Herald Tribune* and several other organizations early in her tenure as First lady she agreed to accept no more radio contracts but soon abandoned this pledge.⁹⁰ Yet ER’s public appearances and her well-publicized generosity endeared her to many Americans. The greatest evidence of this was the 1936 Presidential election in which Republican leaders’ attempted to portray ER’s unorthodox role in the Roosevelt administration negatively, arguing that an

unelected woman was running the country. Members of the press and the Roosevelt campaign noted, however, that this view of ER failed to take a strong hold nationally.⁹¹ Americans were as enthusiastic about seeing ER as they were FDR. Furthermore, letters to ER reveal that people appreciated her efforts at her husband's side.⁹² Even more important ER's daily presence in the lives of Americans through the media lent to FDR's administration a strong sense of personal concern for the people, and tireless dedication to improving economic conditions.⁹³ Ultimately, it was this public recognition of her vital role as spokesperson for the New Deal and as the voice of public opinion in the White House that was the source of her political power in the Roosevelt administration.

As first lady, ER understood the power of the media to shape public opinion and sought to put that power to work in unprecedented ways. She said that "the most powerful weapon that we have at our command today is public opinion . . . it could move mountains."⁹⁴ Opening up her life to the scrutiny of the press through weekly press conferences, a daily newspaper column, two magazine columns, a series of paid speaking engagements on the radio, and a lecture tour ER harnessed the media to increase her political capital as a vital part of the Roosevelt administration and as an advocate for women. A 1939 *Time* magazine cover story described her as, "wife of a ruler, but her power comes from the influence not on him, but on public opinion. It is a self-made influence . . . unique for any woman to hold."⁹⁵

ER's press conferences were another example of her willingness to share her personal experience as first lady with the American public, but they also served as a platform from which to promote the New Deal and social feminist political agendas.

ER's first press conference was held just two days following FDR's inauguration on March 6, 1933. Thirty-five female reporters attended. The last was held April 12, 1945, just hours before FDR died. There were 348 press conferences in all.⁹⁶ Topics of discussion at the conferences ranged from social engagements at the White House to promotion of New Deal programs to descriptions of ER's travels throughout the country and abroad. The press conferences trace the development of ER's political agenda during the White House years. They created job opportunities for female reporters during the Great Depression. They provided a platform from which ER could address the women of the country, informing and educating them on the politics of the New Deal. They allowed her to feature leading women of the New Deal and promote by example greater female participation in politics. They provided a forum in which to promote equal access for women and children within New Deal programs. More than any other, this venue allowed ER to comment on New Deal policy. By doing so and, at the same time, maintaining a high level of national popularity, ER made herself a valuable asset to the public relations machine of the Roosevelt administration and social feminist political organizations.

ER's extensive travels throughout the country and her discussions of her experiences in both her press conferences and her syndicated column, *My Day*, earned her the nickname, "Eleanor everywhere." In her first year in the White House, ER traveled over 30,000 miles around the nation as an inspector and good-will ambassador for FDR.⁹⁷ Several cartoons caricatured the nation's sense of her ubiquitous presence. One, following her inspection of a coal mining region of West Virginia entitled "...Here

comes Mrs. R,” depicted coal miners surprise at meeting ER in a coal car deep underground.⁹⁸ Likewise suggesting ER’s propensity to turn up in places not customary for a first lady or any woman of elite status, another cartoon portrayed one hobo saying to another “pull up your socks and straighten your tie” because “you never can tell when you’ll run into Mrs. R.”⁹⁹ Depictions of her travels solidified the image of ER as a modern first lady – not constrained by either feminine decorum or safety (indeed protecting her proved a challenge for her secret service detail). Trained by her early efforts at the NCL and her investigative work for FDR during his tenure as governor, ER embodied the bold curiosity, attention to detail, maternal compassion, and righteous indignation at the heart of social feminist reform efforts.

ER appeared at county fairs, picnics, and parades as well as at schools, hospitals, and factories to talk to Americans and investigate the conditions created by the Great Depression and to assess the impact of the New Deal on assuaging those conditions. ER’s friendly concern won her many friends on the road and in local newspapers in the cities and towns she visited. Her press conferences allowed her to publicize her trips nationwide and gave her the opportunity to tie massive governmental policies undertaken by the Roosevelt administration to the needs of individual Americans she had met in towns across the country. Letters to both ER and FDR revealed that Americans often viewed the couple as partners and saw New Deal policies as personal acts of kindness by a first family whom many viewed as loving parents and caring neighbors to a nation in need.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, ER’s travels reflected traditionally feminine social influence based in local civic networks and on old-fashioned neighborliness.

ER wrote even more extensively as mistress of the White House than she did as First Lady of New York State, but her writings continued to intermingle traditionally feminine concerns with political issues. She wrote three different columns during this period, “Mrs. Roosevelt’s Page” for *Woman’s Home Companion* (Aug 1933 to Jan 1935), “If you Ask Me” for *Ladies Home Journal* (June 1941 to May 1949), and *My Day*, a diary of her activities that was published six days per week in over fifty newspapers from 1936 until her death in 1962. Two forces drove ER to embark on these writing commitments. The first was that she wanted to earn money of her own to contribute to social feminist and other reform organizations she endorsed. The second was that writing gave her the opportunity to engage in a dialogue directly with the American people. This discussion was indeed a two-way conversation as her columns elicited thousands of letters each month on which she commented publicly. The conversational tone of the columns, their two-way dialectic, and the private, neighborly subject matter that pervaded much of this writing made ER a daily guest in the homes of millions of Americans.

ER used these public forums as platforms to promote both the New Deal and the social feminist agenda. Under the guidance of the Roosevelt administration she promoted New Deal policies, programs and personnel. Combining policy talk with anecdotes she humanized government initiatives – providing examples of the benefits of governmental reform on the lives of Americans the country over. ER also challenged New Deal policy-makers to enact legislation, hire personnel and establish programs supported by social feminists. She also encouraged female political participation,

showcased the work of social feminists in the Roosevelt administration and modeled a political identity consistent with social feminism.

ER voiced the concerns of the common man, politicizing the conditions of the Great Depression and encouraging New Deal solutions. After visiting a DC institution for destitute young girls (mostly African American), for example, ER described the deplorable conditions at her press conference, publicly advocated additional funding for the school, and invited the inmates to the White House for a garden party.¹⁰¹ Following her visit to a West Virginia coalmine, ER became a leading supporter of the Arthurdale Project, a government-sponsored subsistence homesteading program.¹⁰² At her press conferences, she promoted the project and, later, as opposition mounted against the high cost and questionable benefits, vehemently defended it. Although pundits and politicians criticized ER's efforts, the general public viewed her much more favorably, seeing her activism simply as concern for poor Americans.¹⁰³

By publicly supporting New Deal programs ER proved both that a woman could be a source of political news and that New Dealers were working to alleviate the worst conditions of the Great Depression for those citizens -- women, minorities, and young -- who were rarely considered in politics. ER discussed the benefits of dried skim milk developed by the Department of Agriculture, and spoke favorably about the impact of National Youth Administration worker training programs.¹⁰⁴ She invited Assistant Administrator of Women's Projects at the WPA to speak about training women in household employment, library and museum work, and other white-collar occupations for

women.¹⁰⁵ Second tier programs directed at political minorities received attention they otherwise would not have as a result of ER's press conferences.

In addition to suggesting that New Dealer's were working on behalf of their constituents, ER's writings conveyed a much more personal sense of concern for struggling Americans. In her first article for *Woman's Home Companion* "I Want You to Write to Me," ER expressed the hope that her column would "establish a clearinghouse, a discussion room, for millions of men, women, and young people who read the *Companion* every month."¹⁰⁶ She wanted to use her column as a means to correspond directly with the people of the United States to discuss the problems facing individual Americans.

"I want you to tell me about the particular problems which puzzle you or sadden you, but I also want you to write me about what has brought joy into your life, and how you are adjusting yourself to the new conditions in this amazing changing world."¹⁰⁷

She was not just looking to hear from Democrats but rather invited dissent in order to engage critics of the New Deal in fruitful discussion.¹⁰⁸ Establishing the tone of the column in this first installment she suggested a topic – low cost vacations – and invited discussion. Guided as it was by letters from struggling Americans ER's column painted a picture of the effects of the New Deal but instead of focusing on governmental solutions it offered sympathy, advice, and aid directly from the First Lady.

Americans responded to ER in record numbers. They described their personal trials, asked for help, and expressed their appreciation of the many efforts made by the Roosevelt administration and ER herself to alleviate the suffering caused by the

Great Depression. Most correspondents were appreciative of ER's many efforts to help the underprivileged of the nation and expressed confidence that she would respond to their requests for help. One person wrote, "I have heard, or read of so many fine things you have done for those in need ... and you always seem to be able to find, or make a way, to solve every problem presented to you."¹⁰⁹ The letters revealed that Americans viewed ER as actively involved in the creation of governmental policies designed to alleviate their suffering.

ER reciprocated her audiences' trust by providing entrance into the lives of the first family, further contributing to the sense of neighborliness ER inspired. While most reporters and editors preferred her more overtly political contributions, personal anecdotes dominated "My Day," and arose frequently during press conferences as well. Such personal asides allowed ER to downplay her political influence and instead emphasize the qualities she shared with other American women as a prototypical wife, mother, and grandmother.¹¹⁰ *My Day*, a running log of ER's thoughts and activities, more than any other venue, allowed ER to develop the social feminist model of female political identity that she envisioned for America, even if it did not necessarily accurately portray her own political identity.

In keeping with the traditional concerns that had long been subjects of women's writing, ER discussed domestic events – weddings, graduations, vacations, and even the more mundane, babysitting and dog sitting.¹¹¹ In *My Day* ER was free to ruminate on virtually any subject she wished and over the course of thirty years the topics covered were broadly varied. ER discussed books and plays she'd seen, luncheons she'd

attended, family dinners, holidays, political appointments, particularly those of women, visits with friends, and her travels. A typical entry describing a parade in the President's honor in Texas stated, "Some bright boy, who has evidently been told to look for the President, has his eyes glued on the motorcycle escort in front and is annoyed at his parents who are trying to make him turn his head to look at the less interesting car in which drives the President of the United States."¹¹² Another, which highlights ER's down to earth attitude stated, "One thing amuses me very much! Whenever I leave a public building or a shop in New York City, someone is sure to ask me, "May I get your car?" and they always look somewhat surprised when I explain that I am walking or taking a cab."¹¹³ Another, praising New Deal programs, stated, "my visit to the exhibits of the WPA and National Youth Administration was heartening from the point of view of their real accomplishments."¹¹⁴ Commenting on the difficulty of getting the President away from the Oval office to attend his son's wedding, ER commented, "There is no doubt about it, public officials should have no private lives."¹¹⁵ More than a study of her political influence "My Day" conveyed ER's personality to the American public – an energetic, compassionate, observant, and optimistic mother figure.

ER's role as mistress of the White House was covered most extensively in her press conferences. The few instances in which coverage of ER made the first page of major newspapers in the White House years the topic was social in nature – the decision to serve alcohol at the White House and the visit of British monarchs were widely covered. State sponsored social events and other parties that the Roosevelts hosted were newsworthy, but in general society reporters assigned to the White House bemoaned the

First Lady's lack of interest in either traditional etiquette or fashion. She was reported to have given little thought to her appearance and was frugal in her wardrobe selections, failing to provide society reporters with a rainbow of new gowns on which to report.¹¹⁶ While such evidence of ER's lack of social grace annoyed society reporters, it once again illustrated how much ER shared with the public at large. Furthermore, her lack of interest in her role as national hostess meant that press conferences were dominated by more overtly political topics.

Given ER's strong relationship with the American public, her political support proved a tremendously valuable asset to the administration. FDR remarked to a White House advisor "there goes the opinion of the average man in the streets."¹¹⁷ His reliance on her observations as well as her formidable power over public opinion forced New Dealers to seriously consider the possible political ramifications of ignoring her requests even though she held no formal position in the government. Howe, a strong supporter of ER's press conferences, continued to tutor her in public speaking and press relations because he "recognized that ER ... was an unparalleled asset to the administration. She could make thousands of friends her husband could never reach."¹¹⁸ This was the source of her power in the White House and she used it to the advantage of the causes she advocated.

Several examples reveal White House perceptions of ER's value as a mediator of public opinion. In 1933 FDR sent ER to visit a camp set up by unemployed World War I veterans seeking soldiers' bonuses. In a press conference she described the camp as "clean and orderly" and the men there as having "a fine spirit... nothing but the most

courteous behavior.” In so doing, she helped to quell public fears of communism within the camp.¹¹⁹ During the 1936 Democratic Convention, FDR sent ER to speak in favor of his vice presidential choice, Henry Wallace, when a contentious battle broke out among delegates about his nomination.¹²⁰ Lastly, ER was appointed co-chair of the Civilian Defense Committee, which was charged with inciting and organizing public support for World War II. This appointment represented the first formal acknowledgement of ER’s role as shaper of public opinion in the Roosevelt administration.

Having established herself as a vital asset to the Roosevelt administration and the most beloved political figure of the time, ER used the skills she’d developed in the 1920s to give women’s organization’s vital access to the Roosevelt administration. Social feminists came to view ER as the key to their political success during the New Deal. Democratic Party leader, Molly Dewson provided this example of how ER exercised her influence. “When I wanted help on some definite point, Mrs. Roosevelt gave me the opportunity to sit by the President at dinner and the matter was settled before we finished our soup.”¹²¹ Continuing to rely on traditional forms of feminine influence, ER made sure that social feminists had the ear of the President.

But ER also put political pressure on members of the administration without requiring the intervention of her husband. Mary Anderson, head of the Women’s Bureau, offered an illustration of ER’s more direct influence. At a White House luncheon, ER whispered her desire that Anderson do something about unfair treatment of domestic service workers, a form of employment undertaken overwhelmingly by African American women. Knowing that Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins was opposed to

addressing this issue for political reasons, Anderson suggested that ER talk to Perkins directly. As a result of ER's intervention, the Women's Bureau got a \$25,000 appropriation to fund a study of the conditions domestic work.¹²² Anderson also thought that ER's investigation of conditions of home working in Puerto Rico "helped most in getting better wage standards" there.¹²³ ER attended Congressional hearings on work hour limits to express tacit presidential support and earn the hearings favorable publicity.¹²⁴

For social feminists, who gave ER her start as a politician in her own right, her public success was an invaluable asset. She never forgot the values she had learned working for the LWV, WTUL, NCL and Women's Division and these organizations' early support paid vast dividends during the New Deal. ER threw the full weight of her political power behind many programs, policies and bills that represented the interests of social feminists. In her writings and speeches she advocated women's greater participation in politics using the very arguments social feminists developed during the suffrage campaign and perfected during the 1920s. Equally important, ER embodied a vision of modern womanhood very much in keeping with social feminist philosophy, combining traditional methods of feminine influence and conventional female values with modern political activism. Lastly, she used the political capital she earned through her iconic status to bring female democrats into positions of power within the Roosevelt administration.

At her press conferences, ER expressed her public support for the New

Deal programs that represented the implementation of ideas for which women's groups had fought throughout the 1920s. Although ER cannot be said to have been solely responsible for the inclusion of these programs in the New Deal, she played a vital role in exposing FDR to progressive ideals early in his career and thus in shaping his general philosophy toward the potential role of government in social welfare. Furthermore, she helped women capitalize on the change in public opinion toward new liberalism as a result of the onset of the Great Depression. Arguing for government's responsibility for ensuring the welfare of its citizens, ER stated that "[y]ou must have a minimum of economic security in order to have true democracy and for people to love their government and their country ... People cannot love a government or country which does not allow them to have anything which makes life worth living."¹²⁵

ER publicly advocated for the inclusion of social feminist programs in the New Deal. In a 1935 press conference she articulated the National Consumers' League's position arguing for a

“complete realization of both labor and industry or capital of their responsibility towards each other and the public ... On the part of industrial leaders, I would like to see a willingness to realize that labor must share a greater extent and receive a fairer return for its part in the world's work... On the part of organized labor, I should like to see a greater understanding and recognition of their responsibility to the people at large.”¹²⁶

ER strongly promoted the consideration of consumer interests in the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The NRA brought together representatives from labor, industry, and the public to work collectively to meet the challenges of the Great Depression. The recognition of the public, or consumer, was the realization of an ideal that the National

Consumers' League had long espoused.¹²⁷ ER was also a vital source of publicity for the NRA's "Buy Now!" campaign to persuade households put back to work by government programs to use their increased buying power to improve the economy nationwide by spending on consumer goods. She invited Mary Rumsey, NCL member and Chairman of Consumers Advocacy Board, to explain the program at her press conference.¹²⁸

Elevating the role of the consumer in economic recovery, ER contributed to the creation of a triumvirate of labor, industry, and the public that became central to the New Deal vision of America and came to dominate Americans' understanding of their role as citizens throughout the twentieth century.¹²⁹ Along with a general recognition of the importance of the consumer to economic recovery came legislative victories on a number of measures for which social feminists had lobbied unsuccessfully in the 1920s. They finally won the abolition of child labor as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act 1938, and earned the right to unionize in the 1935 National Labor Relations Act.

ER vocally advocated that New Deal programs provide equal assistance to women. Programs addressing the needs of labor tended to view men as the legitimate recipients of aid, as they were traditionally the family breadwinners. Women's labor unions such as the WTUL pushed for recognition of the vital importance of women's labor and their need for aid. ER stood up with advocates of laboring women and encouraged that women receive equal aid from the Federal Emergency Relief Program. With veteran NCL member and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, she announced forest work camps for women. With WTUL President, Rose Schneiderman, ER urged inclusion of women workers in National Recovery Administration industrial codes.¹³⁰ ER

threw her personal support behind Schneiderman saying “Our hope is that before codes are made an attempt will be made to get the opinion of workers, both men and women.”¹³¹ With Ellen Woodward, head of Women’s Work Program of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), ER publicized FERA projects designed specifically for women, including “training for household workers” which featured efficiency experts and labor saving gadgets.¹³² By placing a parade of social feminist New Dealers before the public and advocating with them for greater inclusion of women in New Deal programs, ER put pressure on the Roosevelt administration to dedicate significant program resources to women in need rather than just placing a few women in high profile positions and directing the majority of their recovery efforts toward male breadwinners, as most male New Dealers advocated.

During the White House years, ER defended the social feminist commitment to protective legislation on a number of occasions during the 1930s by publicly criticizing the National Woman’s Party’s endorsement of the ERA. She argued that the NWP

“ignores the fact that there is a fundamental difference between men and women. I don’t mean by that women can’t make as great a contribution, nor if they do the same work they not be paid the same wages. The mere fact that women basically are responsible for the future physical condition of the race means for many restrictions. It is a physical difference, not a mental.”¹³³

Reporters speculated that ER was influential in the selection of social feminist Mary Winslow being selected to replace NWP member Doris Stevens, as the U.S. representative to the Inter-American Commission of Women. ER denied having nominated Anderson.¹³⁴ However, a letter from ER to the leadership of the Commission

stated that “Latin America was even less ready for a blanket amendment and loss of protective legislation than in U.S.”¹³⁵ Given ER’s informal method of influence it is likely that she followed up this letter with a personal recommendation.

In keeping with the view of the Women’s Trade Union League, ER publicly championed the right of married women to work against the charge that their withdrawal from the labor force would stimulate economic recovery by providing needed employment for male breadwinners. ER went beyond the economic arguments posited by the Women’s Bureau arguing presumably from personal experience that work “is almost a necessity to development. It may be that it’s not always the keeping of a home which is the type of work that [women] are supposed to do and you can’t deny permanently to any human being the right.”¹³⁶ She argued that some women were not meant to be homemakers alone, suggesting the legitimacy of their desire to pursue valuable employment, and to be otherwise useful. ER presented the possibility that if a married woman could do a job outside the home better than anyone else that doing such work would be “economically sound as well as spiritually a good thing.”¹³⁷ ER used her public platform and her private negotiation skills to influence New Deal policies on behalf of social feminists.

Capitalizing on the moment created by the Great Depression, ER and Women’s Division leader Molly Dewson spent the first year of FDR’s presidency seeking political rewards for social feminists’ hard work in his campaign. In her study of women who held positions of power in the Roosevelt administration and the Democratic Party during the New Deal, Susan Ware suggested that ER was a “spiritual leader” of sorts to the

Washington women's network and that despite her lack of a formal position within the government she was instrumental in forwarding the careers of Democratic women.¹³⁸

ER and Dewson worked together extensively to win positions for women deserving of White House patronage. They developed lists organized into several classes – by the contributions of the woman and by the level of the position requested either for her or her spouse in appreciation for her efforts during the campaign.¹³⁹ The first and most historic position they filled was U.S. Secretary of Labor, making Francis Perkins the first female member of a Presidential cabinet. Upon her appointment Perkins was influential in obtaining positions for women within the Labor Department, including the Women's Bureau, Children's Bureau, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Like ER, Dewson and Perkins began their careers in women's social welfare groups rather than politics. Perkins got her start in the NCL, becoming inspector general and then secretary of labor for the State of New York under Al Smith and FDR. Dewson began her career as a member of the WTUL. Like ER, they maintained allegiances to their ideological roots as they moved into leadership positions within the Democratic Party and the Roosevelt administration. Upon her appointment, Perkins said she felt it was not she who was chosen as Secretary of Labor “but that it was the Consumers' League who was appointed, and that I was merely the symbol who happened to be at hand, able and willing to serve at the moment.”¹⁴⁰ Florence Kelley, head of the National Consumers' League, led Perkins' generation of reformers to pursue legislative and policy-based solutions to the problems of labor, which she viewed as systemic failures of

capitalism. The New Deal proved the opportunity of a lifetime to attempt the systemic change Kelly had envisioned.

ER's role in the patronage process was indicative of her method of influencing many issues within the White House. Dewson often asked ER to appeal to FDR on her behalf – asking him to speak at events, get his chief of staff to hire more or certain women, even asking a sub-cabinet member to resign so that one of her Democratic women could take the position.¹⁴¹ Dewson asked ER to appeal to the Cabinet, asking them to appoint Democratic women to positions in their departments, which they often did upon her request.¹⁴² White House Chief of Staff James Farley received a number of notes from ER following up on requests made by Dewson as well as untold verbal reminders.¹⁴³ Dewson expressed her gratitude for ER's behind-the-scenes assistance saying, “What would the Democratic women of America do without you right there on the spot!”¹⁴⁴

This patronage system was both a continuation of female networking that had been used by social feminists throughout the 1920s and the first opportunity for women to take advantage of Presidential patronage from which male politicians had long benefited when their party came into power. Ironically, ER gave social feminists entry into a system of patronage in the 1930s that had been used to exclude them from positions of power in politics in 1920s and thwarted their agenda during the progressive era. As a direct result of the efforts of ER and Dewson seventy women held important positions in the federal government or National Democratic Party by 1940. According to Dewson's own count, she helped over 100 women and their spouses obtain positions at

the state and federal levels in appreciation for their service to the Democratic Party and the Roosevelt campaign. Carrie Chapman Catt of the League of Women Voters wrote to ER: “You, Miss Perkins, Mrs. Owen, Miss Wooley, Miss Abbott, Miss Anderson, and some others, make a fine looking group – the beginning of the grand display of statesmen.”¹⁴⁵ ER’s dedication to female patronage confirmed Ware’s argument that the women of the New Deal held in common a set of social feminist values that were based in their collective experience of the suffrage and progressive movements. These women safeguarded progressive ideals during the 1920s when they were unpopular and then in the 1930s won the long-awaited opportunity to test them out in an administration willing to expand the traditional role of government to include ensuring a basic level of economic security, industrial safety, and human dignity to the nation.

ER’s press conferences and “My Day” served as vehicles to tout the achievements of the women appointed to governmental posts and to promote the agendas of women New Dealers, many of whom she’d been instrumental in hiring. Members of the WTUL, NCL, as well as women from the Department of Labor, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, National Recovery Administration and other New Deal agencies found ER’s press conferences vital opportunities to explain their work to the public.¹⁴⁶ ER stood side by side with female New Dealer’s at her press conferences and discussed their efforts in “My Day,” holding them up as examples of what women in power could do.¹⁴⁷

For social feminists ER’s influence on the public at large was equally important as her influence within the White House. ER embodied the social feminist political philosophy in her public rhetoric. Social feminists located their political power in

qualities exclusive to women and therefore sought to maintain the unique status of women in politics and society. ER's philosophy as expressed in her early public writings and speeches embodied this view. Maurine Beasley argued that "[w]hat was unique lay in Mrs. Roosevelt's ability as First Lady to inspire the public with a message that reinforced traditional values at the same time that it enlarged them. Lauding those humanitarian concerns believed to be the special province of women, she credited women with the intelligence and motivation to solve social ills."¹⁴⁸ Biographer Robert Booth Fowler argued that Carrie Chapman Catt, leader of the NAWSA and a major proponent of social feminism viewed ER's life to be:

"a demonstration of what Catt dreamed modern women (and men) could do ...[ER] stood her ground as she acted in (and out) of politics to advance the causes of peace, justice, and women among others. She was the liberated woman, as Catt visualized that ideal, helping others and seeking to improve the world, a Progressive woman in politics."¹⁴⁹

ER's public image provided a counterpoint to popular images of women of the period, which largely precluded a political identity.¹⁵⁰

In keeping with the social feminist ideology, ER's political agenda was broad and placed the political advancement of women in a secondary position to humanitarian causes including but not limited to fair working conditions for labor, peace, improvements in the status of African Americans, and the achievement of a basic level of economic security for all people. ER's dedication to politics stemmed from her sense of concern for humanity and her sense of duty to act on that concern. Like other social feminists ER regarded such concern as women's special contribution to the political process. Looking back on women's political contributions in 1940 she stated,

“I feel we can really credit to the women ... the government’s attitude of concern for the welfare of human beings. ... This is a general change, which I attribute to the fact that men had to appeal for the vote of the women and have therefore taken a greater interest in subjects they feel may draw women to their support.”¹⁵¹

ER viewed women’s political activism to be an extension of their roles within the home. In 1935 she argued against what she called “the old inherent theory that woman’s interests must lie only in her home;” instead she suggested that “when people say woman’s place is in the home, I say, with enthusiasm, it certainly is, but if she really cares about her home, that caring will take her far and wide.”¹⁵² Showing women how to read the newspaper to maximize their understanding of national issues and providing access for women to information about New Deal programs were two important ways in which ER opened politics up to American women.¹⁵³ The vision of women’s political involvement reflected in ER’s rhetoric in the early White House years provided a social feminist model of citizenship for ordinary women.

Reflecting the consumerist compromise inherent in social feminism of the period, ER pointed to the consumer economy as a critical link between home and government. In keeping with the agendas of the LWV and the NCL, ER stressed the need for well-informed voters and consumers.¹⁵⁴ She argued that the consumer economy was leading to greater concern among women about government policies and commercial agencies because women were recognizing the ways in which these things impacted their daily lives.¹⁵⁵ She argued that consumer culture increased interdependency between rural and urban areas of the nation.

“Every housewife in this country should realize that if she lives in a city and has a husband who is either a wage earner or the owner of an industry, her wages or profits will be dependent not only on the buying power of people like herself but upon the buying power of the great mass of agricultural people throughout the country.”¹⁵⁶

In her writings and her press conferences, ER suggested that Americans identities as consumers were fundamental to their identities as citizens because she believed that renewing consumer buying power was critical to the prosperity of the national economy.¹⁵⁷ This view of citizenship encouraged women, who were the primarily consumers of household goods, to imagine their political identities as extensions of their roles as modern housekeepers.

ER’s life provided a rich example for women who sought the very highest political influence. Her influence within powerful Washington political circles challenged the status quo even more than did her public rhetoric in the early White House years. While ER’s position within the White House was largely an informal one, her unprecedented influence on the Roosevelt administration’s creation of the New Deal is undeniable even though it is difficult to measure. ER brought social feminists into the Roosevelt administration and strongly advocated for the inclusion of social feminist ideology in New Deal programs. The development of ER as a national celebrity in the early 1930s brought social feminism into the national spotlight and provided them the opportunity to exercise influence in national politics and represented the pinnacle of their political influence.

As First Lady ER continued to grow intellectually and her writings in the late 1930s bore witness to her development of a theory of democracy that, while influenced

by social feminist views of expert citizenship and new liberalism, transcended that consumerist compromise by failing to acknowledge the primacy of gender in political identity. ER's writing during this period, which formed the ideological basis for her work on the Declaration of Human Rights for the United Nations, represented an important break with social feminist rhetoric and signaled the decline of both social feminist notions of female citizenship and the political influence of the generation of social feminists who both trained ER and rode into Washington on her coattails.

In a series of articles in the late 1930s and early 1940s ER developed a theory of democracy that she would promote throughout the remainder of her career and that would propel her onto the international stage as a leading elder statesman. Fundamental to ER's vision of democracy were two conjoined doctrines. The first was that the founding principle of democracy was its promise to ensure the basic security of its citizens. The second was that in contrast to all other forms of government on earth democracy was dependent on the participation of its citizens. ER's travels around the United States during the Great Depression and internationally during World War II as well as the rise of the Cold War afterward led her to articulate the responsibilities of both government and the citizen in an ideal democracy in hopes that Americans would come to appreciate rather than fear the ethnic, racial and class diversity of their nation.

For ER democracy transcended the liberalism espoused by social feminists and institutionalized by the New Deal. The conditions of modern industrial society made it imperative that government protect the basic economic security of its citizens in order that all citizens could freely exercise their rights. "There can be no real democracy unless

there are three basic things. 1. Economic security sufficient to give at least some minimum to make living worthwhile. 2. Sufficient education to understand the problems before the country and to help to solve them. 3. The sources of information to be free – press, radio, movies. We have to watch other factors of the government to keep them free.”¹⁵⁸ Economic programs to reduce unemployment and care for those citizens unable to care for themselves prevented the disenfranchisement of the poor and made a democracy both just and healthy.

ER argued that government regulation of public welfare was critical to managing the logistics of care. “It is basic in a democracy that leadership for the welfare of the people as a whole must come from government ... We need a voice to define our aims, to put into words the things we want to achieve; and so we look to government to do just that – so that we do not stand still but move forward.”¹⁵⁹ ER’s vision of democracy as a form of government in which all citizens participate but in which government is responsible for the welfare of all citizens grew out of the progressive social feminist doctrine.

Key to the notion of citizenship developed by ER was the idea that ultimate responsibility for the quality of a democracy depended on the participation of the whole of the citizenry. The educated and conscientious use of the vote was the cornerstone of American political participation. “Our greatest safeguard is the constant exercise of the right of the people to express their changing opinion at the polls and the acceptance by all people of the majority decision so expressed – until it is altered again at the polls... Nowhere else does the individual shoulder so great a responsibility as under democratic government.”¹⁶⁰ ER saw the responsibilities of the citizen to extend well

beyond the formal political process however. “The motivating force of the theory of a Democratic way of life is still a belief that as individuals we live cooperatively, and, to the best of our ability, to serve the community in which we live, and that our own success, to be real, must contribute to the success of others.”¹⁶¹

Education was critical to a democracy because the people themselves were the ultimate arbiters of governmental action through the exercise of the vote. So being, she argued that the first objective of education must be the development of “informed and intelligent citizens” armed with the realization that “we are all responsible for the trend of thought and the action of our times.”¹⁶² For a democracy to be successful citizens must apply their individual talents to the pursuit of the greater good for all.¹⁶³ Americans must learn early that “good citizenship consist[ed] in leading their ...lives so as to make them as productive of good for all around them as they can be, and their public duty is expressed by using their vote as intelligently as possible.”¹⁶⁴

During this period ER noted with great apprehension rising anti-communist sentiment and racial strife.¹⁶⁵ Her travels as first lady led ER to reprioritize her political agenda. She found anti-communist “hysteria” and racism to be more serious issues than gender inequality.¹⁶⁶ These observations are reflected in her writings and speeches during this period as well as in the philosophy of democracy that she developed.

ER argued that democracy was in greater danger from intolerance from within than it was from attacks from without, suggesting that Americans would not need to fear the Americans of differing views and backgrounds if those persons were provided economic security, education, and a political voice. “Confidence in your fellow citizens

can only be maintained in a civilization which makes certain standards of living possible for each and every individual and gives an equal opportunity to progress as far as his ability and character will permit.”¹⁶⁷

It is important to note that ER continued to advocate increased political participation for women. However, that advocacy was part of a broader ideal of total citizen participation that included women among a number of groups under represented and underserved by government. Notably absent from this construction of citizenship is the notion that women were the driving force of social reform. While she credited women with advocating for the inclusion of social reform in American government she now argued that it was not merely a political plank but rather was absolutely fundamental to the nature of democracy itself. It was no longer the purview of one political group or one sex rather it was a right inherent in the form of democratic government.

Rather than promoting the social feminist ideal that social reform was part of women’s political agenda, ER now took the existence of a welfare state for granted. The notion of expert citizenship promoted by social feminists for the purpose of bringing women into politics both expanded and lost its gendered focus as ER articulated an inclusive vision of American citizenship in which all perspectives, regardless of race, ethnicity, class or gender would be valued in the basis of individual needs and contributions. It was no simply that ER no longer stressed women specifically but rather that her rhetoric stood in conflict with one fundamental aspect of social feminism – the idea that women had a unique set of skills and concerns that they shared based on their

gender. The ideal of democracy that ER developed in the late 1930s stressed individual rather than group identity.

Two examples illustrate this shift in ER's relation to social feminism. In the first example from a 1938 press conference discussing working mothers ER contradicts the idea upon which social feminism is founded, the notion that by virtue of their sex women have the skills and the desire to perform the role of mother better than any other task. She stated "Who should say that where the skills of the woman were such that she could do that particular job better than anyone else, better than she could do that particular job better than anyone else, better any she could do any other thing, probably it would be economically sound as well as spiritually a good thing?"¹⁶⁸ This statement represents an important departure from the social feminist philosophy. ER rather tentatively suggested that some women might be better suited to occupations other than motherhood. Furthermore she suggested that in such cases it would be best for women to choose such occupations over motherhood. This statement stands in stark contrast to many of her previous statements, in which she viewed family life as an inevitable and central role in women's lives and which she viewed as fundamental to all women's aspirations outside the home including their political agendas.

The second example, ER's reversal on the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment, represents a much later and much more fully developed statement against social feminism. Having opposed the ERA in press conferences and speeches on numerous occasions throughout the 1920s and 1930s ER stated in 1939 that "I think we are getting nearer to a time when the stand of the National Woman's Party, which I agree is ideal,

may become a reality.”¹⁶⁹ She maintained her objection to the ERA, particularly in international discussions of women’s rights, for more than a decade however. But in 1951 ER reluctantly dropped her objection to the ERA, believing that women workers were adequately protected by non-gendered labor legislation and unions in the event that the ERA invalidated protective legislation for women. She did not, however, endorse the ERA.

More than being indicative of ER’s change of heart on the issue of equal rights, ER’s career suggests the decline in gender as a guiding principle in women’s political activism generally following the New Deal. ER’s decreased participation in issues related solely to the status of women as a percentage of her total political activism after 1940 suggests that for ER at least gender was no longer a central political issue. In part this stemmed from the fact that she had overcome the political limitations posed by her gender and, as a highly influential democrat and American statesman, she was free to pursue any issue she chose. She no longer required the support of a coalition of women’s groups to make her voice heard.

By her own admission, the 1920s were for Eleanor Roosevelt the critical period in which she first learned about many of the issues that she held most dear throughout her political life. During the 1920s ER developed a network of close associates who shaped the kind of political activist she would become. ER emerged from the 1920s armed with media savvy and political know how that allowed her to garner and wield unprecedented influence in American political life. Her celebrity status as well as the

uncharacteristically broad range of her public advocacy allowed her to represent social feminism at its height in the 1930s and overcome its decline in the 1940s.

Through ER, the 1930s saw the social feminist vision of female citizenship achieve national prominence. While this was a great service to social feminist groups, ultimately it served to reveal the limitations of their model. By accepting and continuing to promote the view first put forward during the campaign for suffrage that women's political legitimacy was located in their gender-based concerns and biologically-rooted skills, social feminists were tied to a set of progressive values that would fall from favor following World War II. Although individual social feminists rose to positions of power in the New Deal, few with the notable exception of ER herself were able to continue to advance their careers following World War II. Their expertise was too closely tied to social welfare, which lost potency during the Cold War in part because it had been institutionalized during the New Deal and in part because, like in the 1920s, many Americans now feared that social reform bred communism. Through her development of a national public identity that was characterized as much by her concerns for youth, African-Americans, and workers as for women, ER was able to modernize her ideology and her image as she observed social feminism no longer to be either central or necessary to liberal politics.

As a symbol of female political participation, ER reveals even more about the fate of social feminism and about the American electorate. The women's groups discussed here, like the myriad others working during this period, sought to ignite the political potential of the female electorate. As discussed throughout this dissertation,

these groups used a variety of methods to reach out to women going about their daily lives. ER's public persona, more than any other source, provided social feminists with access not only to the White House but to the millions of individual homes that made up the American electorate. Through this access social feminists had the chance to sell Americans a 'new and improved' model of womanhood, and citizenship, in which political identity was dramatically expanded from its roots in voluntary associations and civic groups to include national political participation. Through newspapers, magazines and radio, ER represented social feminists, as a celebrity endorses a product. ER's growing sense in the late 1930s and early 1940s that gender was a less defining characteristic of her political identity and women's rights a less significant issue than other social problems, reflected a national trend noted by historians of the post World War II period that resulted in the decline of social feminism.¹⁷⁰

The work of historians Robyn Muncy and Susan Ware suggests however that female New Dealers as a whole were not as able as ER to transcend social feminism.¹⁷¹ Frances Perkins' is a good example of this predicament. Perkins viewed her appointment as Secretary of Labor not as an individual achievement but rather as an endorsement of a value system developed and promoted by the National Consumers' League. Following World War II, when the Cold War chilled public support for liberal causes, the ideology represented by Perkins fell from favor and her career was over. By identifying so strongly with the National Consumers' League Perkins' individual expertise as an administrator and political operative was not recognized and therefore her career could not overcome changes in political climate.

Most of the leading social feminists retired in the 1940s in part because they tended to be older than ER but also because their expertise was indelibly tied to the doctrine of social feminism – which was predicated on a gendered social welfare agenda that by the 1940s seemed out of date. As the New Deal instituted new liberalism, social feminists lost their unifying principle. As reflected by ER’s rhetoric on democracy, social welfare was no longer a women’s issue -- it was now fundamental to American government as a whole. As the generation of who defined social feminism during the end of the suffrage campaign retired they were not replaced with younger women in equal numbers or with equal zeal. The generation of women coming of age in the 1940s took woman suffrage for granted and did not see women’s organizations as a necessary vehicle to career in politics because the previous generation, led by ER, had opened the parties up to them. This is not to say that women were now equally represented in politics but rather to suggest that gender was no longer the organizing principle of women’s political agenda. Women continued to join the League of Women Voters, Women’s Trade Union League, and National Consumers’ League; however, women’s identities as workers and citizens rather than as wives and mothers guided their thinking. For those women drawn to politics it was no longer necessary to couch their political identities in traditional female roles.

While social feminism ultimately failed to stimulate mass political participation by women neither did ER’s argument in favor of greater political participation by all Americans reverse the trend toward declining voter participation following World War II. Instead it was the consumerist compromise that took hold of American politics in the post

war period. Americans' identities as consumers took on political significance in the New Deal and were strongly promoted by ER and other social feminists who viewed consumer culture as critical to women's entry into politics. Rather than igniting greater civic responsibility among Americans as ER and the National Consumers' League had hoped, Americans came out of the Great Depression with the view that the freedom to consume represented the best that democracy had to offer, displacing ER's more complex notion of democracy, which depended on the informed participation of the electorate.¹⁷² ER was right that a basic level of comfort was needed to make people love their country, and the deprivation of that comfort caused by the Great Depression, for a time, ignited public interest in politics, making ER's rise to power possible. But instead of a tolerant, educated, and involved electorate the Cold War ushered in fear, suspicion, and a desire for distraction from the impending doom now represented by politics. So instead of getting the activist consumer citizen imagined by ER and social feminists, particularly members of the NCL, what emerged was Elizabeth's Cohen's citizen consumer, shopping for candidates and legislation that best served their individual self-interest and immersed in a consumer culture represented by suburban homes and conspicuous consumption designed to break down Americans sense of national community and instead promote comfort and safety within the nuclear family.

Like Sinclair Lewis in *Main Street* ER saw in consumer culture the opportunity to break down divisions between rural and urban citizens and between men and women. She saw the media as a way to send a unifying message to the nation and Americans' shared identities as consumers to be central to women's entry into the public sphere of

politics. Furthermore, ER saw national markets as linking the prosperity of rural producers with urban consumers and vice versa. Like Lewis's protagonist Carol Kennicott, ER accepted the consumer compromise in the 1920s and early 1930s and struggled to carve out a political identity for women that fit within traditional social mores. Social feminism as a movement suffered the limitations foreshadowed by Kennicott's experience. Kennicott's failure to question the validity of her own middle-class gender assumptions made her unable to articulate and achieve a sustained social reform agenda in *Gopher Prairie*. Her fears of appearing too radical or unladylike made her unable to change the world around her either in her own mind or materially. In contrast to Kennicott and to social feminists generally,

ER's work on the nature of democracy suggested that she was able to overcome the limits of gender norms, creating for herself a prominent place in the human rights movement of the mid-twentieth century that was not predicated on a gendered ideology but rather on liberal philosophy developed through experience, growth, and achievement.

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¹⁶⁷ Roosevelt, Eleanor, "Various Occupations for Women" *It's Up to the Women*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., p. 175.

¹⁶⁸ June 16, 1938 Beasley, *The White House Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt*, p. 54.

¹⁶⁹ Lois Scharf, "ER and Feminism" *Without Precedent*, p. 238. Earlier and subsequent statements by ER opposing the ERA can be found in her press conferences dated February 27, 1939.

¹⁷⁰ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004; Dennis A. Deslippe, "Rights, Not Roses:" *Unions*

and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-1980. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000; Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women United Auto Workers, 1935-1975*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990; Ruth Milkman, *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of Women's Labor History*. New York: Routledge, 1975.

¹⁷¹ Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*.

¹⁷² Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, p. 112-165.

Conclusion

“The very existence of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, under Eleanor Roosevelt’s leadership creates a climate where it is possible to recognize and do something about discrimination against women in terms not only of pay but of the subtle barriers to opportunity.”¹

On February 13, 1962 the first meeting of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) convened in Washington D.C. Commissioned by President John F. Kennedy, the PCSW was charged with recommending a series a measures designed to “overcome discrimination on the basis of gender in employment.”² The formation of the PCSW was an unprecedented statement of governmental opposition to gender discrimination in employment and support for women’s organizations actively working for the improvement of conditions for women. The commission was an invitation for women’s groups to voice long-held grievances regarding sex discrimination and an opportunity to achieve consensus among feminists who, since the introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, had pursued opposing agendas. Finally, the PCSW was an example of the post-war liberal consensus – the acceptance of an ideal that social feminists had been promoting since the turn of the twentieth century that government had the right and the responsibility to regulate business practices on behalf of American citizens.³ The PCSW serves an ideal example of both social feminists’ achievements with regard to the modernization of American political culture and the changes in gender norms that they helped facilitate. Together, these political

achievements and cultural changes, by mid-century, rendered the social feminist ideology largely obsolete as a force for effective change.

The Commission brought together social and radical feminists in an effort to bridge the ideological gap created between them by the introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment. The Women's Bureau coalition included social feminist organizations -- Woman's Trade Union League, National Consumers' League, and League of Women Voters among others. The commission also included supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment including the National Woman's Party and a number of other groups whose support it had won during the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ The most notable of these was the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), which had thrown its considerable resources behind the social feminist agenda throughout the 1920s and 1930s but finally endorsed the ERA in 1944 after a ten-year study of the issue.

The GFWC's reversal regarding the ERA was representative of the gradual sea change occurring among feminists.⁵ This warming to the idea of the equal rights was precipitated largely by changes in the role of women in the workplace between 1920 and 1950. World War II dramatically increased the number of American women working outside the home, as women were needed to fill existing jobs vacated by American servicemen and new positions born out of increased wartime production. Attitudes toward married women workers markedly changed during this period from the 1930s view that married women workers were stealing jobs needed by male breadwinners to the 1940s view that they were performing a vital service to their country by filling their husband's positions. While the conclusion of the war precipitated a return to a more

traditional rhetoric urging women, particularly married women, to forfeit jobs to returning soldiers, a post-war economic boom resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of clerical jobs available to women. As a result, many of the women who entered the work force as a temporary wartime measure remained employed following the war.⁶

The gradual expansion of women's roles outside the home contributed to the decline of the social feminist ideology, which stressed women's roles as wives and mothers as the foundation for their political identities. By 1962 the Women's Bureau coalition had come to see women's roles more broadly as a result of social and political changes in America. Gradual public acceptance of women's permanent presence in the work force made it possible for social feminists to acknowledge women's public lives as components of their political identities without alienating middle and upper class women. Furthermore, the membership of their organizations began to include more working women.⁷ Lastly, social feminist lobbyists and politicians found that as social welfare reform was institutionalized as part of the New Deal their agendas no longer reflected a primarily female political philosophy and they found that in attempting to represent women alone they often limited their political opportunities.⁸

The Women's Bureau's leadership in the formation and administration of the PCSW in the 1960s reflects a change in emphasis from concern specifically with governmental regulation of working-class women's employment to a general acknowledgement of women's freedom to work and right to do so on the same terms as men. Although social feminists had always fought to safeguard women workers through protective legislation, their rhetoric encouraging women's political participation

throughout the 1920s and 1930s appealed primarily to middle-class and elite women as wives and mothers and aligned their political identities with the civic volunteerism practiced by women who did not work outside the home. By the 1960s the rise in the number of professional women workers from among the middle and elite classes and married women of all classes led the Woman's Bureau coalition to see women's status as workers as an integral part of their collective political identities and the need to improve the status of women workers as grounds for their political participation.⁹

The Women's Bureau's recognition of the permanent presence of women in the workforce and their responsiveness to changing trends in the lives of American women are illustrated by their willingness to compromise with supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment in the PCSW. The potential invalidation of protective legislation enacted for women was the most significant threat that social feminists feared from the ERA in the 1920s. The NWP had argued that labor legislation should apply equally to both men and women in order not to limit opportunities for women workers, however, legislators and courts in the 1920s were not amenable to passing and upholding protective measures for men. The passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) established a national minimum wage and overtime pay among other measures that had previously been legislated on a piecemeal basis for women. This made it possible to extend labor protections to workers regardless of sex, making the NWP ideal possible. The FLSA's guarantee of protective measures regardless of sex allowed the Women's Bureau coalition to alter their position on protective legislation for women as part of the PCSW,

arguing that protective laws for women should only remain in effect only until better laws were enacted that protected both men and women.¹⁰

As result of both the passage of the FLSA and the increase in the number of women employed in professional positions, many members of the Women's Bureau coalition came to agree with the NWP that protective legislation was a detriment to career advancement for many women.¹¹ When members of the commission failed to agree to recommend that work hour limits be applied to men as they were to women, the Women's Bureau coalition agreed that work hour limits for women should be applied "flexibly," exempting professional positions.¹² While the Commission did not endorse the Equal Rights Amendment, the Women's Bureau coalition's reevaluation of their views in light of changing workplace conditions for women was vital to the commission's ability to take a strong united stance against sex discrimination. Their recommendations ultimately led President Kennedy to eliminate institutionalized sex discrimination in civil service employment practices, thereby setting a precedent for "equal opportunity" employment laws that would subsequently include private employers as well.¹³

Despite social feminists' willingness to compromise regarding protective measures for women, committee rhetoric reflected the continuing presence of social feminist ideology into the 1960s. In order to appease continuing popular sentiment, the committee repeatedly acknowledged the primacy of women's roles as mothers.¹⁴ This assumption affected their recommendations regarding education and childcare among others. Their education policy illustrates the committee's efforts to allow women the

opportunity to re-enter the workforce after their children were grown. They argued that educational institutions needed to accommodate the “patterns of women’s lives,” which often included the need for retraining following an extended absence from the workforce due to child-rearing.¹⁵ More significantly, the commission chose not to support childcare, except for welfare recipients. In so doing, they prevented many women from choosing work outside the home as an alternative to taking primary responsibility for childrearing.¹⁶ The President’s Commission on the Status of Women reveals growing consensus among feminists regarding the importance of women’s roles outside the home yet it also points to continued ambivalence regarding how to juggle women’s roles as mothers with their professional lives.¹⁷

Although the PCSW illustrates that social feminism as a strategy for inspiring female political activism was losing influence in response to changing trends in women’s work, it also demonstrates the lasting impact of social feminist efforts during the 1920s and 1930s. The PCSW, which sought to keep its recommendations within the limits of popular approval, demonstrated the defeat of laissez-faire liberalism and the broad acceptance both within the Kennedy administration and among the American public at large of the social feminist version of liberalism which stressed government’s responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. The relationship between the PCSW and President Kennedy reflected a major change in American political culture that social feminists had strongly encouraged. It reflected the transformation from a political culture in which political parties were the primary drivers behind administrative policy to one influenced by consumerism in which presidents influenced policy by appealing directly

to the public via the media and in which lobbies had direct access to the president through highly publicized and institutionalized meetings like those of the PCSW.¹⁸ Lastly, social feminists' efforts to call public attention to the plight of women workers through their many magazine and newspaper articles, speeches, and lobbying campaigns rendered visible women's labor outside the home, calling on middle-class and elite women to work together with working-class women to improve the status of women. These efforts established a public discourse regarding women's work outside the home that chipped away at deeply imbedded cultural assumptions about gender roles and gradually increased public acceptance of women's work outside the home.

Unlike social feminists of the 1920s who were hard-pressed to convince legislators and judges that government had the right to intervene in business practices and regulate labor relations, the PCSW benefited from both legal precedent in the form of the FLSA (which was upheld in court in 1942) and the general belief that government had not only the right but the duty to set and regulate employment standards. This belief, which was the foundation for the social feminist reform agenda in the 1920s, was promoted consistently by social feminists in their major campaigns for protective legislation in the interwar period.¹⁹ The Women's Trade Union League spearheaded efforts by social feminists to discredit the laissez-faire political philosophy in favor of an expanded notion of American liberalism in their rhetoric opposing the ERA during this period as well. Their demands that government be accountable for the welfare of its citizens were rooted in progressive rhetoric that had lost sway during the 1920s. Social feminists' unwavering support of modern liberalism laid the foundation for a return of

popular and political support during the Great Depression. Many leading social feminists also played an active role in the creation of the welfare state they had long envisioned through their participation in the New Deal.²⁰

The PCSW illustrates the increasing power of the presidency and political lobbyists within post-World War II American political culture. President Kennedy's invitation to the PCSW and his enactment of policies based on their recommendations were important examples of presidential efforts to alter both public opinion and federal policy in favor of greater acceptance of women's roles in the workforce. Beginning with Teddy Roosevelt's "Bully pulpit" and increasing with FDR's (and ER's) extensive use of the media to appeal directly to the American people rather than working simply with their representatives in Congress, the emergence of mass culture precipitated a dramatic increase in the power of the presidency.²¹ The League of Women Voters led social feminist efforts to undermine nineteenth-century party-based political culture in favor of one that was more candidate and issue-based and which was significantly influenced by the methods of public persuasion found in consumer culture. Through the Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns of the 1920s social feminists encouraged citizens to become experts on candidates and issues before voting and to make their political choices based on their own analysis rather than on party affiliation. In part as a result of this change, the modern president gained unprecedented access to the media and thus far greater opportunity to influence public opinion than any other government official.

The PCSW also demonstrates political lobbyists' power to influence policy through direct access to the office of the presidency. In the twentieth century, executives

relied increasingly on expert political lobbyists to keep them informed about the latest information on a given issue, monitor and influence the state of public opinion, and provide vital political support. Organized labor, environmentalists, manufacturers, physicians, lawyers, gun owners and countless other groups exercise influence on elected officials by promising political support in the form of votes, publicity, and fund-raising in exchange for legislative support on important issues. Filling the vacuum left behind as political parties lost sole control over legislative agendas, social feminists were among the first to develop strong lobbies, approaching politicians directly and offering them women's votes in exchange for political support for their agendas.²² The Women's Joint Congressional Committee, which lobbied for the Child Labor Amendment as well as measures protecting women workers, is one example of women's groups pooling their resources to form a strong issued-based lobby. The PCSW embodied modern political culture by bringing lobbyists into direct contact with the president in a highly publicized forum designed to represent and sway public opinion.

The PCSW highlights social feminists' continuous struggle to publicize women's work outside the home, improve the conditions of women's work, and win greater recognition for women's contributions in the fields of both work and politics. Social feminist organizations such as the League of Women Voters, the Women's Trade Union League, and the National Consumers' League encouraged female voter participation, established a place for women in places of power in politics particularly related to the administration of social welfare, and promoted a progressive political agenda that sought to improve the lives of women workers. Collectively, social feminists kept alive the

discourse regarding women's roles outside the home throughout the interwar period by their example, their calls for women to participate in politics, and their investigation and publication of the conditions of working women. Their acceptance of the consumerist compromise, which rooted middle and upper-class women's activism in time saved by modern conveniences and in women's roles as consumers, blazed a trail for women to enter public life and the professions without ideologically abandoning the traditional roles they valued. This rhetorical foundation was vital to deconstructing traditional gender norms because it rendered acceptable women's contributions outside the home and primed the public to look more favorably upon women's entry in the workplace in large numbers during World War II, easing their fears that the family would suffer as a result of mother's absence.²³ The PCSW demonstrates the lasting legacy of social feminism, even as a modern women's movement was beginning to seize control of the discourse on women's rights in the United States.²⁴

This dissertation places the efforts of social feminists within the context of major changes in American culture, politics, and gender norms. Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions, much of the historiography of women's activism in the 1920s focuses quite narrowly on the legislative efforts of individual women's organizations.²⁵ Such works tend to highlight individual leaders and specific campaigns.²⁶ This approach generally emphasizes the divisions among and within women's groups and stresses their failure to overcome the many obstacles they faced in the conservative political climate of the 1920s. Building on a foundation established by historian Susan Ware, this study takes a broader view. Using visual theory to analyze notions of gender in 1920s consumer

culture, this dissertation places the combined efforts of this dominant group of female activists within the context of major cultural and political shifts occurring in the 1920s as a result of the rise of consumer culture and the decline of political parties. Unlike previous accounts of 1920s feminist activism, this study argues that social feminists accepted a consumerist compromise in which they appropriated tenets of consumer culture both in their public relations strategies and in the model of female citizenship that they promoted.

This methodology allows for a broader examination of women's political influence by looking beyond political agendas and instead focusing on the greater influence of women's rhetoric on American political culture generally, highlighting women's role in the modernization of American citizenship. This study of social feminist political rhetoric, which introduces the consumerist compromise as a mechanism to promote the social feminist political ideology, argues that social feminists were significant drivers in the transformation of American political culture and the modernization of American liberalism. In so doing, this strategy ties the social feminist of the 1920s to New Deal rhetoric of the 1940s and labor feminism and liberal consensus ideologies in the 1950 and 1960s. Thus fortified, social feminism emerges as a significant force behind the transformation of American political culture in the image of consumerism, the development of the welfare state as a result of the modernization of American liberalism, and the expansion of gender norms to include a greater role for women outside the home in the areas of work and politics.

Endnotes

¹ Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton, 1963, p. 361.

² A selection of documents from the PCSW may be found in Laughlin, Kathleen A. How Did State Commissions on the Status of Women Overcome Historic Antagonisms between Equal Rights and Labor Feminists to Create a New Feminist Main Stream, 1963-1973 in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds. *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* accessed through University of California, Riverside at <http://library.ucr.edu/> accessed 9/19/2009. Also see Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. For more on feminism in the post-World War II period see Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-war America, 1945-1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994; Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987; Diane Blaser, *Sisterhood and Solidarity: Feminism and Labor in Modern Times*. Boston: South End Press, 1987; Steven Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman suffrage, Equal Rights and Beyond*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990; Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics: From Consciousness to Mass Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

³ The historiography of post-World War II liberalism is immense but begins with: Allida Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; William H. Chafe, *The Achievement of American Liberalism: The New Deal and its Legacies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Leonard A. Williams, *American Liberalism and Ideological Change*. DeKalb: Illinois University Press, 1997; Stephen P. Depoe, *Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr and the Ideological History of American Liberalism*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994; Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Merrill Peterson, *Coming of Age with the New Republic, 1938-1950*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999.

⁴ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 139.

⁵ Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*. New York: New York University Press, 1986, p. 170; "ER and Feminism" *Without Precedent: The Life and Career of Eleanor Roosevelt*. Hoff-Wilson, Joan and Marjorie Lightman, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 244.

⁶ For more on the subject of changes in women's employment in the twentieth century see: Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of America's Wage-earning Women*. New York: Oxford University Press 1982; Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982; Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984; Harrison, *On Account of Sex*; Nancy Baker Wise, *A Mouthful of Rivets: Women at Work in World War II*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987; Susan Thistle, *From Marriage to the Market: The Transformation of Women's Lives and Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

⁷ The biographical roster of the Minnesota commission is one example of the involvement of working women "**Biographical Roster, Governor's Commission on the Status of Women,**" 1964, Box 54, Viola Hoffman Hymes Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn. Included in Laughlin, Kathleen

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⁸ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

⁹ The Women's Bureau's extensive lobbying efforts resulted in the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1961. Their leadership of the PCSW throughout the 1960s reveals their unprecedented focus on issues related to the conditions of labor for women.

¹⁰ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 152.

¹¹ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 151.

¹² Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 152.

¹³ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 145.

¹⁴ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 154.

¹⁵ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 154.

¹⁶ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 154.

¹⁷ The PCSW is significant because it represents the confluence of the two major strains of early twentieth-century feminism that just few years later would be overshadowed by a new generation of feminists represented by the National Organization of Women (NOW), which in 1966 formalized growing feminist sentiment among college students, civic rights activists, and other mostly young women who took for granted women's rights to a political voice and to work outside the home, rights for which post-suffrage feminists had fought.

¹⁸ For more on the notion of the "imperial presidency" see: Mari and Paul McCaffey, editors, *The American Presidency*. New York: H.W. Wilson CO. 2008; Matthew Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, editors, *Presidential Power: Unchecked and Unbalanced*. New York: Norton, 2007; Aida DiPace Donald, *Lion in the White House: A life of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: Basic Books, 2007; Matthew Dickinson, *Bitter Harvest: FDR, Presidential Power, and the Growth of the Presidential Branch*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Carol Gelderman, *All the President's Words: The Bully Pulpit and the Creation of the Virtual Presidency*. New York: Walker and CO., 1997; G.H. Bennett, *The American Presidency, 1945-2000: Illusions of Grandeur*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000; Alan Schroeder, *Celebrity-in-Chief: How Show business took over the White House*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004; Robert A. Wilson, editor, *Character Above All: Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995; Mark J. Rozell and William D. Pederson, eds, *FDR and the Modern Presidency: Leadership and Legacy*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997.

¹⁹ Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

²⁰ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*; Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism*; Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*.

²¹ Rozell and Pederson, *FDR and the Modern Presidency*; J. White Graham, *FDR and the Press*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

²² For a history of the rise American lobbies in the Progressive era see Elizabeth Saunders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers and the American State, 1877-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

²³ Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, p. 138.

²⁴ The National Organization of Women (NOW), which would spearhead the modern women's liberation movement, was formed in 1966, just 3 years after the PCSW made their recommendations to President Kennedy.

²⁵ Such exceptions featured prominently in discussions here including: Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*; Anna L. Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*; Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*

²⁶ Joan M. Jensen and Lois Scarf, *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983; Klein *Gender Politics*; Linda Gordon, *Women, the State and Welfare*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*, New York: Free Press and Harvard University Press, 1994; Kristi Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996; Sara Hunter Graham, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996; Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage*; Susan D. Becker, *Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981; Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights*; Elizabeth Anne Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robb and the Women's Trade Union League*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Louise and Ralph Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989; Linda G. Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's party, 1912-1920*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*; Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism*; Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2004; Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism*.

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