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# "Fine Dignity, Picturesque Beauty, and Serious Purpose": The Reorientation of Suffrage Media in the Twentieth Century

Emily Scarbrough

*Eastern Illinois University*

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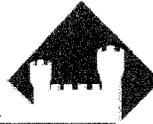
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BY

Emily Scarbrough

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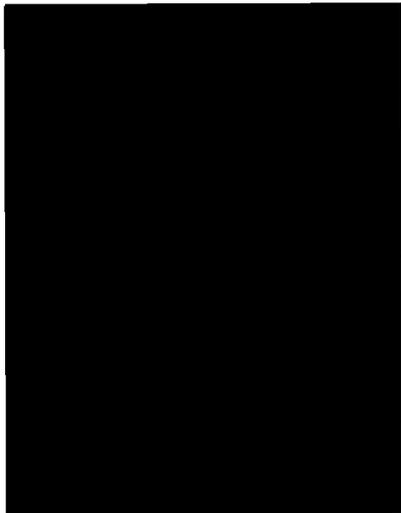
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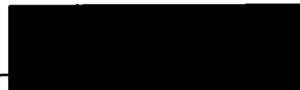
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### **Abstract**

Throughout the first half century of the woman's suffrage movement, the women of the movement were depicted as dastardly, masculine women who usurped the family structure with their penchant for politics. In the twentieth century, a new generation of woman's suffragists took command of their appearance in the media. Instead of controversial figures, woman's suffragists were envisioned as normal, beautiful women and mothers. Through the use of mass media, woman suffragists restructured their campaign to convince the general public that society needed women to clean up politics. In doing so, suffragists sacrificed their goals of sexual equality in favor of their particular femininity. They celebrated their gender as the particular reason that they *needed* the vote, unlike earlier suffragists who declared that they *deserved* it. Using film, postcards, illustrations, and public demonstrations, suffragists created a comprehensive campaign that reached millions with the singular message that enfranchisement would be both politically significant and a natural extension of feminine virtues. Though the woman's suffrage movement in the twentieth century was one of modern means, the message was fundamentally traditional.

### **Acknowledgements**

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**“Fine Dignity, Picturesque Beauty, and Serious Purpose”:  
The Reorientation of Suffrage Media in the Twentieth Century**

*All we ask and expect is a fair hearing and the same consideration which would be given to a great organization of men, an organization of national scope and size. For we are proposing to bring to Washington the leading women from every state in the Union – women of splendid standing and dignity, college women, professional women, homemakers, mothers, and workers. The demonstration is to be one of fine dignity, picturesque beauty, and serious purpose.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> “The Suffrage Parade,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 7, 1913, 6.

## Introduction

On March 3, 1913 thousands of American women marched in Washington D.C. for the cause of woman's suffrage. They were militant marchers, yet they balanced their dedication with femininity and nonaggressive behavior. Some wore all white, the color of purity, others pushed strollers and handed out sandwiches, representing their domestic lives as wives and mothers; women assembled from states all over and from every walk of life – African American women were forced to parade separately, but they came nonetheless. The parade stood as a sign of solidarity – women wanted the vote.<sup>2</sup> Inez Milholland, a lawyer, activist, and suffragist emerged as the face of the movement by riding a pure white horse through the nation's capital wearing all white. She embodied the vision of suffragists as beautiful, young, vibrant women, whose passion and dedication likened them to modern-day Joan of Arcs. Their militancy was seen, not as masculine or threatening, but as virtuous and just.

The parade began the day before Woodrow Wilson's first inauguration as President of the United States, and the women marched right up to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, championing the cause of woman's suffrage. It was a message to the president-elect and the mob who greeted the suffragists that they were no longer the old, unwed spinsters of the nineteenth century. Woman suffragists stood, as Mrs. Helen Gardener envisioned, with "fine dignity, picturesque beauty, and serious purpose."<sup>3</sup>

The woman's suffrage parade in Washington D.C. was one of a great many efforts that suffragists made in the first two decades of the twentieth century to take control over media portrayals. Their message had been restricted to small groups of women who communicated

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<sup>2</sup> In reality, many women in America did not want the vote. They formed anti-suffragist leagues, including the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS). However, suffragists sought to create a parade that showed the support rather than opposition to woman's suffrage.

<sup>3</sup> "The Suffrage Parade."

primarily amongst themselves in closed meetings and conferences throughout the nineteenth century, when woman suffragists struggled immensely to gain support. While the movement saw some early victories in the West, by the 1880s political gains had slowed to a crawl. Many historians refer to the period as the “doldrums” of woman’s suffrage.<sup>4</sup> Out of this, however, emerged a strikingly different suffrage movement.

Twentieth century suffragists tried to engage the masses through a variety of new media – film, postcards, photographs, mass market magazines and newspapers as well as suffrage newspapers. They took control over how they were portrayed in the public’s eye to appeal broadly to both voters and their wives. They used mass media – a new phenomenon related to technological innovations like improved printing, film, and newspaper circulation – that created a culture that was predominantly homosocial. Instead of the stratified class culture of the nineteenth century, mass culture helped integrate men and women of various classes and backgrounds to the same cultural dialog.<sup>5</sup>

As cultural venues became increasingly affordable for the less wealthy, culture became a meeting place for bottom-up and trickle-down processes of exchange. Michael Kammen argued that class lines began to dissolve between popular forms of entertainment in the late nineteenth century as leisure activities underwent a price revolution.<sup>6</sup> Class tastes continued to mingle to form an increasingly muddled division among Americans. Essentially, he argued that American culture, as it became more universal, was inherently democratic because it could reject a singular

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<sup>4</sup> The “doldrums” was a term first used by Aileen Kraditor in Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman’s Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). It has come under some criticism though, as other historians, such as Steven Buechler in Steven Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement: The Case of Illinois* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986.), argue that the period was a staging ground, during which time the movement saw a dramatic regime change that shaped the arguments and methods that followed in the twentieth century.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 32.

cultural authority, and it allowed for widespread participation. As culture became more universal in the Progressive era, suffragists became more adept at using mass media as a vehicle to communicate with the masses.

The suffrage parade in March, 1913 stands as a single example of how twentieth-century woman suffragists consciously took ownership of the visual representation of their cause. The new generation of suffragists embraced a wider range of tactics than nineteenth century suffragists had. They promoted a vision of women voters who deserved the vote, but still maintained positively feminine characteristics. They argued that the vote would not make women manlier, but that women could make the vote into a tool for positive reform. This tenet of the new suffrage argument was very much a part of the wider Progressive reform movement. Women became, in the words of many historians, municipal housekeepers. They extended the sphere of what was considered woman's roles by arguing that political reform outside the home was directly related to the lives and welfare of their own families. Further, women took up causes that championed the nation's youth because women felt the need to protect children. This rise of female activism is linked directly to the rise of higher education for women; as upper-class women graduated from college they sought to use their education without acquiring wage earning positions, which were very rarely held by women of status. The rise of women's clubs in the early 1900s was very much a product of educated women.

Many suffrage advocates began in positions of municipal housekeeping. Activists, in large part, saw the potential that the vote had for reform. They did not subscribe to the ideology that men and women were equal, but rather that women needed special protective legislation to counteract oppression of women and protect children. Some activists supported the suffrage movement as a means to promote these women's issues. Municipal housekeeping served as a

bridge between radical suffrage in the nineteenth century and women in the public sphere during the twentieth century. Municipal housekeeping contended that women had an equal burden of citizenship through the influence that society held upon their homes. The concept was very much rooted in traditional gender roles, yet it proposed a modern approach to dealing with problems facing society.

In a similar vein, suffrage emerged as a way for activist women to engage in politics by presenting the cause as both very traditionally related to women's traditional gender roles, but as a modern method for reform. But, in order to effectively argue that activism and suffrage were both natural extensions of woman's domestic position, woman suffragists presented a vision of suffragists as idealized, hyper-feminine creatures who needed the vote to spread the positive values which they embodied.

Woman suffragists from both state and national organizations crafted and refined their new identity in emerging mass media of print, film, and newspapers, all of which, became essential facets of popular culture in the early twentieth century. In doing so, suffragists broadcast their arguments of the nineteenth century to a much wider audience. Through the use of mass media, woman's suffrage presented itself as a mainstream movement. It shed its nineteenth century public portrayal as a radical revolution of gender roles, by suggesting that enfranchisement would strengthen, not diminish, feminine virtue.

My aim in this thesis is to identify precisely why and how woman suffragists were able to take control over their portrayal in the media between 1910 and 1920, and how their manipulation of the suffrage image allowed them to reach a wide audience. New media were crucial to taking a marginal movement and making it mainstream. Through new access to print and film production methods, the suffragists used media made for and by themselves. They

employed cartoonists, producers, and organizers specifically to rebrand suffrage in a way that made votes for women nonthreatening. By 1920 it was not a question of whether women would win the vote, but only when they would. The suffrage media essentially changed the concept of woman's suffrage by presenting an alternative idea of what a woman voter could be. Instead of being a radical, masculine, threatening figure, woman suffragists could appeal to traditional roles for women.

Woman suffrage activists took control of this cultural shift in America by taking ownership of their own print organs and film productions. Further, they engaged in the type of public spectacle that captured the attention of newspapers nation-wide. For suffragists, the most essential part of their persistent campaign was being in the limelight as conversation pieces. During the 1910s suffragists became masters of gaining and maintaining the attention of masses. Whether or not individuals supported suffrage, they were certainly discussing it in a way that no one would have done in the preceding years.

Though the suffrage movement formally began in 1848, by the twentieth century very little had changed for women's political roles. The only states to implement woman's suffrage laid west of the Mississippi where only a very small percentage of the nation's population resided. The so-called "doldrums" persisted into the twentieth century when the older leaders of the movement – Anthony, Stanton, Stone, and others – passed away.<sup>7</sup> The new leaders of the movement emerged from a new background of educated, middle-class women rooted in reform activism.

NAWSA was reinvigorated by young college women interested in the vote for a variety of reasons. Many young females felt that their ability to use their degree was dramatically

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<sup>7</sup> Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman's Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

restricted because they had limited political power – they could not vote. From among these young college-educated suffragists emerged Alice Paul – who quickly revolutionized the way that women campaigned for the vote. Paul had been an eye witness to the British suffrage movement and admired the militant strategy of its activists. Unhappy with the slow progress of NAWSA, she organized her own suffrage organization, the National Women’s Party (NWP). The NWP and NAWSA often butted heads in the last decade of the suffrage movement, but together they embraced new tactics to make suffrage possible.

Fundamentally, this study is one of modernity. It traces the way that NAWSA and the NWP defined themselves for the public. They embraced mass media as a method to create a marketable, approachable model of who suffragists were and what suffragists could be. In a short article from 1999, Susan Strasser explained, “Americans became *consumers* during the Progressive Era.”<sup>8</sup> The twentieth century had replaced the face-to-face, individualized relationship of customers and replaced it with an amalgam of people labeled “the consumer.” It was a new world where industry replaced agriculture, moving films replaced vaudeville, and brightly colored photos could grace the covers of magazines. Individual leisure time was largely overwhelmed by commercial amusements like Coney Island and Nickelodeon motion picture theaters.<sup>9</sup> Americans were bombarded with advertisements and postcards. Images were everywhere, constantly emitting a subtle influence on the thoughts and opinions of millions of Americans. The distinction between “high” and “low” brow culture dissolved with the rise of new media that confronted not one singular class of Americans, but rather all of them.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Strasser, “Customer to Consumer: The New Consumption in the Progressive Era,” *OAH Magazine of History* 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 11.

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent look at the rise of the commercialization of leisure read Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1999), 42-43.

Progressive era departed through its use of commercialized leisure and a prominent visual culture that thrived in magazines, newspapers, postcards, and films.

The woman's suffrage movement has been studied extensively since the rise of gender history in the 1960s and 1970s. Older histories were particularly interested in the political history of the movement from its inception in 1848 to its conclusion in 1920.<sup>11</sup> Since then, historians have become increasingly more focused on what elements of the movement they choose to study. Some have written extensive biographies about leading figures, while some have chosen to focus on geographical campaigns. Hundreds of articles and books exist on the topic of woman's suffrage.

At the core, the story of the woman's suffrage movement is a reflection of the Progressive era. To understand the way that women in the Progressive era worked, lived, and played, Nan Estad's *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* is an indispensable resource. She examines how material culture and consumerism interacted with working-class women.<sup>12</sup> Along those same lines, Kathy Peiss's *Cheap Amusements* looks extensively at the rise of leisure activities and the gendered implications for young, single, working-class women.<sup>13</sup> These two works both contribute tremendously to the scholarship on the consumption of popular and mass culture in the Progressive era.

Margaret Finnegan's *Selling Suffrage* presents the suffrage movement as a sellable commodity.<sup>14</sup> She envisions woman's suffrage as a product whose advertising was increasingly

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<sup>11</sup> Examples of this type of history include: Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959). Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman's Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). Anne Scott, *One Half the People: The Fight For Woman Suffrage* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975). Ellen Carol Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Woman's Movement, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Nan Estad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

nanced in the 1910s. As mass consumerism became a reality in the lives of women, woman suffragists developed a campaign that tailored their approach to a system of salesmanship and advertising. Along those same lines, Ann Marie Nicolosi examines the effectiveness of selling the suffrage ideal with beauty in her article “The Most Beautiful Suffragette: Inez Milholland and the Political Currency of Beauty.”<sup>15</sup> Nicolosi places an emphasis on the use of beautiful models in suffrage political displays. Inez Milholland became the symbol for woman’s suffrage because of her remarkable beauty, a trait that became incredibly significant for the revitalized movement.

Alice Sheppard’s *Cartooning For Suffrage* examines a wide variety of media that suffragists produced and that outside magazines created.<sup>16</sup> She situates the suffrage movement in terms of both its political and cultural history. She frames the typical images that both suffragists and their detractors employed, but also situates those depictions into the political narrative. Further, she identifies key symbols for both the movement and the opposition.

To better understand how, when, and why woman suffragists made this transformation of their identity in the media, I have examined a number of suffrage produced materials. In particular, the publications *The Suffragist* and *The Woman Citizen* provide great insight into how the suffragists of the National Woman’s Party (NWP) and National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), respectively, planned, created, and shared the ultra-feminine vision of woman suffragists. The publications provide information about the tactics used by suffragists to recruit and expand, but also provide cartoons that help reinforce the identity that they created.

Further, suffrage organization in the early 1910s engaged in film production. NAWSA created three films – *Votes For Women* (1912), *Eighty Million Women Want--?* (1913), and *Your*

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Marie Nicolosi, “The Most Beautiful Suffragette: Inez Milholland and the Political Currency of Beauty,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 6 (July, 2007): 287-309.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Sheppard, *Cartooning For Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

*Girl and Mine* (1914). Additional groups like the Women's Political Union (WPU) in New York made films as well. Suffragists themselves had many disagreements, but they still presented a consistent image. Women suffragists in print, film, parades, photos, and postcards were young, beautiful, sympathetic, mothers and wives, and above all else, feminine. Of course, because of their age it is very difficult to find the full films preserved. For films that have not survived, I depend on film trade magazines that discuss studio, publication, and review information. The films that were preserved provide insightful glimpses into the careful way that suffragists presented themselves, but the ones that have been destroyed still demonstrate one of the avenues used to convey the suffragists' main motives and ideas. When taken into consideration with newspapers, magazines, and postcards, the media campaign of suffragists becomes more clear.

Equally important to understanding this cultural transformation of woman suffragists is analyzing how successful they were in changing the minds of the American public. To determine how much sympathy woman suffragists won or lost during this period I have consulted a range of newspapers as well as popular film and newspapers. The newspapers come from major urban centers that were polarized by the idea of woman suffrage – New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C. being the most notable. I have also encountered a number of popular magazines of the time including: *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Puck*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and *Life Magazine*. Film trade magazines, *Moving Picture World*, *Motion Picture News*, *Motography*, and *Photoplay*, provide reviews and film production information not only on suffrage films, but also films that depicted suffragists in a negative light. The reaction to woman suffrage media is equally important because it reveals how effective the suffragists' media campaign was. Additionally, the films helped keep suffrage as a popular topic. Even negative depictions perpetuate discussion.

Additionally, secondary sources on the rise of mass media like Lary May's *Screening Out The Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* and Kay Sloan's *The Loud Silents* help set new media within their emerging context.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, chapter one examines the Progressive-era context for the suffrage movement, out of which the more culturally conscious campaign emerged. By drawing connections among media, education, and female gender roles, the chapter sets the stage for the emergence of a modern campaign. The section illuminates the suffragists' choice to move into a more perception-driven campaign that played with ideas of mass media and public spectacle, a product of the evolving society from which this new generation of suffragists emerged. I look specifically at gender norms, standards of beauty, education, and race. From these elements, we can better understand why suffrage activists developed their visual representations in the way that they chose.

The second chapter looks more specifically at the woman's suffrage movement in the twentieth century. It examines the political shifts that fostered its tactical changes. It examines most closely the intent of woman suffragists in embarking on this new strategy. Particularly, the chapter draws attention to the way that new leaders organized and created a political machine to produce and disseminate a newly crafted identity of woman suffragists, and how the two dominant suffrage organizations – the NWP and NAWSA – interacted.

Chapter three suggests that the public spectacles of parades, pageants, tableaux, exposure in newspapers and magazines, depictions in film and on postcards all worked in conjunction to present a unified vision of woman suffragists. The visual rhetoric of woman's suffragists relied heavily on the standards of feminine culture in the era. To explain how they developed this visual language of woman's suffrage, I offer substantial analysis of various suffrage-produced

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<sup>17</sup> Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

media content. Woman suffragists depended on traditional understandings of feminine virtue to present an idealization of woman suffragists. This chapter examines those depictions and virtues and tries to elaborate on how and why suffragists believed this kind of visual rhetoric would have a resounding impact with their audience.

The final chapter follows the reaction that the general public had to these radical shifts to the way American suffragists were depicted. This chapter looks at media produced outside of suffrage organs to offer insight into how major news outlets, magazines, and film companies presented or rejected the suffrage ideal. It also examines the ultimate impact that the more conservative campaign had. New media, the war, and modernity held such promise for change to the existing gender norms, yet, by 1920 the suffrage campaign presented a non-revolutionary picture of the future. Early feminists struggled to reconcile their vision of womankind's future with the promise of suffrage as a natural extension of existing gender relationships.

Because this project examines a large body of media, I have developed a web-based version on Scalar. It is a form of scholarly publishing supported by the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture at the University of Southern California. The platform allows for interaction between the reader and the information presented. It allows the audience the opportunity to pursue different avenues of my research and engage the media I reference directly. The service also serves a bridge between scholars and the general public by sharing through social media. Scalar supports the a modern sensibility toward mass media, which certainly supports this study of the emergence of mass media as a political tool. The book can be viewed at <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/suffrage-on-display/index>.

The history of woman's suffrage in the United States is one of a long and complicated process. Numerous historians have examined the political tactics of the movement, but there has

been significantly less scholarship on the cultural transformation that occurred during the Progressive Era. The political success of the suffrage movement was intimately bound up in the shifting cultural perceptions of the general public. In the twentieth century woman suffragists developed their own media body to create and perpetuate a vision of woman voters. They created an identity that they could sell to mass audiences, an identity that played on existing gender roles instead of challenging them. They took the radicalized vision of the nineteenth century suffragists and instead recast the movement with mainstream appeal and calm, quiet logic.<sup>18</sup>

Suffragists in the nineteenth century interacted with the modern world with precision. They utilized new technologies and appealed to the new visual culture of the era. Instead of making suffrage a private matter, they depended on the new fascination with celebrity, fame, and spectacle. Woman suffragists presented themselves as paragons of female virtues; they were idealizations of what women should want to be. They developed a visual campaign that deradicalized the notion of women voters and replaced it with a vision that fed into emerging avenues of mass media and appealed broadly to women to want the vote and men to comply.

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<sup>18</sup> In 1848 early suffragists Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton fashioned a Declaration of Sentiments modeled after the United States Declaration of Independence that outlined the goals of the budding movement. The early suffragists also began their own newspaper named *The Revolution*. Nineteenth century suffragists had radical goals and played with the idea of revolution in a way that made the public nervous and kept the movement politically marginalized.

**Chapter One**  
**“An American Girl”**  
*The Progressive World*

*She's had a Vassar education,  
 And points with pride to her degrees;  
 She's studied household decoration;  
 She knows a dado from a frieze,  
 And tells Corots from Boldonis;  
 A Jacquemart etching, or a Haden,  
 A Whistler, too, perchance might please  
 A free and frank young Yankee maiden*  
 “An American Girl” by Brander Matthews<sup>19</sup>

In the twentieth century American woman suffragists recognized that the movement, which began a half century prior, was largely unsuccessful. Instead of opening the movement up to broader support, nineteenth century suffragists had alienated themselves through secluded meetings and private conventions. They further proposed a radical agenda that called for social, political, civil, economic equality between the sexes, and even issues like the dissolution of property rights, higher education for women, and access to divorce.<sup>20</sup> In the media they appeared as man-hating spinsters or child-abandoning mothers – outliers in the typical family structure. As a result, suffrage was either ridiculed or ignored for a majority of the nineteenth century.

Twentieth century suffragists sought to revise their image in the public's mind. To do so, they created an identity that played into existing, popular opinions on class, race, and beauty to become mainstream rather than marginal. The success of the suffrage model was largely dependent on how well suffragists understood and utilized the wider culture of the Progressive Era. Many Americans resisted changes to gender roles; the suffrage movement found itself on

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<sup>19</sup> *Our Girls: Poems in Praise of the American Girl* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1907), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Bonnie Dow, “The Revolution, 1868-1872: Expanding the Woman Suffrage Agenda,” as printed in Martha Solomon, ed. *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 78.

the front lines in a battle between progressive and traditional. In order to win both the support of women who embraced the newness of the twentieth century and those who held onto old Victorian visions of motherhood and womanliness, the suffrage cause compromised its radical vision of the future, and instead drew heavily on the past for much of its campaign in the media. Instead of framing suffrage as liberating for women, suffrage became a way to protect gender distinctions by promoting domesticity, morality, and femininity.

### **Understanding America's "Girls"**

In the course of gender history a number of woman's historians have examined the cultural expectations of women in the nineteenth century. Early gender historians like Barbara Welter have labeled the hyper-feminine cultural language of womanhood in the nineteenth century as either a cult of domesticity or a cult of true womanhood. These women, historians have argued, were supposed to, according to dominant culture, possess four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submission, and domesticity.<sup>21</sup> Historians have suggested that the women in the twentieth century departed from this exalted vision of womanhood as the ideal of the new woman emerged. The new woman was a celebration of real women. Winnifred Harper Cooley, daughter of Susan B. Anthony's biographer and author of *History of Woman Suffrage*, Ida Husted Harper, wrote in 1904 *The New Womanhood*. The book argued "the *woman* has been worshipped in almost every stage of civilization, while *women* have been degraded. The Madonna adored, while the human mother has been despised or neglected."<sup>22</sup> In response to the popular understanding of woman's role within society, this new ideal emerged, in which women were given new opportunities. They were not "limited by physical burdens and suppressed by

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1966), 152.

<sup>22</sup> Winnifred Harper Cooley, *The New Womanhood* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company: 1904), 3.

public opinion.”<sup>23</sup> In popular memory this new woman ideal is seen as a radical departure from Welter’s so-called Cult of True Womanhood, but in reality, popular gender norms persisted. The suffrage movement’s reorientation of its media presence is a reflection not of the ideal of the new woman, but primarily of the existing understanding of femininity.

Throughout the twentieth century suffrage campaign, leaders of the movement struggled to balance conservative values with progressive goals. To make the cause approachable suffragists presented themselves along similar veins as popular media mainstays. Suffragists drew on the iconography of famous American illustrators like Charles Dana Gibson and Howard Chandler Christy. Advertising illustrations defined standards for beauty by creating an ideal that was mass produced and mass circulated. The American “Girl” had a thin waist, pouty lips, dreamy eyes, and sweetly chignonned hair. These depictions appeared in catalogues, magazines, and were brought to life on film and stage by actresses like Ethel Barrymore and Evelyn Nesbit. Suffragists aligned themselves with this vision of beauty rather than the more practical and more autonomous vision that new womanhood promised. Though suffrage media presented itself as a part of the American “girl” phenomenon many of its supporters were in fact women who had experienced the “new woman” shift.

Instead of living on farms as many Americans had throughout the nineteenth century, many young women flocked to cities to work in factories and lived autonomously by the turn of the century. Historian Howard B. Furer refers to the American city as a catalyst for women. He claimed, “the total number of women gainfully employed, other than in agriculture, multiplied fivefold between 1870 and 1910.”<sup>24</sup> By moving from rural farms to the urban centers of Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, etc., women stayed single longer and were able to pursue a wider

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<sup>23</sup> Cooley, *The New Womanhood*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Furer, “The American City,” 290.

variety of goals.<sup>25</sup> Furer contended that the migration of young women into cities was paramount to the success of woman's suffrage. By moving into cities, women had greater opportunities for a dramatic rise in higher education.

Nineteenth century fears that education might dissolve the distinction between the sexes were assuaged by rooting twentieth century female educations in fundamentally feminine virtues. Universities drew heavily on traditional Victorian values when creating their female curriculum.<sup>26</sup> Education became more widespread and less of a social taboo because of the semantic distinction between male and female educations. Lynn Gordon argues that women's education in the Progressive Era was a celebration of traditional gender roles rather than a discernible challenge.<sup>27</sup> The classes, men believed, focused on domestic duties – sewing, cooking, and cleaning. In reality, many young women began reform work in temperance and settlement houses during college. However, these activities were ignored because, as Gordon argues the public could not reconcile “traditional ideas of womanhood with intellectual and professional competence.”<sup>28</sup> Despite the levity with which women's education was taken, women flocked to colleges and gained education that frequently led them down the path of reform activism. Gordon emphasized that female colleges focused on “female separatism, social activism, and belief in a special mission for educated women.”<sup>29</sup>

During the Progressive era the women who emerged from higher education often joined social clubs and committed themselves to volunteer work. Women's work inside the home had been greatly reduced by technological innovations of the industrialized era. For instance, the rise

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<sup>25</sup> Howard Furer, “The American City: A Catalyst for the Women's Rights Movement,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 52, No. 4 (Summer, 1969) 285.

<sup>26</sup> Lynn Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Lynn Gordon, “The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women's Higher Education in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920,” *American Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 211-230.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, “The Gibson Girl Goes to College,” 223.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive*, 1.

of clothing manufacturing relieved women from the responsibility of producing clothes for their families. Still though, middle class women opposed finding paid employment. Sociologist Thomas Leonard argues that people of the early twentieth century believed wage work would threaten health and morals, take jobs intended for “family wages,” and force women to abandon their eugenic responsibilities, which primarily consisted of producing strong, white, American offspring.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, if women worked in social clubs as volunteers, they extended the positive moral influence of the female sex without usurping male jobs, while maintaining their ability to raise families. To put their education to work without finding paid employment, many female graduates joined city clubs across the nation, inspiring enthusiasm to reform in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Suffragists emerged primarily out of this group of middle-class women who had been educated and had a family whose income could support their voluntary labor. Although a number of clubwomen became advocates for woman’s suffrage, these elite clubwomen were also the primary members of the highly organized antisuffrage movement as well. While the connection to reform and suffrage is very significant, the two ideas are entirely distinct.<sup>31</sup> Women reformers had a very specific vision of gendered citizenship, which developed largely out of existing gender norms and the new problem of professionalizing newly educated women. Many new political avenues that afforded women access to positions involving child welfare and regulations for female workers emerged.<sup>32</sup> Many such reformers wanted to find a place for women in politics outside of the electoral process.

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Leonard, “Protecting Family and Race: The Progressive Case for Regulating Women’s Work,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 64, no. 3 (July, 2005): 757-791.

<sup>31</sup> For an example of a new woman antisuffragist consider Josephine Dodge, the leader of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS), who attended Vassar College and was the founder of Association of Day Nurseries in New York City in 1895, yet ardently disapproved of woman’s suffrage.

<sup>32</sup> Women succeeded politically in child welfare policy. Well before women won the right to vote, Julia Lathrop, a female reformer, headed the United States Children’s Bureau (1912-1922). Historian Robyn Muncy proposes that

The reform efforts of Progressive Era women have often been referred to by both historians and contemporaries as “municipal housekeeping.” The term developed as part of the longstanding values of the Cult of True Womanhood. Municipal housekeeping argued that the welfare of a city directly influenced the welfare of their own homes – the private sphere over which women had domain. In order to help preserve the health and welfare of their own families, municipal housekeepers implored that they must maintain the health and welfare of the wider public. Through activism like sanitation, food safety, and poverty, women were not only affecting positive change for their community, but also for their own homes. Margaret Flanagan suggested that by situating city hall as a part of their own homes, women could easily justify extending their influence into the political arena. The term, she claimed “enabled women to become involved in every facet of urban affairs without arousing opposition from those who believed woman’s only place was in the home.”<sup>33</sup>

If women could extend their influence into politics on behalf of reform, suffragists argued that women required the vote as a tool for protecting their families, their homes, and their communities. Many clubwomen wanted to actively participate in politics to elicit their specific brands of reform. And although a number of clubwomen, municipal housekeepers, and other reformers rejected the claims by suffragists that women wanted and needed the vote, suffragists, themselves, promoted this idea heavily in their own media.

### **Female Consumption in the Progressive Era**

Suffragists carefully crafted their image in the media during the twentieth century. They wanted to present themselves as young, vibrant, feminine, bright, and witty. However, this vision

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the success of the bureau offered a conservative, political alternative to women. Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) xii.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Reform: The City Club and the Woman’s City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era,” *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (Oct., 1990), 1048.

they created was successful only because of an astronomical rise of media consumption in the Progressive Era. Mass media is defined by its sheer volume and distribution, it is distinguished from popular culture because it lacks a specific audience. Mass media was only made possible by technological innovations that allow for the wide circulation of identical messages and images. The Progressive Era marked a distinct shift in the way Americans consumed media because the explosion of industry at the turn of the twentieth century. Newspapers could bear more illustrations than ever before, magazines reached high circulations, postcards were at the height of popularity, and cinema was a popular leisure activity for city dwellers. Woman suffragists understood that the success of their movement would lie in two key factors: getting the support of the largest amount of women possible to create solidarity in their message and getting the support of men who already had the vote in order to ratify an amendment. To engage the broadest audiences possible, suffragists utilized a wide variety of new, emerging media.

The stratification of American culture that existed prior to the 1900s became increasingly less significant to Americans who were all reading the same newspapers, seeing the same ads, shopping from the same Sear's catalogue, swooning over the same film stars, and mailing the same postcards. American culture had much less rigid divides between high and low brow forms of entertainment.<sup>34</sup> All Americans became consumers of popular culture, which gave a great amount of influence to those who controlled the production of these new and spectacular media. In the twentieth century, woman suffragists recognized the incredible power of this command over media. As a result, suffragists took conscious ownership over their image in print, film, and in person. If suffragists could take command of this new, distinctly modern form of mass culture, they could shape the way the American public perceived their movement.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1999), 42-43.

As American leisure developed between 1890 and 1920, the working class found themselves open for the first time to entertainment as a commodity. Film became a huge attraction for workers and their families. Silent movies appealed particularly to ethnic audiences who did not need to understand English to follow plots. Patrick Mullins, a film scholar, estimated “about one third of all New York City nickelodeons were ethnic-owned or operated.”<sup>35</sup> One film historian estimated that by 1910, more than 25 percent of New Yorkers attended movies weekly and that 43 percent of Chicagoans were swept up into the Nickelodeon craze.<sup>36</sup> Cinema served as a bridge between middle- and upper-class progressive reformers and the working-class people they wanted to reform.

Middle-class reformers hoped to use the huge influence film held over the working-class to disseminate their message. A new genre of film emerged during the Progressive era in hopes that behavior of the lower classes could be shaped through idealized depictions by the people who produced the films. These social problem films, as they have been labeled, targeted questions like temperance, eugenics, child labor, white slavery, and, of course, suffrage. Film scholar Kay Sloan suggested that the genre emerged as “reformers realized that film had the capacity to solve problems, to suggest solutions that would contain disorder and push forward moderate change.”<sup>37</sup> Certainly, woman suffragists latched onto this idea of moderate change. They situated suffrage as nonthreatening and approachable in their campaign because they could gain support more quickly than if they proposed the sort of radical equality that early suffrage pioneers had proposed.

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<sup>35</sup> Patrick Mullins, “Ethnic Cinema in the Nickelodeon Era in New York City: Commerce, Assimilation, and Cultural Identity,” *Film History* 12, no.1 (2000), 116.

<sup>36</sup> Mullins, “Ethnic Cinema,” 86.

<sup>37</sup> Sloan, *The Loud Silents*, 11.

In addition to film, more Americans were reading than ever before. Census records indicate that American literacy rates rose steadily throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>38</sup> Suffragists took advantage of high literacy by creating their own newspapers. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) produced and disseminated *The Woman's Journal* (Later renamed *The Woman Citizen*) while the National Woman's Party created *The Suffragist* beginning in 1913. Further, suffragists used mass market magazines like *Puck*, *Judge*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Life*, and even locally produced newspapers as platforms for their political cartoons.

A number of women emerged as significant illustrators for the suffrage cause including: Nina Allender, the official cartoonist for *The Suffragist*, Rose O'Neill, an illustrator for *Puck* and other freelance magazines, and Lou Rogers, a feminist illustrator for *Judge*. These suffrage cartoonists helped develop a recognizable set of icons by which the public identified suffrage. Nina Allender developed the quintessential suffrage girl, who borrowed from Gibson and Christy, American standards of beauty, but imparted the suffrage message and spirit for reform. Rose O'Neill created the Kewpies, a Cherub-like figure whose chubby cheeks charmed the public. Lou Rogers played more into the vision of new womanhood; she presented suffragists as classical figures who sought to leave behind the notion that politics had no place for women.

In addition to political cartoons, postcards emerged as a popular form of visual media in the twentieth century. The early 1900s were the height of postcard popularity. As such, the illustrations on the highly exchanged, bright, colorful slips of papers often presented political opinions that celebrated the cause of woman's suffrage. Postcard collecting became a common hobby as Americans loved the exchange from friends and family. Suffragists developed and

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<sup>38</sup> Tom Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), 9.

produced their own postcards to help promote their cause. The cards were another appeal on the part of suffragists who used the cheap papers to appeal to the working-class who traded the cards scrawled with a short message on the back because it could be mailed for very little money. By circulating positive images of woman suffragists, they were able to imbue the movement with a legitimacy. In the same way that a company needed to build a brand, suffragists needed to develop an image that could be replicated across media.

Suffragists were careful in how they repeated their message in live events. They drew on themes used in their films and cartoons to create massive public demonstrations like parades, pageants, pickets, and tableaux. Many of the same themes that suffragists developed in print and film reappeared in their public spectacles. Suffragists were particularly adept at using classical Greco-Roman mythology as a foothold for their demonstrations. By drawing on universally recognized symbols, suffragists used a cultural language with which many Americans were already familiar. They used history as a way to grant a new, modern movement a sense of authority. Further, classic imagery helped emphasize the femininity and beauty of suffragists in person who wore all white robes and crowns upon their head.

Suffragists solidified their claims to legitimacy through a number of commodities. One of the most unique pieces of suffrage ephemera is *The Suffrage Cookbook*. Compiled in 1915, it featured a number of recipes submitted by famous woman suffragists. Ruth Medill McCormick's fine bread, Julia Lathrop's quick tip about organizing a kitchen, Carrie Chapman Catt's Pain d'Oeufs, and letters from six governors all appear inside the cookbook.<sup>39</sup> The cookbook is significant in that it paints suffragists as women who are working within their own home as much as they are working toward their political aims. Suffragists wanted to appear to as

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<sup>39</sup> L. O. Kleber, *The Suffrage Cookbook* (Pittsburgh: The Equal Franchise Federation of Western Pennsylvania, 1915).

feminine, and perhaps there was no singular task that appears more womanly than feeding one's family. *The Suffrage Cookbook* gives insight into how suffragists embraced consumer culture as a way to spread their campaign. In the same way that they produced media content, suffragists produced real physical objects, mementos by which they could easily be identified. Suffragists engrained the movement into popular culture by creating and distributing materials that were readily consumed in this era of mass consumption.

Reform women used the emergence of visual culture in film, newspapers, and popular amusements to make a particular appeal to working-class audiences. Suffragists in particular, developed a campaign that presented suffrage as approachable and moderate. The movement presented itself, not as a revolution of traditional gender relations, but rather as the way to preserve the gender balance in a distinctly modern world. Additionally, suffragists needed a campaign that played on the need for working-class Americans to act as consumers. The middle-class reformers required the sheer number of supporters both male and female that the working-class offered. Suffragists needed a model that would not threaten men, whose votes they needed, or women, whose support they desired.

As suffragists became prominent in the mainstream media, they became more personable. Suffragists were no longer man-hating, child-abandoning spinsters, but rather youthful, energetic women with beauty and wit. Suffragists were in the public mind because of their keen ability to navigate mass media. They produced their own newspapers, films, postcards, and public demonstrations to keep society thinking about their cause.

### **Suffrage, Race, and Class**

In the twentieth century suffragists became attuned to how they could market suffrage successfully. At the same time, they came to understand what would hinder their progress. The

development of eugenics at the turn of the twentieth century definitely informed the way that woman suffragists approached the issues of race and class in their appeals to the American public. Eugenics was a movement popular among the middle and upper class whites, that argued good traits could be bred into future generations and negative traits could be eliminated by careful breeding. The concept advocated reproduction of wealthy whites, but discouraged immigrants and African Americans from having children. It further sought to eliminate traits like criminality and insanity by sterilizing those who possessed them. Eugenics promoted an already perceived inequality among the races, but was distinct because it gave white reformers a self-legitimized biological justification for holding their views. Woman suffragists often espoused a high opinion of eugenics, but even those who did not were well aware of its popularity in the American mind. In turn, woman's suffrage required a significant distance between woman suffragists and those who were considered genetically inferior in order to appeal to the white middle-class audience who made up the bulk of their support.

Because of pervading racist attitudes very few African American women appeared in mainstream suffragist media. In parades black women did not march with their state organizations, but instead as a collective African American delegation. When Ida B. Wells, a noted black suffragist and anti-lynching crusader, tried to walk with the Illinois delegation in the 1913 march in Washington Grace Wilbur Trout, the leader of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association (IESA), asked Wells to march with a segregated delegation of only black women to appease white women from southern states. The *Chicago Tribune* reported the incident on March 4, Wells issued this ultimatum for Trout, who personally opposed the discrimination of Wells, but acted on the wishes of the national movement. Wells said, "I shall not march at all unless I can march under the Illinois banner, when I was asked to march with the other women of our

state, and I intend to do so or not take part in the parade at all.”<sup>40</sup> Two women from the Illinois delegation agreed to march with Wells in the black delegation, but all three women reunited with the other Illinois women during the parade. Wells marched in the parade as an Illinois woman, but the fact that she was asked not to demonstrates the very systematic way that national suffrage leaders hoped to eliminate race as a component of their campaign for woman’s suffrage.

Because the national movement placed expediency above race relations, they often neglected African American supporters. Ultimately, the black woman’s suffrage movement existed primarily as a parallel movement rather than a contribution to the dominant white woman’s suffrage movement. While, leaders of the black woman’s suffrage movement developed their own organizations, they were often excluded from public spectacles and are decidedly absent from suffrage media like cartoons for *The Suffragist* (NWP) and *The Woman Citizen* (NAWSA). Although African American publications like *The Crisis*, the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) continually advocated on behalf of woman suffragists.

Mary Church Terrell, the most prominent leader of the African American woman’s suffrage movement, was one of the nation’s first black women to earn a degree. She helped form The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1894 and served as its leader leader.<sup>41</sup> Though she regularly campaigned for woman’s suffrage, speaking at NAWSA’s national convention in 1898 and again in 1900, she was highly critical of white suffragists, particularly in the twentieth century as women like Alice Paul began to alienate black women as an appeal to racist white male voters. Church argued, in her 1912 article for *The Crisis*:

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<sup>40</sup> “Illinois Women Feature Parade,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1913, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (New York:G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 145-147.

*The elective franchise is withheld from one-half its citizens, many of whom are intelligent, virtuous and cultured, and unstintingly bestowed upon the other half, many of whom are illiterate, degraded and vicious, because by an unparalleled exhibition of lexicographical acrobatics the word "people" has been turned and twisted to mean all who were shrewd and wise enough to have themselves born boys instead of girls, and white instead of black.*<sup>42</sup>

Church continued her support for equality between the sexes and among races for the rest of her life. In her autobiography Church explained her pride in supporting suffrage by saying, "it gives me satisfaction to know that I was on the right side of the question when it was most unpopular to advocate it."<sup>43</sup> Despite all the work that Terrell did for woman's suffrage her contributions are largely ignored because her activities, particularly after the rise of the NWP in 1913, were marginalized on account of her race.

Suffragists sometimes struggled to present a singular message as the leaders of the movements rejected the support of the poor, ethnic immigrants, or African Americans. For instance, Frances Willard, a suffragist and leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), blamed "illiterate aliens" and "a plantation negro, who can neither read nor write, whose ideas are bounded by the fence of his own field and the price of his own mule" for the defeat of temperance legislation in the south.<sup>44</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, the leader of NAWSA from 1900 to 1904 and again from 1916 to 1920 was certainly reluctant to appeal to immigrant voters, but even more so to African American voters. Under her lead, NAWSA argued on several occasions that female enfranchisement would help reinforce white supremacy by giving white women votes to outnumber black men. Some members of NAWSA went so far to advocate the

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "The Justice of Woman Suffrage," *The Crisis* 4, no. 5 (September, 1912), 243.

<sup>43</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 144.

<sup>44</sup> Ida B. Well, *Crusade for Justice*, Alfreda Duster, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 207.

concept of an educated voter, who would be required to pass literacy tests for access to the ballot.<sup>45</sup>

Some suffragists argued that only educated people – men and women – should be allowed to vote. They supported literacy tests as a measure of who could vote, which excluded both a majority of blacks and of immigrants. Some later suffragists like Harriot Stanton Blatch and Alice Stone Blackwell argued instead that less educated citizens still deserved the vote and that exercising in participatory politics would, in fact, elevate them. Other suffrage leaders Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt excluded black women and argued that added laws concerning literacy would strengthen white supremacy. In one book written to persuade southern congressmen to support woman’s suffrage, Catt wrote, “White supremacy will be strengthened, not weakened, by woman suffrage.”<sup>46</sup> She provided tables and population data to prove that the white female vote would give more political power to southern whites rather than to African Americans. She argued that regulations like property qualifications and literacy tests would further eliminate black voting power, while elevating the political power of whites, both male and female.

This split within the leadership of the woman’s suffrage movement illustrates a crucial division between those suffragists who wanted victory quickly and those who still believed in the idealized equality outlined in The Declaration of Sentiments. Fundamentally, the woman’s suffrage movement had to choose in the twentieth century whether they wanted to pursue a vision of the future that was radically different, with equality between the sexes and races, or a

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<sup>45</sup> For one of the most racist appeals for woman’s suffrage consider Belle Kearney’s “Durable White Supremacy,” an address to the 1903 NAWSA convention, in which she argues that “the enfranchisement of women would insure the immediate and durable white supremacy, honestly attained.” Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage* vol 5 (New York: J.J. Little and Ives Company, 1922), 82.

<sup>46</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, *Woman Suffrage by Federal Constitutional Amendment*, (New York: National Woman Suffrage Publishing Co., 1917), 76.

future in which things were relatively similar, with women voters. One vision promoted the new woman as man's equal, but stood as an affront to prescribed gender roles, while the other celebrated traditional feminine virtues. The leaders of the woman's suffrage movement made a conscious decision based on the context of the Progressive Era to focus their attention not on equality, but on enfranchisement. They understood that modern media afforded them the opportunity to spread a single message. Both the NWP and NAWSA both opted to present the more moderate option to appeal to the most people possible.

The identities of American women transformed drastically from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the next. Changes to standards of education, employment, family, and beauty altered the lives of women. Woman suffragists played on these new ideals and appealed to women's new interests to gain wider support for the vote. The movement created a campaign suited for an audience whose primary goals were to improve society and stave off revolution. Suffragists succeeded, where many other progressive reform efforts failed because of their ability to promote suffrage as a moderate change that would preserve the standards of society rather than challenge them.

**Chapter Two**  
**“Training the Animals”**  
*The Campaign*



**Figure 2.1** Nina Allender, “Training the Animals,” *The Suffragist*, February 1, 1920.

In 1920 *The Suffragist*, the premier suffrage organ of the National Woman’s Party, published “Training the Animals.” The cartoon depicts a modern, young, beautiful woman training the Republican Party, represented by an elephant, and the Democratic Party, represented by a donkey. She holds in her hand a single treat, labeled “vote.” American women became nationally enfranchised with the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. This cartoon, which was published before the amendment was ratified, demonstrates several key components of how woman suffragists transformed their public representations in the twentieth century. Suffragists trained themselves to play with humor, beauty, and message to construct a vision of themselves that starkly contrasted with the public perceptions of nineteenth century suffragists.

If one compares the complimentary nature of suffrage produced media of the twentieth century with the popular depictions of suffragists in the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that

the suffragists consciously and dramatically altered the way they appeared to the masses. By taking advantage of new media that emerged or improved around the turn of the century, suffragists approached their campaign with a new, laser focus on public perception. They reoriented their campaign, one which in the nineteenth century had been dominated by a focus inward, with closed parlor meetings and small suffrage conventions, toward the general public. Instead of focusing on women who already supported the aims of the movement, suffragists attempted to engage the largest number of people in the most visible and spectacular ways. The campaign of twentieth century suffragists was one that embraced modern technology, reached broad audiences, and promoted preexisting gender roles.

### *The Revolution:*

#### **A Look at Nineteenth Century Radical Suffrage**

To understand what made the woman's suffrage campaigns of the twentieth century so distinctly approachable, the radical nature of the nineteenth century campaigns must be examined. An organized woman's rights movement emerged out of the equally marginal abolition movement in the years before the Civil War. Throughout their campaign to abolish the institution of slavery, women abolitionists realized that they were not given the same platform as their male counterparts. When two abolitionists, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were denied seats at an international abolition convention in London, they agreed to organize a woman's rights convention when they returned to America. The young movement modeled itself after the birth of America – it contended that the Constitution had ignored one half of the nation by leaving out women. The Declaration of Sentiments, a list of goals for the budding woman's rights movement, was modeled on the Declaration of Independence. Suffrage was born as a

dramatic departure from existing gender relations. Throughout the movement, suffragists reshaped their arguments to suggest that suffrage was not radical, but rational.

The claim by many of the earliest suffragists that woman's rights needed to be a revolutionary restructuring prompted much criticism. In 1896 cartoonist George Yost Coffin created an illustration entitled "The Apotheosis of Suffrage." The cartoon is modeled after the "The Apotheosis of Washington," a fresco painted on the ceiling of the rotunda in the Capitol



**Figure 2.2** Coffin, George Yost, artist. "The Apotheosis of Suffrage." 1896. Cartoon Drawings, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Building. In the original painting by Brumidi, George Washington is depicted as having ascended into heaven; apotheosis literally means to deify. Coffin's spoof of the painting puts Stanton and Anthony flanking Washington. The juxtaposition of Washington and two suffrage women was absurd to many, and a pointed critique of how suffragists saw themselves. It paid particular attention to the way the two women envisioned themselves as revolutionaries and leaders. With Stanton in the place of the Goddess Victoria, and Anthony in the place of the Goddess Justice, the cartoon mocks the movement for the type of radical rhetoric they had used. The cartoon appeared in the *Washington Post* to tease the suffragists who wished to revolutionize the nation. Significantly, this cartoon was produced not by suffragists. In the early movement suffragists did not create a lot of their own media, and that which they did produce was almost

entirely controversial. Stanton and Anthony produced *The Revolution*, a newspaper with low circulation, funded by William Lloyd Garrison. The newspaper emphasized, much like the early movement, the necessity for woman to become men's equal. The notion was particularly offensive to the Victorian ideals prominent in the golden age of domesticity. By suggesting that men and women could be equals, suffragists upset the very foundation of gender relations.

Susan B. Anthony was a particularly polarizing figure because her Quaker upbringing and the fact she never married. Popular depictions of Anthony showed her as masculine and imposing, unnatural. She lacked all the typical qualities that would make her distinctly feminine. In 1872, when she went on trial for voting illegally, she used the opportunity to discuss the concept of natural rights and how those rights were denied to the female sex. She utilized public spectacle in a way that closely resembles the kind of tactics that women would use in the next century, but because her message was rooted in a revolutionary rhetoric that frightened many, she failed to win public favor. Anthony stood in the courthouse and refused to pay a fine for voting, arguing:

*Yes, but laws made by men, under a government of men, interpreted by men and for the benefit of men. The only chance women have for justice in this country is to violate the law, as I have done, and as I shall continue to do... So shall we trample all unjust laws under foot. I do not ask the clemency of the court. I came into it to get justice, having failed in this, I demand the full rigors of the law.*<sup>47</sup>

By demanding the vote, getting arrested, and stepping outside of the tradition of marriage, Anthony raised a lot of fears concerning gender roles. Anthony was seen as a revolutionary, an anarchist. Her vision of the future frightened many of her contemporaries.

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<sup>47</sup> Susan B. Anthony, *Selected Papers of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Against an Aristocracy of Sex, 1866 to 1873*, ed. Ann Gordon (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 613.

One newspaper applauded Anthony for getting arrested. The writer joked that if voting could get women to be silent from their prison cells he “knows lots of men thereabouts who will urge their wives to vote at the next election.”<sup>48</sup> Anthony was equally unpopular in cartoon depictions as in print. She had a square jaw, angular frame, and grumpy face. In one cartoon for *The Daily Graphic*, a New York-based illustrated newspaper, Anthony is shown in an



**Figure 1.3** "The Woman Who Dared," *The Daily Graphic* 1, no. 81 (June 5, 1873)

Uncle Sam hat with her hand on an umbrella. She wears a stern face and in the background stands a woman police officer, father holding a baby, and a stage of women speaking publicly and presumably politically. The implication of the cartoon is one that runs through much anti-suffrage literature: if women win the vote, they will become more masculine, while men will become more feminine. If any single women epitomized those fears, it was Susan B. Anthony.

Although Anthony had certainly distanced herself from the acceptance of the general public, her political partner Elizabeth Cady Stanton did not offer much help. Stanton was married and a mother, but her political opinions were often unconventional, like her support of controversial topics like divorce and birth control. She also wrote *The Woman's Bible*, a controversial nonfiction book that challenged the Bible for its role in subjugating women. In her introduction Stanton explains that the text:

<sup>48</sup> "The Latest Impertinences About Susan B.," *The Public Ledger*, January 28, 1873, 2.

*teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitates the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the house, she was commanded to ask her husband at home.*<sup>49</sup>

Stanton's work was so controversial that even Anthony tried to distance NAWSA from the work. It was the revolutionary, incendiary methods and personas of suffrage leaders, Stanton and Anthony that made the cause of woman's suffrage so marginal in the nineteenth century. If the leaders of the movement represented a threat to established gender norms or a threat to the Bible, the general public was not willing to follow them. Americans were afraid of such radical change. Suffrage only became successful as leaders became attuned to the public's resistance to radicalism and adopted a campaign strategy that played into existing gender relationships and presented a vision of the future where women remained feminine, pious, and virtuous.

### **A New NAWSA**

Woman suffragists needed to develop a way for women to win the vote without upsetting the balance of the sexes. The campaign that emerged in the twentieth century drew upon existing gender relations and promoted a vision of women voters as nonthreatening and decidedly feminine. The pervasive fear of gender role inversions had handicapped the cause throughout much of the nineteenth century. As suffragists came to understand what underlying fears the public held, they curbed their public image to relegate those anxieties. In the first years of the twentieth century NAWSA reshaped its relationship with the American public.

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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1895) 7.

Historian Steven M. Buechler argued in *Women's Movements in the United States* that the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a period referred to as the doldrums by Aileen Kraditor, were in fact, a period in which the national suffrage movement underwent revision so that an organized, efficient, and competent political group emerged in the twentieth century with full vigor and focus to reshape the minds of the American public, and to win the vote.<sup>50</sup> Whether or not the 1880s and 1890s served as a staging period for American suffragists, clearly, something had changed at the turn of the century. The movement began appealing to the public, rooting itself in the nation's mind. Instead of Stanton and Anthony's revolution, twentieth century suffragists wanted a campaign that enshrined the virtues of women. They wanted to win the vote, not equality.

To develop their own modern approach to winning public support suffragists defined their own media image and a vision of who woman voters could be. As a result, suffrage media became an expression of feminine virtue as women took to the streets, to the silver screen, and to the front page. They implored the public to give women the vote, not because women and men were equal, but because women were special. Women, they argued, could use their natural abilities as wives, mothers, and nurturers to elevate society; the female sex was imbued with virtues that were absent from the corrupt political system. To promote this new argument, woman suffragists focused on this traditional view of women.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the woman's suffrage movement was confined to a relatively small circle of elite women. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) had formed in 1890 with the combination of the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA). The

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<sup>50</sup> Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990)

organization held closed meetings and small conferences annually. Overall though, the national organization was fairly small. The leader of the organization in 1900 was Carrie Chapman Catt. Her campaign was one that pandered to white, middle-class audiences. She advocated woman's suffrage to counteract the "foreign ignorant vote which was sought to be brought up by each party."<sup>51</sup>

Catt appealed to middle-class audiences by criticizing corruption and promoting nativism. Her views on race were common among the Progressive Era reformers who supported eugenics. Catt was quoted as calling Native Americans savages and suggesting to Southern senators suffrage could be a stepping stone toward white supremacy. At the same time that Catt was advocating the rise of woman's suffrage many states were implementing a series of laws to disenfranchise black male voters. These Jim Crow laws included poll taxes and literacy tests as measures of whether or not a citizen could vote. Ultimately, these measures nearly eliminated the voting power of African Americans, which helped suffragists like Catt convince supporters that enfranchising women, would not mean letting black women vote.

Catt argued that one of the reasons many people were reluctant to give women the vote was because of the "inertia in the growth of democracy which has come as a reaction following the aggressive movements that with possibly ill-advised haste enfranchised the foreigner, the Negro and the Indian."<sup>52</sup> She argued that by granting the vote to these questionable groups the public had become wary of allowing women the vote. But she believed that the piety and moral superiority of females would counteract the negative impact of these questionable characters. Certainly, Catt aligned herself closely to the eugenics cause. She invested in making suffrage an approachable, white, middle-class movement. Catt worked against the fear of anarchy that was

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<sup>51</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, "Class Versus Gender," *Woman's Journal*, December 15, 1894.

<sup>52</sup> Ida Husted Harper, ed. *History of Woman Suffrage* vol. 5 (New York: J.J. Little and Ives, 1922), 6.

prevalent among reformers. Where the nineteenth century suffragists had set themselves apart as revolutionaries in need of drastic change, Catt and others poised suffrage as a way to combat the most radical elements of society, which, for many white, middle-class Americans under the thrall of eugenics, meant sharp racial divisions.

Membership in NAWSA was 13,150 in 1893, but by 1915 the organization brought together over 100,000 women to campaign for the vote.<sup>53</sup> NAWSA developed a compelling political strategy that renounced the radicalism of early suffragists, while it played with all the things that made the twentieth century modern. NAWSA supported the long-standing practice of campaigning for suffrage on a state by state basis. The moderate and gradual approach had been the only successful element of the nineteenth century with a number of state suffrage victories in the West. NAWSA actively tried to engage with state suffrage associations to help them build a federation of woman suffragists. The organization approached local woman's clubs like the Chicago Political Equality League, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the Women's Trade Union League. Suffrage was swelling in popularity as NAWSA appealed to elite clubwomen from across the nation. NAWSA hoped that by building a tight-knit network of supporters, they could gradually win over the entire nation's support.

### **The National Woman's Party**

The suffrage campaign evolved most dramatically in 1913 when Alice Paul, a young American woman who had been active in the British suffragette campaign, created a committee within NAWSA. Paul's Congressional Union (CU) was a small group of women within NAWSA who were dedicated to developing a *national* suffrage amendment. Paul believed that NAWSA was an old organization, whose state-by-state approach to suffrage cost women time and money.

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<sup>53</sup> Francis Bzowski, "Spectacular Suffrage," *New York History* 76, no. 1 (January, 1995), 63.

Alice Paul, instead, opted for a much more aggressive campaign modeled after the militant strategies of the English suffragettes.

Paul had worked in England to help campaign alongside women like Emmeline Pankhurst. Famously, English suffragettes employed a much more physically threatening campaign than their American counterparts. The British suffragettes chained themselves to buildings, blew up mailboxes, were imprisoned, and force-fed.<sup>54</sup> The militant strategies of British suffragettes were very unlike the slow, quiet, cautious methods of NAWSA. One thing that Paul took away from the British movement was a sincere interest in the way that suffragettes navigated the media.<sup>55</sup>

The CU quickly severed ties to NAWSA and became the National Woman's Party. Many leaders of the organization admired the British movement and tried to emulate the spectacle that made the British suffragettes newspaper sensations. The members of the NWP copied the spectacle of woman's suffrage, but they maintained a nonviolent campaign. They employed a number of tactics like parades, pageants, open air talks, tableaux – a paused scene from history or mythology with immobile actors – automobile tours, and picketing. The organization hoped that constant agitation would keep them in the public consciousness. If the NWP could keep attention turned on woman suffrage, then the cause would be able to petition and lobby congressmen and even President Wilson to secure the vote for women.

### **The Divisions**

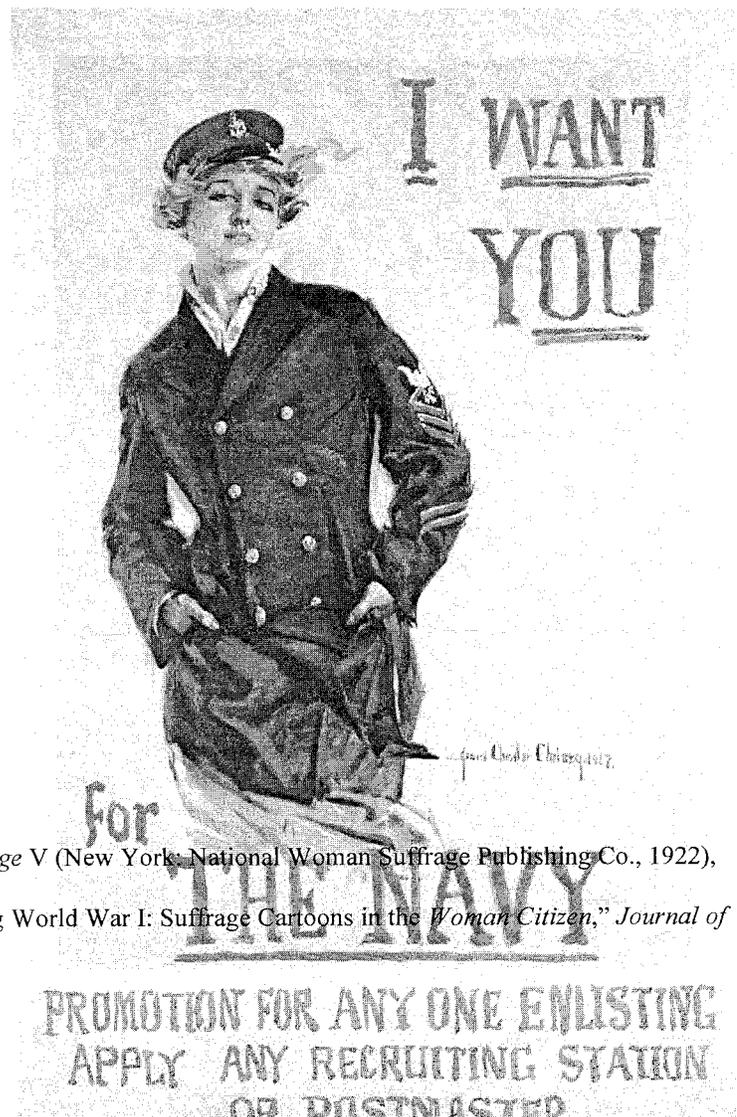
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<sup>54</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: The History of the Militant Woman's Suffrage Movement* (Boston: The Woman's Journal, 1911), 431.

<sup>55</sup> For an examination of British suffragettes in media see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

The biggest distinction between NAWSA and the NWP developed during the war, as the two organizations developed very different approaches to securing enfranchisement for women. Though the strategies of the two suffrage organizations often diverged, both organizations promoted a very feminine vision of woman voters. On one hand, at the 1915 NAWSA convention a series of women spoke on the topic “How to advance women suffrage by making friends instead of enemies.”<sup>56</sup> NAWSA had dedicated its efforts to being a friend to the United States government in the years of World War I. The suffragists wanted to appeal to voters, senators, and President Wilson as citizens of the United States. To argue that women deserved equal participation at citizens, NAWSA first felt compelled to prove that women would equally bear the burden of citizenship. On the other, suffragists camped out on the President’s lawn.

Throughout World War I, NAWSA developed a persona that framed women as “‘loyal citizen,’ thereby granting them an important means by which to argue for woman’s enfranchisement.”<sup>57</sup> Particularly in the publication *Woman Citizen*, woman suffragists were depicted as confident, beautiful, and strong. The women are capable of being citizens, contributing to the war effort in whatever way they



<sup>56</sup> Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage V* (New York: National Woman Suffrage Publishing Co., 1922), 450.

<sup>57</sup> Michele Ramsey, “Inventing Citizens During World War I: Suffrage Cartoons in the *Woman Citizen*,” *Journal of Western Communication* 64, no. 2 (2000), 115.

can, but still adept mothers and wives as well.

NAWSA was able to reconstruct the way that citizenship was defined because warfare was markedly different than it had been before. The type of war waged in Europe was a total war that drained the male population out of factories and farms and into battlefields. As a result, women could serve their nation in a much more direct way than they had in any war prior.

Women in World War I had opportunities to work in production – fueling munitions and farms, administration – taking over for the missing male workforce, and directly in the war – the Red Cross, ambulance corps, and Navy all offered positions to women, which allowed women to take a prominent position in war activities.<sup>58</sup> NAWSA capitalized on these new opportunities by encouraging members to aid in the war. In cartoons published by NAWSA, they present women as strong, loyal, but still very

feminine. They wanted to perpetuate a belief that women could and would do what was necessary for the war effort, but that they would be

**Figure 2.4** Howard Chandler Christy, "I Want You, The Navy," 1917. This recruitment poster was illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy, who like Charles Dana Gibson helped define standards of beauty in the Progressive Era through his advertising "girls." Note that the navy recruit still appears feminine despite undertaking a position with the navy. Most women naval workers undertook administrative positions with the rank of yeoman.

essentially womanly. President Wilson sympathized with the suffragists of NAWSA who devoted themselves to the war, even eventually speaking to Congress on their behalf.

The NWP began fairly moderately, but became increasingly radical and militant as they waited for results. At the same time that NAWSA encouraged women to aid in the war effort, the NWP famously began picketing the White House. They held signs asking Wilson, "How long must women wait?" and addressed the president as "Kaiser Wilson."<sup>59</sup> The controversial actions

<sup>58</sup> Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *The First, The Few, The Forgotten: Navy and Marine Corps Women in World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Ryan, *Feminism and the Women's Movement* (New York: Psychology Press, 1992), 29.

of the NWP landed a number of its members imprisoned at the Occoquan Workhouse for sedition. The NWP capitalized on media attention by going on hunger strikes. Even as the NWP began to move away from moderate methods and into more extreme media ploys, the leaders of the organization were careful to frame the suffragists as womanly. Women who were forced into the workhouse wrote about their experiences, capitalizing on the fragility of women. These women emphasized their mistreatment and presented themselves as martyrs.

The best way to understand the media campaign that suffragists developed under the leadership of women like Carrie Chapman Catt and Alice Paul is to look at the actual representations that NAWSA and the NWP produced. Clearly these two organizations dramatically shifted the way that they appeared to the general public in the 1910s. The revitalization of the movement depended on a keen ability to present woman's suffrage as nonthreatening to the existing gender balance. Woman's suffrage could not be an issue of woman's equality because it was a cause fundamentally rooted in the distinct value of femininity. Twentieth century suffragists carefully tried to undo the revolutionary rhetoric of Anthony and Stanton and replace it with the assurance that men and women were not equal, but that women were morally superior. Women were presented as heroic, sympathetic, beautiful, and brave in the last years of the woman suffrage movement.

Chapter 3  
"Our Hat is in the Ring"  
*The Media*



Figure 3.1 Nina Allender, "Our Hat is in the Ring," *The Suffragist*, April 8, 1916.

I argue that the emergence of the new suffrage media campaign was not a shrugging off of existing gender norms, but instead a celebration of them. To de-radicalize the suffrage movement, leaders consciously adopted traditional views of gender in order to project a future of woman voters that was not a revolutionized society without distinct gender roles, but rather a society in which the female sex contributed a distinctly feminine influence upon politics. Additionally, the woman suffrage movement carefully toed the line in regard to race. While some woman suffragists supported equal rights regardless of sex and race, others promoted woman's suffrage as a means to curb the influence of both blacks and immigrants. The new suffrage campaign sacrificed older celebrations of total equality held by suffragists like Lucy Stone, an early suffragist who supported the fifteenth amendment and helped form the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) with Frederick Douglass, to help speed up the success of woman's suffrage. In doing so, they crafted a new ideal of woman suffrage, a figure sometimes called the Allender Girl, who was, in addition to youthful, energetic, and vibrant, white.

### **The Allender Girl**

A gifted artist and passionate suffragist, Nina Allender was born in 1872 in Kansas. Allender became involved with the movement in 1912. She was president of the Stanton Suffrage Club -- with a membership of around 400, the club was the largest in the District of Columbia.<sup>60</sup> She was a proponent of actively advertising suffrage through parades, lectures, and literature. Allender became involved in the National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and followed Paul and Burns when they broke from the group to form the National Woman's Party (NWP). She was instrumental in reshaping the image of suffragists in print media. The Allender Girl slowly replaced the mannish caricatures of older suffrage media.

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<sup>60</sup> Emily Farnum, "Truths By Women Who Know," *The Washington Times* (July 11, 1914), 4.

Allender portrayed suffragists as light, bright, young, and feminine. Her cartoons graced the covers and pages of *The Suffragist* -- the official organ of the NWP. Perhaps more than any other artist, Allender sought to re-brand American suffragist women. She worked against the long-standing stereotypes that began with the movement's inception. Instead of suggesting that politics would corrupt women, turn them into man hating, child abandoning, cruel spinsters, women could elevate politics. They would use the vote as a tool to extend their natural qualities -- motherhood and beauty -- to help purify politics, attack graft, and reform society.

The Allender Girl developed from the older existing model of beauty that had come to dominate advertisements of the age. To create a character who espoused the values, virtues, and beauties of the age, Allender took inspiration from the quintessential “it” girl from the 1890s-1920s – the Gibson Girl. The Girl had pouty lips, a button nose, white skin, groomed eyebrows, a slender frame, newest fashions and radiant youth. She rose to prominence with the innovation of ready to wear clothing for women. As clothing manufacturers sought to sell new designs every year, the advertising world developed “the standardized woman’s features... ubiquitous, presenting the one look that reiterated a particular year’s view of perfection.”<sup>61</sup>

The Gibson Girl was everywhere and every girl wanted to be her. Advertisements and cartoons like “Design for Wall Paper,”



<sup>61</sup> Katherine Adams and Michael Keene, *Seeing the American Woman, 1880-1920: The Social Impact of the Visual Media Explosion* (London: McFarland & Co., 2012), 60.

Figure 3.2 Charles Dana Gibson. *Design for Wall Paper. Suitable for a Bachelor Apartment. Published in Life, September 18, 1902.*

which appeared in *Life* in 1902, play with charm as well as beauty. Gibson girls were not only beautiful, but they often came with witty captions, like “suitable for a bachelor apartment.” In this way, Allender also followed suit. The Allender girl was distinct from Gibson’s though, because the Gibson Girl’s existence was almost entirely defined by the way she interacted with men. The Gibson girl was aloof, passive. Things happened to these women, but they did not initiate actions. Allender mimicked the beauty and humor of Gibson’s famed cartoons, but injected them with a spirit for reform. The Allender Girl maintained the image of the Gibson Girl, but with the message of the NWP.

The cartoon “Changing Fashions – She Used to Be Satisfied with So Little,” first appeared in *The Suffragist*

in March, 1915. The

cartoon captures Allender’s famous knack for

promoting the feminine

suffragist. The cartoon

features an astonished

looking man concerned

with the extravagant,

beautiful dress of a

suffragist labeled “National

Constitutional

Amendment.” The

suffragist has the names of



Figure 3.2 Nina Allender. “Changing Fashions – She Used to Be Satisfied with So Little,” *The Suffragist* (March 13, 1915)

several states hanging from her hat and belt, indicating that she has many states in the sights of her suffrage aims. The upper right corner showcases the style of 1884, which only has the states Montana and Wyoming on her dress. The cartoon suggests that suffragists are going to keep pushing for suffrage until they win the right to vote for women of every state. The appearance of the suffragist is extremely significant because she is youthful and well-dressed. By presenting suffragists within existing standards of beauty, Allender suggest that suffragists could easily fit the mold created by Gibson and others. Even though the suffragist pictured is ambitious in her aims for national enfranchisement, she does not appear pushy, bossy, or shrewd. She instead, reflects popular views of how women should carry themselves. Allender presents a vision of suffragists that fits very much into the cultural, gender norms of the Progressive Era.

In 1914 when NAWSA released *Your Girl and Mine* (1914), a film that promoted this version of the woman's suffrage campaign. It was met with a review that argued the lead actress "makes a winsome figure of Equal Suffrage and, if all suffragettes were as fair to look upon, it is safe to say 'Votes for Women' would be a reality in every state in the Union today."<sup>62</sup> The suffragists created a vision of themselves that promoted beauty and grace. Nina Allender created the girl in print, but by navigating all elements of the emerging phenomenon of mass culture, suffragists presented a uniform and unshakable vision of suffragists as young, bright, and beautiful.

The Allender girl became a mainstay of the suffrage vision through a variety of media: newspapers, political cartoons, public displays like parades, pageants, and tableaux, postcards, and film. Each of these avenues presented a few specific tropes central to the suffrage campaign. Suffragists used allegory from historical and mythological figures, militant heroic women, citizens of the United States, martyrs willing to suffer for their freedom, and vanguards against

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<sup>62</sup> "Has Initial Showing," *Motography*, October 31, 1914.

graft. Along all of these paths, however, suffragists maintained a singular vision of themselves as feminine, young, beautiful, and used these blueprints to suggest all the other things that suffrage could and would accomplish.

### The Allegory

During the enormous March, 1913 suffrage parade in Washington D.C. the procession came to a halt in front of the U.S. Treasury building for over one hundred women to take part in a massive tableau. Tableaus were wildly popular displays for suffragists, as they silently reenacted famous scenes from history. They played very well into the suffragists' tendency toward spectacle. In fact, they really represent a general, growing interest in the progressive era toward big spectacles.<sup>63</sup> The suffrage pageant and parade represents a very strong, growing interest in a sort of street theater that emerged not only as a form of protest, but as popular entertainment.

During the parade an elaborate demonstration called “The Allegory” commenced. Orchestrated by Hazel McKaye, a member of the NWP and a renowned theatre expert.<sup>64</sup> The official program of the parade describes the outline:

Columbia, hearing the approach of the Procession, summons to her side, Justice, Charity, Liberty, Peace, and Hope, to review with her this “new crusade” of women. When these are assembled, Columbia takes her place as leader and guardian of them all, and, in a final tableau, they stand together and review the oncoming Procession.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 3.3 “Scene from a tableau held on the Treasury steps in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Woman's

McKaye's Allegory used figures from mythology who were traditionally seen as women: Justice, Charity, Liberty, Peace, and Hope. These figures represent the positive virtues of the female sex and lent a certain legitimacy to the claims of suffragists that women were the moral compass for society. Women were represented by all of these positive values, which makes it incredibly important that Columbia, the feminine personification for the United States of America, leads them all. As Columbia guides the virtuous mythological figures, it demonstrated to the audience that the nation could choose to incorporate feminine virtue into the path that America would take in her political future.

The display was intensely popular. The *New York Times* referred to the Allegory as “a wonderful series of dramatic pictures.”<sup>66</sup> The same article estimated that 500,000 people witnessed the tableau. The parade drew its authority from cultural symbols that everyone already understood. Historian Alice Sheppard contends, “by imposing recognized characters or relationships on a current situation, the viewer identifies motifs of good and evil, heroism and villainy.”<sup>67</sup> If suffragists drew upon an existing cultural dialog, they could inject their message by using universally recognized symbols.

On the one hand suffragists hoped to achieve the progressive goal of woman's enfranchisement, but they rooted their argument in older, existing, even ancient, beliefs in woman's unique goodness. It also befitted suffragists that traditional allegory depicted women as inhumanly beautiful. The use of classic mythology as inspiration for the movement can be seen in print as well as public displays. Allegory was also significant for woman suffragists because it afforded them the opportunity to frame women as heroic and strong without being masculine. A

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<sup>66</sup> “5,000 Women March, Beset By Crowds,” *New York Times* (March 4, 1913), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Alice Sheppard, *Cartooning for Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 161.

balance that the NWP struck carefully with the development and prolonged use of its version of militancy.

### **The Militant**

Although the American suffrage movement had become increasingly more moderate over the course of the movement, Americans had a fascination with the militancy of the British suffrage movement. In particular, suffragists were very interested in Emmeline Pankhurst. *Good Housekeeping*, a popular middle-class woman's magazine, published a series of interviews with Pankhurst that detailed her life and her militant tactics. Despite being a conservative magazine, one editor at *Good Housekeeping* idolized the radical suffrage leader explaining, "Mrs. Pankhurst is no mere destroyer of property. She is no more an anarchist than Paul Revere and Nathan Hale were anarchists."<sup>68</sup>

The United States was so intrigued by the suffragettes that Mrs. Pankhurst made it into one of the suffrage movement's films. The Women's Political Union – a New York-based suffrage organization led by Harriot Stanton Blatch – produced a film in 1913 in conjunction with Unique Film Company. *What 80 Million Women Want—?* was a "four-reel drama of love, intrigue and politics... which will hold attention of the audience from start to finish."<sup>69</sup> The film focuses on the problem of political machines and graft, offering suffrage as the solution to corruption. It capitalized on the public's fascination with militant English suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst and American suffrage leader Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Because people observed the antics of suffragists in the news, they wanted to watch the films that featured these famous ladies.

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<sup>68</sup> O.H.P. Belmont, "The Story of the Women's War," *Good Housekeeping* 57, no. 5 (November, 1913), 570.

<sup>69</sup> "What 80 Million Women Want –?" *Motion Picture News* 8, no. 20 (November, 1913): 13.

As per the revised vision of suffragists, a love story is central to the plot of *What 80 Million Women Want --?* (1913); a young woman falls in love with a lawyer who gets swept up in a political machine. To rescue her love, the woman joins a suffrage organization and together the group finds evidence that destroys the political machine and saves the young lawyer's morality and romance. The film features a strong sense of community and collaboration that mimics the spirit of confederation that suffragists often promoted. These activists carefully built alliances and argued that women stood in solidarity on the issue of woman's rights. The film echoes the sentiment of suffragists, but also contradicts the sort of cutthroat, corrupt politics of men. The young couple is wed and "seem happier by far over the marriage license than she was over the party badge she had worn,"<sup>70</sup> suggesting that even suffragists believed that traditional feminine values supplanted their suffrage goals. The film contributes to the depictions of suffragists as feminine, rather than mannish, and suffrage as a means to solve problems, including personal problems and political ones.

Blatch appreciated the NWP, collaborating with the organization on several suffrage spectacles. She joined her Women's Political Union with the NWP in 1915. The NWP was under the leadership of Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, both of whom had spent time in England at the height of the militant suffragette campaign. They took inspiration from Pankhurst and other's impressive, aggressive methods to persuade policymakers to listen to the arguments for woman suffrage. As a result, the NWP, after years of pageants, parades, and films, took to picketing the White House for media attention. While NAWSA shifted its focus toward presenting its members as productive citizens during time of war, the NWP did not waver in its attempt to secure the vote for women.

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<sup>70</sup> "Eighty Million Women Want --?" *Motion Picture News* 8, no. 20 (November, 1913): 35.

When Suffragists began picketing the White House in January 1917, they were sent to the Occoquan Workhouse. From inside the prison, the militant members of the NWP won support from the media by leaking details of their cruel treatment. The suffragists capitalized on their experience inside the prison by going on tour *The Suffrage Prison Special*; they crossed the nation dressed in their prison garb.<sup>71</sup> Suffragists carefully balanced their assertive militancy with their delicate image as women. They painted themselves as weak, innocent girls who were abused and mistreated rather than as strong, independent, law-breaking women. Even in militancy, which is often construed as a masculine trait, suffragists maintained their feminine identity.

### **The Martyr**

*It is my sincere hope that you will understand and appreciate the martyrdom involved, for it was the conscious voluntary gift of beautiful, strong and young hearts. But it was never martyrdom for its own sake. It was martyrdom used for a practical purpose.*<sup>72</sup>

Women found several examples from mythology, but when they looked to history for inspiration, there was a single figure recognizable for woman suffragists to draw upon: Joan of Arc. She represented all the things that suffragists envisioned for themselves: femininity, strength, heroism, piety, and citizenship. Joan of Arc became emblematic particularly for the NWP, who additionally latched onto the story of her suffering and martyrdom. The movement found its own Joan of Arc in Inez Milholland Boissevain, the leader of the grand suffrage procession of 1913. Milholland evoked the heraldry of the middle ages with a laurel upon her head and a chorus of trumpets behind her. The woman was an activist, a socialist, a lawyer, a Vassar graduate, and undisputedly, beautiful. She led the parade dressed in armor, riding a milk-

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<sup>71</sup> Jean H. Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of American Suffragists* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 220.

<sup>72</sup> Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom* (New York: Boni & Liveright Publishing, 1920), vii-viii.

white horse. The suffragists wanted her to look like a modern Joan of Arc. And like the popular Christian icon, Milholland died young and became a martyr to her cause.

Milholland began her campaign for woman's suffrage during a 1908 election parade for President Taft. She began shouting "Votes for Women!" Milholland delivered a speech along the sidelines and pulled attention away from onlookers who began to gather and listen to her. She was known as "The girl who broke up the Taft Parade."<sup>73</sup> She was a gifted orator, but was an even better *symbol* for the movement. If Nina Allender created an illustrated, idealized the vision of woman suffrage, Inez Milholland embodied it. She was a middle-class, white, native-born American whose beauty was both classical and akin to the Gibson Girls who dominated the pages of mass market magazines. She was both a new woman, with an education and enthusiasm for reform, but still aligned to traditional values of femininity like piety, wearing all white, or by association with her romance with Eugen Boissevain – a wealthy coffee bean importer from Holland. Milholland announced to newspapers that she was the one to propose.<sup>74</sup>

Martyrdom, then, came in the form of Inez Milholland Boissevain's death. She was touring in the state of California, speaking on behalf of suffrage. She asked "President Wilson, how long must this go on?" as a part of the last speech she ever made in public.<sup>75</sup> She collapsed upon the stage. Milholland spent about a month in the hospital before she died. Aplastic anemia had rendered her body unable to produce red blood cells. Despite blood transfusions, Milholland died on November 25, 1916. She immediately became a martyr for the suffrage cause.

Newspapers lamented her death:

*Unselfish? Almost to a fault. Her's was indeed an example. An example for the idle rich girl who is poor indeed, whose rime hangs heavy because it is full of nothingness. An example for the pretty girl who believes that all life means is to*

<sup>73</sup> "Mrs. Boissevain Will Be Taken East for Burial," *Chicago Tribune* (November 27, 1916), 13.

<sup>74</sup> "Inez Milholland Says She Proposed to Her Husband," *Chicago Tribune*, (November 27, 1915), 1.

<sup>75</sup> Linda Lumsden, *Inez: The Life and Times of Inez Milholland* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 163.

*smile and dress. An example for the woman of brains who hides them under her marcel wave because she has become a parasite. An example for the woman who thinks that she can gain love when she acquires a man's bank account. An example for all womanhood – Inez Milholland Boissevain.*<sup>76</sup>

Even poet Carl Sandburg mourned the loss of Milholland:

*They are crying salt tears  
Over the beautiful beloved body  
Of Inez Milholland,  
Because they are glad she lived,  
Because she loved open-armed,  
Throwing love for a cheap thing  
Belonging to everybody ----  
Cheap as sunlight  
And morning air.*<sup>77</sup>

Milholland's death was a shock to many. She was a young woman who had appeared healthy, yet her body had failed her. Even in death, Milholland became a symbol of the fragility of womanhood. She epitomized everything that the suffrage movement had asked of her. She became an icon for the movement, and her last public words became a rallying cry. Picketers outside of the White House held banners asking the president, "How long must women wait for liberty?"

### **The Citizen**

If it was the aim of the National Woman's Party to turn suffragists into martyrs, it was the aim of the National American Woman Suffrage Association to turn suffragists into citizens. While the NWP camped out on Woodrow Wilson's doorstep, the members of NAWSA became intimately involved in the war effort. They wanted to prove that women could bear the burden of citizenship and deserved the privileges.

NAWSA encouraged its members to join in the war effort. The cover of NAWSA's premier publication *The Woman Citizen* often featured allegorical beauties. NAWSA paid

<sup>76</sup> Sophie Irene Loeb, "The Example of Inez Milholland," *The Evening World*, November 29, 1916, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Carl Sandburg, "Repetitions," *Cornhuskers* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1918), 47.

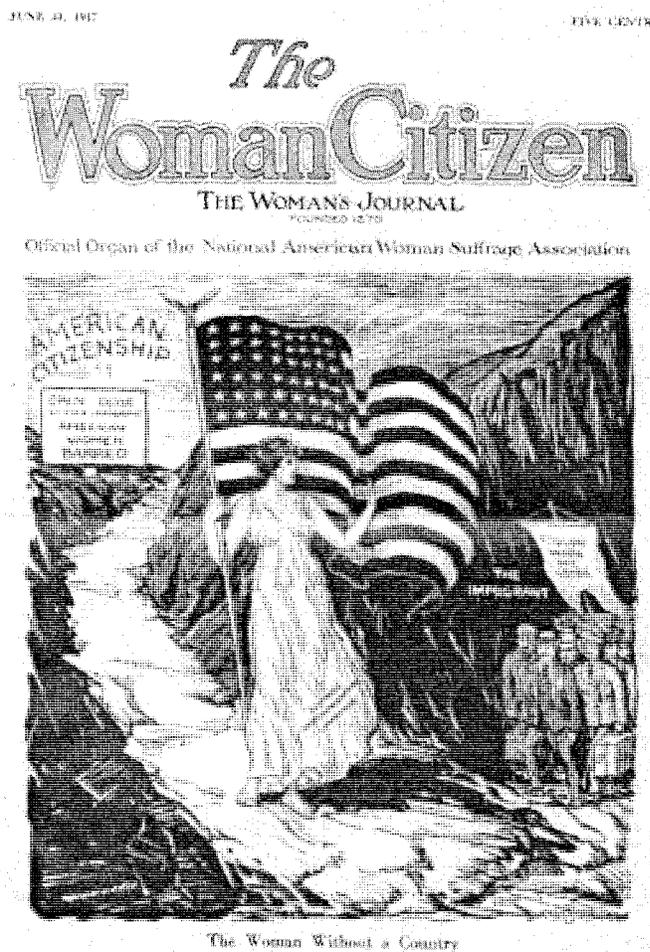


Figure 3.5 "The Woman Without a Country." *The Woman Citizen*. June 30, 1917.

particular attention to the way these figures could be used to represent not only the virtuous past, but also the connection to woman's citizenship.

The magazine played often with ideas of justice. The cover of the June 30, 1917 issue delved into this idea of female citizenship by employing an allegorical vision of a woman holding the flag. The caption "The Woman Without a Country" refers to the particular problem of woman citizens who paid taxes, owned property, held jobs, but were silenced politically.

Women were denied citizenship,

while they held open the door for immigrants. The cartoon definitely plays on older types than those of the NWP, but the nativist message of the illustration reflects a very modern concern for white, middle-class Americans in the Progressive Era. The native vote would be overrun by the influx of new American citizens who were born abroad. NAWSA suggested that women voters could easily combat this foreign influence.

NAWSA members supported the war as a means to legitimize their own citizenship. Because of the efforts of NAWSA Woodrow Wilson came out publicly in support of woman's suffrage on September 30, 1918. Wilson asked Congress, "We have made partners of women in

this war. Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?"<sup>78</sup> As a result of this mutual appreciation of the United States government and the national woman's suffrage movement, the cartoons of *The Woman Citizen* are remarkably patriotic in the war years. In December, 1920 after votes for women had become a reality the NAWSA publication printed "Suffrage Won – Forward March!" The cartoon

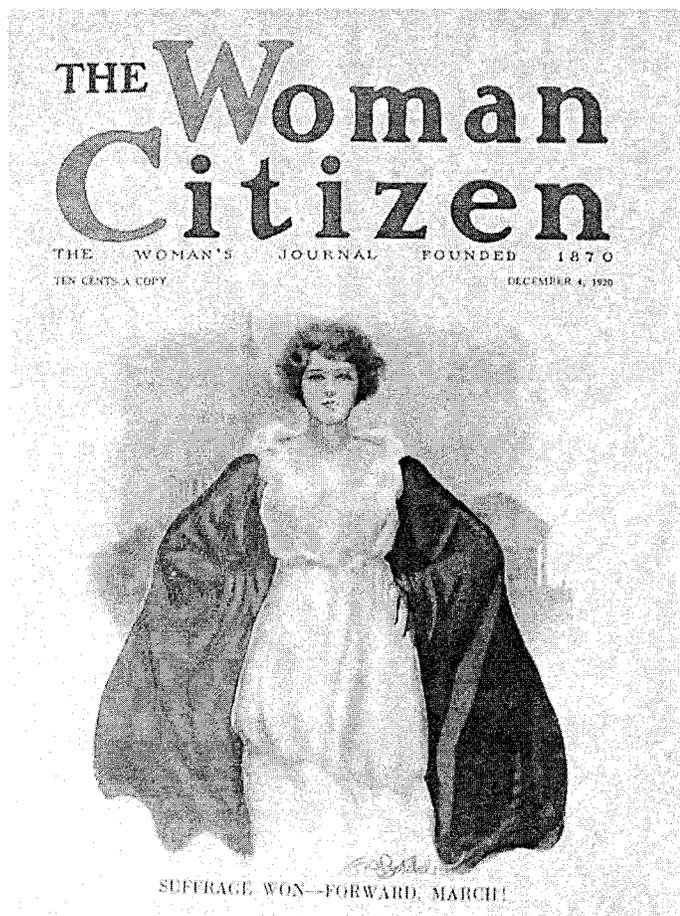


Figure 3.6 "Suffrage Won -- Forward March!" *The Woman Citizen*. December 4, 1920.

features a rather modern looking woman with bobbed hair poised in front of the

United States Capitol building. The woman embodies the militancy of citizenship with the title of the cartoon and the red, white, and blue colors she wears play off the patriotic spirit of American women as they embark on full citizenship. NAWSA played with a number of other tropes in addition to the citizen, but the dutiful service of women during the war dominated the themes of *The Woman Citizen*.

### The Vanguard

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Frost-Knapmann and Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, *Women's Suffrage in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 424.

Suffragists also became, in their own media, an agent of municipal housekeepers, and therefore, a vanguard against vice and a protector of children. Though a number of reformers rejected woman's suffrage as a



Figure 3.7 Nina Allender, "Child Saving is Woman's Work," *The Suffragist* (July 25, 1914).

means to reform society, many suffragists came from a municipal reform background and viewed the vote as the best means to elicit change. Suffragists drew heavily upon the idea of women as protectors, an idea which was very closely linked with the idea of suffragists as mothers. The social housekeeper appeared in a number of cartoons including "Child Saving is Woman's Work." This Nina Allender sketch appeared in *The Suffragist* on July 25, 1914. It stands apart from many of Allender's works because it plays more on sympathy than humor. The women figures do not necessarily emulate the look of a Gibson Girl, but rather the appearance of a Madonna. The cartoon shows suffragists hugging and caring for a large group of desolate looking children appearing before a cold, dirty city landscape. A long stream of skinny, dirty children pour out of the city and into the arms of feminine, motherly suffragists. The illustration seeks to expand woman's work, which had traditionally been involved with domestic duties of mothers and wives, to include looking out for the welfare of all children. Noticably, the children

in the sketch are not distinctly white. Instead they are certainly poor, and likely ethnic. The cartoon plays with the view of eugenics that foreign born Americans are inferior. Because immigrant children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, they need particular protection. The phrase “votes for women” appears above the women and children, conveying to viewers that the enfranchisement of women would help better the lives of all children.

NAWSA adhered itself to this idea of women as moral vanguards for society. This cover for *The Woman Citizen* was published June 7, 1917. It features a classic, allegorical woman labeled suffrage holding a sword of labor laws to protect three small children – the children, unlike Allender’s cartoon, appear distinctly white



They Shall Not Pass

and middle-class based on their features and grooming. The suffrage figure holds back the greedy hands of exploiters of children, all represented by men in suits. These men are poised as enemies to suffrage, politicians and factory owners who are willing to sacrifice children for profit. Another so-called enemy of the cause were people in the alcohol industry who feared that the passage of suffrage would allow for national temperance as well. Suffragists framed these characters as malicious, and themselves as brave. This cartoon certainly presents the suffrage figure as courageous by shielding the

Figure 3.8 “They Shall Not Pass.” *The Woman Citizen* (June 7, 1917).

children, wielding a sword, and facing the attacks of these exploiters. Labeled, “They shall not pass,” the cartoon suggests that suffrage would stand as a constant protector of children, staving off threats to the welfare of children.

Film was another popular form of media for suffragists to sell this message of women as reformers and protectors. NAWSA produced three films between 1912 and 1914, the most successful of which appears to have been *Your Girl and Mine* (1914). The film paints a beautiful, young suffragist as incredibly sympathetic. The woman marries a man at the beginning of the film. Throughout the film the husband accrues a huge amount of debt that the suffragist is responsible for paying off. He also engages in debauchery that drives the suffragist and her children from the home until the law “orders them ‘returned to the roof of their father.’”<sup>79</sup> The film suggested that all the problems that plagued the suffragist, but also society, could be solved if women were allowed to vote. Child labor, inadequate tenement fire escapes, eight-hour workdays, and divorce are all social problems that the film addressed. It then suggests that women, if given the vote, could alleviate the problems. The social problem film pushed the suffrage agenda that the cause could be a stepping stone to all of these other avenues for reform. If suffrage could gain support, then women could assume a larger responsibility for the welfare of society as a whole.

The film was very well-received. Kitty Kelly of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote “Slavery had its ‘Uncle Tom,’ temperance its barroom beacon, and now suffrage has its classic, done up in the mode of the moment – the movies.”<sup>80</sup> The melodrama portrayed a beautiful young suffragist as the heroine, a real life Allender Girl. The film appealed to working-class women through the charming actress by engaging what Nan Estad has called a movie-struck fantasy, the desire of

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<sup>79</sup> James McQuade, “Your Girl and Mine,” *The Moving Picture World* vol. 22, September 3, 1914, 675.

<sup>80</sup> Kitty Kelly, “Suffrage Movie Proves a Success,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1914.

working-class women to escape the drudgery of factory work to become movie heroines, and it appealed to men by painting suffragists as attractive, feminine, essentially nonthreatening.<sup>81</sup> The film set suffragists apart from the spinster, aggressive suffragists of older films, which had ridiculed woman suffragists.

NAWSA presented a vision of suffragists as heroic, hyper-feminine characters who deserved sympathy rather than disdain. They were vanguards of public health and safety. The vote could empower women to escape drunken husbands, to protect their children, create safe living conditions, and more. *Your Girl and Mine* used the Allender Girl vision to suggest that municipal housekeeping could be implemented more effectively if women carried the same political weight as men.

In *The Moving Picture World*, one of the early film trade magazines, James McQuade reviewed the film. He wrote “The near future, I firmly believe, will reveal to those who advocate equal suffrage that moving pictures, as shown in ‘Your Girl and Mine,’ will accomplish more for the cause than all that eloquent tongues have done since the movement started.”<sup>82</sup> This sort of thinking was precisely the same view that inspired NAWSA to pursue film. Suffrage discourse had mostly occurred only among suffragists who already supported the cause. To gain more support, suffragists needed to appeal to more people. By portraying suffragists as young and beautiful instead of as old spinsters, NAWSA helped make the movement more approachable for working-class audiences.

*Your Girl and Mine* was shown in seven key states where suffrage legislation was coming up for a vote. In the same way that automobile tours and lecture circuits had been used to push suffrage through state legislatures, so too could the suffrage propaganda films. These new,

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<sup>81</sup> Nan Estad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 183.

<sup>82</sup> James McQuade, “Your Girl and Mine,” *The Moving Picture World* vol. 22, September 3, 1914, 674.

modern ways to communicate with a broad audience helped suffragists present themselves as progressive. Though they had curbed the radical element of their message, suffragists still needed to encourage and engage the public in the most visible ways possible. Since film was a particularly popular leisure pastime in the early twentieth century, NAWSA's films engaged more people than suffrage had ever before.

Suffragists tried to prioritize attention over message. As long as suffrage was a major point of discussion, the nuances of the movement could be left unspoken. *Your Girl and Mine* "pictures unjust social conditions made possible by and due to women's unequal voice in the management of affairs in which she has no vote, and shown in a concrete dramatic story that ends happily with her winning the vote."<sup>83</sup> The film "taking Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous work as a guide," is carefully crafted "to avoid anything that might look like 'just preaching.'"<sup>84</sup> The plot of *Your Girl and Mine* is certainly a melodrama, a piece of entertainment. As a result, the specific discussion over how women would use the vote to achieve these reforms is lost.

### **Who Suffragists Were Not**

If suffragists were careful to present themselves as martyrs, militants, citizens, vanguards, and allegory, they were equally careful in how they were not represented. Just as suffragists dedicated themselves to promoting the Allender Girl model, in doing so, they also made it very clear the people whom they did not resemble.

One distinguishing characteristic of the model that suffragists promoted was her race. The suffrage woman was always white. Racism was certainly a major component of society during the Progressive Era, but the suppression of black women within the woman's suffrage movement seems like a calculated attempt by suffragists to present themselves as non-radical. If

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<sup>83</sup> "Suffrage Play on Road," *New York Times*, December 21, 1914.

<sup>84</sup> McQuade, "Your Girl and Mine," 674.

they embraced the support of black woman's suffragists like Mary Church Terrell or Ida B. Wells, they opened the group up for criticism from the numerous racists whose support they sought to win. Clearly suffrage aligned itself against black women. They refused to allow black women to march in their parades, appear in their pageants or political cartoons. African American women were absent from the pages of *The Suffragist*. In order to be considered a nonthreatening organization, suffragists kept black women out of their films.

Both the NWP and NAWSA created and perpetuated a singular image of a woman suffragist. The ideal was white, young, educated, and middle-class. Most active suffragists were middle-class women who had received higher education at universities like Vassar. Suffragists so desperately wanted to distance themselves from the poor that they proposed a float for a 1913 parade that included hobos. "Tramps," one article for the *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "to appear in Washington, D.C. as horrible example."<sup>85</sup> The float was intended to show that uneducated, unmotivated homeless people had more political authority than women with degrees and ambitions. The woman suffragists wanted to find "four or five of the toughest hobos" near the nation's capital to sport a sign reading, "but we kin vote."<sup>86</sup> The float never made it into the parade, but the suffragists clearly resented their relative lack of political rights.

In a special issue of *Life* magazine that was created by suffrage supporters, despite the publication's reputation as antisuffrage, the cartoon "Woman is Not Fit for the Ballot" appeared. The illustration features a motley crew of black men, illiterate southerners, immigrants, mobsters, and crime bosses. It implies, much like the proposed hobo float, that if men of these backgrounds deserved the vote, women needed the vote. Women would counteract all of these suspect political leanings. Further, it suggests an inherent mistake in allowing immoral and

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<sup>85</sup> "Hobos Will Join Suffrage March," *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 1913, 9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

uneducated men to vote, while women, the supposed moral center of society and often educated, put their futures in the hands of these ignorant or corrupt voters. The message is again both racist and elitist. These two currents helped appeal to the majority of white middle-class Americans whose support suffragists struggle to win.

Suffragists clearly crafted an identity of who they were and who they were not. In doing so, suffragists projected an identity to the American public. The best way to gauge how the general audience responded is by examining their own media that emerged as a response to the Allender Girl. It is important to note whether the media outside of suffragist control either adopted or rejected the suffrage model to determine how successful suffragists were in redefining their identity.

Chapter Four  
"Look Who's Here"  
*The Response*



Figure 4.4 "Look Who's Here." *Puck*, December, 1911.

This chapter will examine the way that media outside of the suffrage movement responded to the visual rhetoric of suffragists. The suffrage media campaign was very careful and coordinated, but the response was much less so. Whether or not leading publications and films either accepted or rejected the new suffrage model suggests the degree to which the revised strategy of woman suffrage was persuasive.

Gauging the effectiveness of the revised strategy of woman suffragists between 1910 and 1920 is difficult. For instance, the film *Your Girl and Mine*, the NAWSA melodrama from 1914 was reportedly abandoned when “the arrangement with the Film Corporation proved impossible and it finally had to be abandoned.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, the film played in cities from Omaha, El Paso, New York, Chicago, and Tacoma.<sup>88</sup> Advertisements and reviews indicate that the film was shown in a large variety of cities, generally with good reception. However, the *History of Woman Suffrage* only mentions the photoplay as a film viewed at a suffrage meeting. The production of films by suffrage organizations, therefore, tells us very little about the reception of the suffragists’ new media campaign, but a lot about the intent of organizations like NAWSA. Instead, the media that discusses the suffrage media itself is most useful in understanding the reception.

The most reasonable places to start looking for reaction to suffrage activities are the same types of media that suffragists used themselves. As a result, I have examined political cartoons, postcards, films, and newspapers to understand the dialog between suffrage publications and the

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<sup>87</sup> Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage V* (New York: National Woman Suffrage Publishing Co., 1922), 425.

<sup>88</sup> “Film for Suffrs to be Shown This Week,” *Omaha Sunday Bee*, February 21, 1915, 3. “Today and Tomorrow: Your Girl and Mine,” *El Paso Herald*, April 28, 1915, 2. “Suffrage Enlists a New Ally – Melodrama,” *New York Tribune*, September 25, 1914, 3. “Suffrage Movie Proves a Success,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1914, 8. “Your Girl and Mine,” *The Tacoma Times*, March 3, 1915, 8.

response by outside publications. This exchange of the suffrage image helps illuminate how well suffrage fit into the existing framework of American mass media.

### **Anti-Suffrage and the Fear of Gender Inversion**

One of the biggest obstacles for woman suffragists was a general fear of gender inversion. The predominant anti-suffrage fear throughout the nineteenth century was that the female sex would transform into a masculine gender if women were granted the vote.<sup>89</sup> For a nineteenth and twentieth century audience, gender was a binary system – male/female, masculine/feminine. The primary concerns among suffrage opponents in print and film revolve around this concern for inverted gender relations. Because of the belief that genders were mutually exclusive, there was little room for departing from expected gender norms. It was in this vein that much of the anti-suffrage literature and sketches of nineteenth-century suffragists emerged. The twentieth century was certainly still very invested in this gender dichotomy, which is why suffragists worked so hard to frame woman's suffrage as distinctly feminine through their own media. Still though, publications like *Life* magazine, which was opposed to suffrage, presented a number of cartoons that played with the idea of gender reversal. While suffragists saw the vote as a tool to accomplish reform, anti-suffragists saw the shift of women's roles as a threat to traditional gender roles and family values. A number of anti-suffragist media depict masculine women who stand opposed to the traditional values associated with women.

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<sup>89</sup> Laura Behling, *The Masculine Woman in America, 1890-1935* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 3.

Consider “The Eclipse,” the cartoon features a small, sad-looking man in the background of his plump wife who manages the affairs of the public sphere – indicated by reading the newspaper. The picture suggests that women, if more

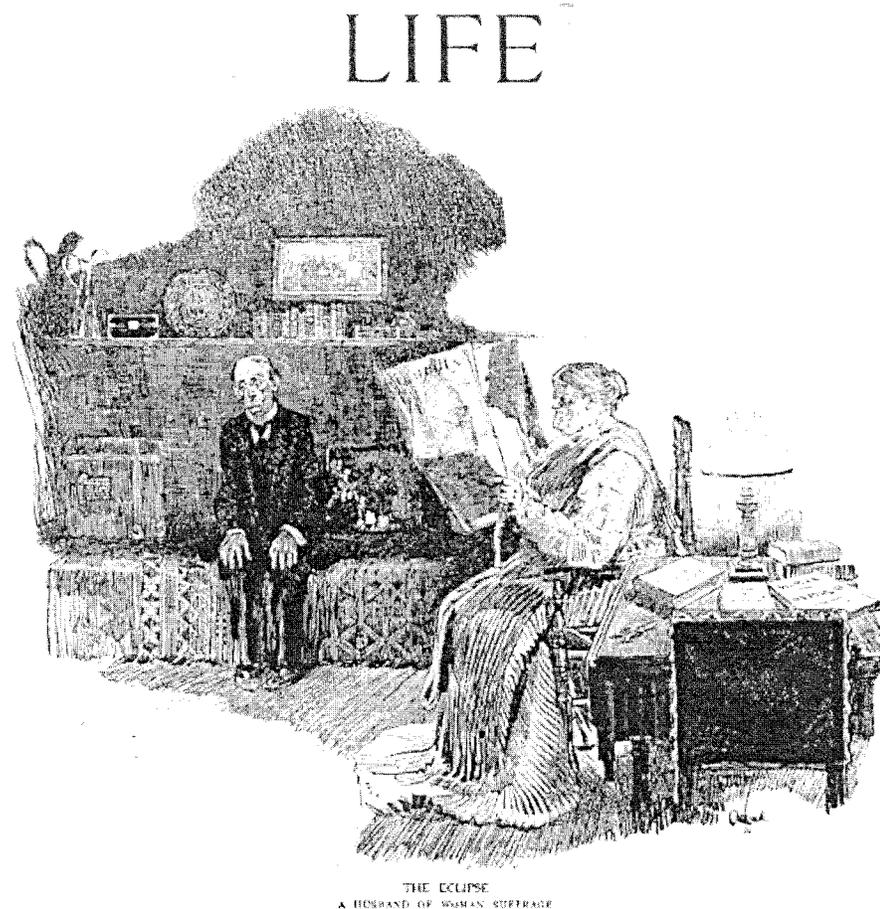


Figure 4.5 "The Eclipse: A Husband of Woman Suffrage." *Life* 51 (April, 1908), 425.

involved with matters outside the home, would usurp the significance of men within the home and in public. Significantly though, this cartoon was created in 1908, which was before the large-scale revision of the woman suffrage strategy. *Life* magazine published a number of cartoons that dealt directly with this theme of gender inversion. They printed cartoons of women engaged in “male” activities such as driving cars, smoking cigarettes, and mailing letters.

Films took a particularly comedic turn on the issue of gender inversion. In a number of films male actors were cast to play woman suffragists. Anti-suffrage films cut into the issue of suffrage with a slapstick style that edged on buffoonery. These antisuffrage depictions began in the 1890s with brief comedic criticisms of Carrie Nation, but developed into more involved parodies of the movement in the 1910s as film technology evolved, allowing for more complex

stories.<sup>90</sup> One such example is *A Lively Affair* (1912), a seven-minute film with an unknown production company. The origins of the film remain unknown because the original title cards and first minutes of the film have been lost. What remains of the film features suffragist women who abandon their womanly duties and descend morally. The women in the film dress in bloomers and manly blazers, and just as they have departed from feminine fashions, each suffragist forsakes all traditional feminine virtues. One woman leaves her husband at home with her children and goes to a suffrage meeting. Another woman realizes that she is going to be late to the meeting and decides to steal a young girl's bicycle. A third woman hands her infant to a complete stranger on the street so she can make it to the meeting. All the suffragist women rush to the meeting place where they gamble while their husbands and families suffer in their absence. Even worse, the suffrage meeting devolves into a cat fight over the card game, and a police officer comes to apprehend the bicycle thief. The women attack the police officer, and when more arrive, are all carted off to jail. Instead of bailing the wives out of jail, the husbands of the suffragists go out for a beer – a plug for the “wet” campaign that opposed suffrage because of its close alliance to the temperance movement – and dance triumphantly around their wives' jail cell. The final title card for the film reads “sadder but wiser” and quickly flashes back to the anguished faces of suffering suffragists. This film was produced at the same time as some of NAWSA's suffrage films, yet provides a very different vision of woman suffragists. Antis poised suffragists as a threat to the family, an old argument that stemmed from the nineteenth century. Perhaps this specific type of argument sheds some light on why woman suffragists were so keen

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<sup>90</sup> A number of films critiqued Carrie Nation, a radical hatchet-wielding teetotaler who smashed saloons in Kansas. Two well-known shorts by Edwin S. Porter include *Kansas Saloon Smashers* (1901) and *Why Mr. Nation Wants a Divorce* (1901). Both films address the radical nature of Nation's actions and deal directly with the fear of gender inversion. However, the two films do predate the restructuring of the woman's suffrage movement that occurs primarily in the 1910s.

on presenting a hyper-feminine vision of themselves. These films held less weight in the face of an overwhelmingly feminine face for woman suffrage.

Another short produced by Keystone, *A Busy Day* (1914) cast Charlie Chaplin to play a suffragist. In this explicit vision of gender inversion, Chaplin's suffragist character becomes enraged at a parade when she sees her husband flirting with another woman. The woman kicks and punches several men at the event, but pauses to smile and wave for a nearby camera, implying that suffragists were media hungry, a critique that was particularly poignant when one considers that 1913-1915 were the height for woman's suffrage demonstrations. The suffragist fights several men and attacks the woman her husband was interested in with an umbrella.<sup>91</sup> The suffragist dances after she has beaten up all those who opposed her, and then can be seen scratching her rear end in a very unladylike manner. At the very end of the film a man pushes the suffragist into the water and no one jumps in to save her. The film is subtitled *The Militant Suffragette* to make it very evident to the audience that the woman behaves in this crude, violent, and unfeminine manner because the militancy of her suffragist cause has made her this way. The film is unlike some other anti-suffrage films in that Chaplin's suffragist character actually fights for her husband instead of abandoning him. Lesbianism was another serious concern for antis, who believed that suffragists would prefer the company of women over their husbands. The film is less focused on the impact that suffrage would have on the home, and more interested in how the roles of male and female would blend together in society. This film represents a central concern about the distinction of gender.

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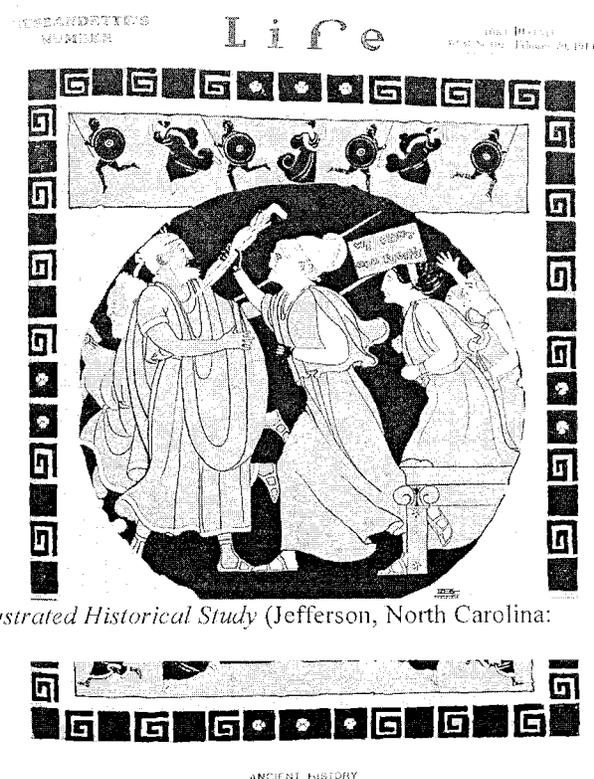
<sup>91</sup> Attacking men with umbrellas seems to have been a common motif for antis. Cartoons of Susan B. Anthony often feature her wielding one as she chases after naysayers. Perhaps the umbrella represents the suffrage's claim of protection – as in municipal reforms, child welfare, etc. Suffragists are using their reform not to better society, but rather to attack it.

Additionally, these films were aimed at the exact type of audiences that suffragists had excluded through their own campaign. The poor, African-Americans, and immigrants were among the largest consumer of film, so it makes sense that production companies would engage this critique of suffragists to earn a profit. At the same time that suffragists were trying to promote themselves in social problem films, these antis presented a vision of suffragists that more closely aligned with their audience's perceptions of the movement.

A twelve part series of postcards produced by Dunston-Weiler Lithograph Company in 1909 clearly reflects this popular fear of suffrage as a means to distorting gender. The enfranchisement of women would compromise gender divisions. If women engaged in a masculine activity -- i.e. voting, they may descend into moral decay. Women would begin smoking and drinking, forego motherhood and become harlots. The shift to American culture could be so fundamental that even Uncle Sam, an understood emblem of Americanism, could be feminized. Consider "Uncle Sam, Suffragee" a comical looking Uncle Sam who wears high heels, a skirt, a huge bow, and even lipstick. Clearly, Dunston-Weiler held deep fears over the impact suffrage would have on America. Other cards in the series suggest that women would become criminal by buying votes or masculine by wearing pants or finding jobs as police officers. To fill the gap that women left behind, men would have to become feminized. The series features the "Suffragette Madonna," a turn on the traditional Madonna image, in which the figure is not a mother, but rather a father. The print coincides with the larger argument that suffrage would be an attack on the home. Other illustrations from the collection echo these concerns of the dissolution of family. One depicts a husband washing dishes and another shows a husband wondering where his wife had gone.

Interestingly, the Dunston-Weiler series contains a number images of cats in the home of suffragists. Cats were used as a way to delegitimize the suffrage cause. Antis likened the cry for woman's suffrage to the cry of cat's suffrage. They argued that females, much like felines, were biological unsuited for the political arena. Middle-class suffragists who espoused eugenics in their alienation of black and immigrant supporters, ironically faced the same criticism from their own opposition. The use of cat imagery also likely has a connection to the British government's Cat and Mouse Act, which allowed prisons to release suffragists on hunger strikes so that they would not die in prison and become martyrs. Antis in the United States borrowed the imagery to suggest that woman's suffrage was silly, and to situate the cat within a suffragist's home as the Dunston-Weiler series does, helps frame the scene as a home under duress. Cats were popular among suffragists, scholar Kenneth Florey claims that a porcelain cat was the "most common of all suffrage ceramics."<sup>92</sup>

Antis engaged in the same cultural dialog as suffragists, and as such, these opponents often played on the same social cues and symbols. Consider this cover from *Life* magazine, "Ancient History," from 1913. The cartoon toys with the suffragist's heavy use of allegory by situating the ever controversial Susan B. Anthony in a toga and in the style of Greek pottery. The pioneer of woman's rights wears her trademarked grimace and holds an umbrella at the throat of patrician. Along the



<sup>92</sup> Kenneth Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia: An Illustrated Historical Study* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland, 2013), 67.

Figure 4.3 "Ancient History," *Life*, February 20, 1913.

top and bottom of the illustration women chase away soldiers with spears and shields. The cartoon pokes fun at the aggression of suffragists and frames the reader's mind to think of how absurd the suffragist's claim to ancient history truly is.

Absurdity was fundamental to antisuffrage media. Antis framed the question of suffrage as trivial. An animated political cartoon entitled *Strong Arm Squad of the Future* (1912) featured a parade of caricatured suffragists who were either militant, or else young and naïve women using the cause as an excuse to dress up. The parade emphasizes a counterpoint to the archetypes of the suffrage campaign. Antis framed suffragists as masculine, ugly, assertive, brash. They were not mothers, protectors, or nurturers. Suffragists were conniving, corrupt political animals who threatened the stability of society and the American ethos. Antis played on the Progressive fear of anarchy by framing suffrage much like it had been in the century prior – as radical and marginal.

However, it seems that antisuffrage media died down during the war years. For instance, fewer films depicting suffragists one way or the other seem to exist after 1914. The decline of suffragists on the silver screen probably correlates to the war, which eclipsed discussion of the cause following its European beginning in July, 1914. Additionally, one could attribute the decline of negative portrayals of suffragists to a declining interest on the part of consumers, who were possibly taken by the comprehensive nature of the woman's suffrage campaign. Despite the cause, by 1915 the suffrage movement seemed to have the battle against the antis. From that year onward, a number of third-party media seemed to favor woman's suffrage. Including *Life* magazine who had published a number of anti-suffrage illustrations.



Figure 4.4 "From Producer to Consumer," *Life* August 22, 1913.

For example, *Life* magazine published a cartoon on their cover in 1918 during the Great War, which featured a woman farmer, completely feminine with a pink bonnet, ruby lips, and bright cheeks, kissing her soldier goodbye. The caption for the illustration reads, "From producer to consumer." The phrase situates the cartoon within the larger trend for women to take on a larger responsibility for supplying the war. Certainly, this specific cartoon emulates the style of

NAWSA's campaign to present suffragists as helpful citizens during the war. The magazine seems to move away from a staunch antisuffrage campaign in 1908 slowly toward a stance that, if not pro-suffrage, is at least significantly less resistant to the cause. This illustration does not feature the "producer" as threatening, instead she is decidedly feminine. The woman in the cartoon fits snugly into the mold for women to take on the role of production in times of war. She is discernibly female despite taking on a male role. In this vein, the cartoon could easily have fit into NAWSA's large-scale campaign to get women to support the war. Certainly, this *type* of cooperation on behalf of women was persuasive both to President Wilson and his Congress.

*Life* even dedicated an entire special issue to support suffrage in 1913. The magazine explained, “This issue of *Life* perpetrates, illustrates, defends, and illuminates the cause of Woman Suffrage. It has seemed to *Life* that it was only fair that this side should be given.”<sup>93</sup> It seems likely that *Life* felt compelled to produce an issue in support of suffrage as a result of the surging popularity of the movement, which was predicated largely on the success of the suffrage parade in Washington D.C. that March. In the special issue, magazine published cartoons like “Barred Out,” which plays into the vanguard prototype that suffragists presented in their own media. The cartoon features a woman’s hand holding a ballot that contains a wall of graft, corruption, and pollution within a city. The side under the vote’s protection appears pristine with the sun peeking out above the city municipal building.



Figure 4.5 “Barred Out,” *Life* (October 16, 1913), 646.

### Supporters

The suffrage movement certainly had opponents, but as the movement evolved into a more approachable representation of woman suffragists, the movement gained considerable support in popular magazines. For instance, *Puck*, a popular humor magazine, began publishing positive suffrage cartoons after 1911. The magazine seems to have adopted the same type of depictions of woman suffragists as did popular suffrage organs. In 1915 *Puck* published “The

<sup>93</sup> “This Number,” *Life* (October 16, 1913), 648.

Awakening,” a cartoon featuring a classical-looking woman sporting a gold toga, torch, and cape labeled “Votes for Women” bringing the light of liberty from the West to women of the East. The cartoon takes up the popular use of classic Greco-Roman figure used by NAWSA in cartoons and public demonstrations and tableaux. Again, a popular news outlet seems to have adopted, consciously or not, one of the types of arguments that suffragists produced and disseminated on their own accord.

*Puck* often found itself on the supporting side of suffragists. Often, the humor magazine presented cartoons that would have fit very well on either the pages of *The Suffragist* or the *Woman’s Journal*. “Revised” appeared in the magazine in April, 1917. The cartoon features an allegorical, classical figure wielding

scroll and a pen. The wall reads “Woman’s sphere is the home,” with the home crossed out and replaced with “wherever she makes good.” The woman holds a list of places where woman’s place could be: the home, the law, industry, the school, the stage, business, the arts. The cartoon suggests that woman has revised her position relative to society, which fits very much into the suffragists’ suggestion that granting women the vote would not



Figure 64.6 "Revised," *Puck* 2093 (April, 1917), 21.

be radical, but rather a change that has, in large part, already occurred. Woman already exerts influence on all of these parts of society, the vote would only empower her to do so more efficiently.

In addition to these popular publications, a fair amount of suffrage paraphernalia was produced outside of the official movement. For instance, the cause enlisted the hugely popular images of Kewpies -- an army of cherub-like babies whose dimples and diapers endeared the American public. Created by Rose O'Neill, the Kewpies were a huge commercial success through poetry published in national magazines, mass-produced bisque dolls, and charming postcards. O'Neill lent her famed Cupids to the suffrage cause, as she was a supporter of woman's enfranchisement.

Kewpies, an affectionate nickname for cupid-like cherubs, launched into popular culture in 1909 when they first appeared in an issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The characters were created by Rose O'Neill, a cartoonist from Pennsylvania. In 1914 *Good Housekeeping* published a series of poems about the mischievous, but helpful creatures, entitled "The Kewpies Arrive." O'Neill illustrated and wrote the poem:

*They're Kewpies -- short for Cupid; thus, you see,  
 They're shorter than that famous "cuss," you see,  
 Their little tummies are more dumpy, too.  
 Their general aspect much more plumpy, too.  
 They look on ordinary Cupids, though,  
 As nothing more than little stupids, though,  
 For they are always working double-while  
 To get poor people into trouble, while  
 The Kewpies' one idea is: "Let 'em out!  
 By hook or crook, or crowbar, get 'em out!"<sup>94</sup>*

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<sup>94</sup> Rose O'Neill, "The Arrival of the Kewpies," *Good Housekeeping* 58, no. 6 (June, 1914), 761.

They became wildly popular as they were produced as paper dolls and more elaborate German porcelain dolls. Rose O'Neill lent the image of her famous cherubs to the suffrage cause as she was an avid supporter of votes for women. She created a series of postcards and cartoons that presented the Kewpies promoting the cause. The Kewpies are indicative of the consumerism that really guided the way in which suffragists presented themselves to the general public. Margaret Finnegan wrote in *Selling Suffrage* that the commodities produced by and for the woman's suffrage movement in the 1910s "became signifiers of cultural legitimacy in a consumer-capitalist society. They suggested that non-radical suffragists were fully in tune with modern consumer values, including the celebration of material abundance and commodity-centered selfhood."<sup>95</sup>

O'Neill and other illustrators additionally suggested that children demanded the votes on behalf of their mothers who needed the vote to help regulate all things concerning childcare. Female suffragists also thought that the use of girls in their images helped to frame woman's suffrage, not only as an issue concerning adults, but the lives and futures of female children.

Suffragists seemed to have won out in the media battle, particularly in the war years as women became more respectable politically. As women sacrificed and toiled alongside men, they won much support for the cause of suffrage. Suffragists also seemed to win out against the opposition because antis lost interest in combatting the cause during the war, when political cartooning needed to focus more on international issues than domestic. As a result, the suffrage media campaign captured the attention of many Americans with their highly feminine images. The campaign was so well-recognized that outside publications latched onto the prototypical depictions of women. Publications like *Puck* and *Judge* helped promote the same type of arguments that suffragists themselves had.

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<sup>95</sup> Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 113.



## Conclusion

The revised strategy of the woman's suffrage movement in the twentieth century was, as I have argued, a distinctly modern campaign. It used popular methods of Progressive reformers to engage a broader audience than it had ever done before, yet it situated itself squarely into the exclusionary concept of eugenics, which limited the support suffragists won from the poor, the ethnic, and African-Americans. Indeed, suffragists abandoned any notions of equality that nineteenth century suffragists had laid out in the Declaration of Sentiments. Instead, suffragists framed their movement as a celebration of the traditional. They used modern methods, but pushed a moderate agenda that earned them favor from a large confederation of clubwomen, and poised them as nonthreatening in the minds of male voters.

Suffrage found its way into the consumer culture through every avenue possible. They produced postcards, films, magazines, newspapers, plays, parades, pageants, songs, and even material goods. Suffragists tried to saturate the media with their own message, which was carefully crafted with the understanding that Progressive Americans did not want revolution, they wanted *progress*. Suffragists tried to define progress in the American consciousness as the enfranchisement of women. To keep that message mainstream, suffragists threw themselves into the culture of the Progressive world. They held onto older views of motherhood, but injected their image with the youth and vibrancy of a new century. By embracing modern media, suffragists were no longer on the margins, but instead in the limelight through their relentless public spectacles. Suffragists, and particularly the NWP, became media darlings. They found their way out of closed meetings and small conferences, into streets and theaters.

Despite modern means, the message of the new campaign mostly aligned to Victorian ideals of home and motherhood. Suffragists played into existing gender roles as a tactic to de-radicalize the movement. The suffrage movement was not the only social movement of the

Progressive era, but it was one of the most successful. The cause seemingly stagnated after the 1880s, but it awoken as Catt and other suffrage leaders successfully united a number of woman's clubs buying into the potential of the vote, for gradual, not radical change. Again the movement revitalized as Alice Paul and the NWP coordinated a campaign that reframed the suffragist identity in the American mind. The revised strategy presented suffrage as a cause that would not weaken the virtues of womanhood, but rather strengthen them.

The Allender Girl was youthful, bright, and very white. The model rejected the support of black suffragists to help distance the movement from the controversy of race. Suffragists, very much a product of the Progressive Era, recognized that race could be polarizing. To create a movement that was incorporated into the mainstream media, they deliberately chose to alienate those who stood apart from their white, middle-class vision of suffrage. Leaders like Paul and Catt spoke publicly about this desire to create distance between suffrage and race. These woman's rights leaders were not concerned for all women, but rather those who met their status, culture, and race.

Suffrage was a cause, which motivated women to work beyond themselves. They promoted an ideal of woman; an ideal, which many early suffragists of the nineteenth century would have rejected. The Allender Girl wore the latest fashions, had an education, and campaigned vigorously for her cause. As the campaign hoped to draw in more support, it played on the perceived fragility of womankind by labeling women like Inez Milholland and the force-fed prisoners at Occoquan as martyrs. The new woman was meant to be a way to remove woman from her exalted pedestal in the cult of true womanhood, but certainly, the outlook given by NAWSA and the NWP between 1910 to 1920 was not one of equality. The campaign sacrificed the vision of democracy laid out in the Declaration of Sentiments as a means of expediency.

As a result, the loose confederation of clubwomen who had formed a majority of the suffrage movement fell apart in the years after suffrage passed. Nobody agreed on the particular potential of woman's enfranchisement. Some women voters clamored for legislation that protected mothers and children from mistreatment in the workplace. These women like Florence Kelley of Chicago, for example, wanted to use the vote as a way of preserving the mystique of womankind. They wanted to define women in terms relating to her biological role as mother and nurturer. These type of women were typically more attuned to avenues for municipal housekeeping.

On the other hand, a number of women emerged as proponents for sexual equality. After the nineteenth amendment passed, Alice Paul wrote the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1923; the proposed amendment would ensure equality of rights could not be denied based on sex. Members of the NWP associated with this clamor for equality, which fundamentally opposed most of the imagery they propagated during the campaign for suffrage. Instead of framing woman as special, the NWP shifted their message to reflect the New Woman ideal. However, as suffragists, these women, had situated their entire media campaign on the fact that women were not equal to men. They had argued that the vote would be used, not to make women equal to men, but so women's particular feminine virtue could elevate and shape society positively. The suffrage movement's films, parades, and cartoons celebrated the divide between genders by promoting women as hyper-feminine.

Alice Paul's proposed amendment did not pass. Ninety-one years later, the amendment sits unratified. Perhaps one reason that the ERA could not gain any traction is that it departed drastically from the suffrage media campaign. Where suffragists had suggested that suffrage would be a moderate change, the ERA failed to frame itself in familiar terms. The ERA was

bold, where the suffrage movement had been timid – in message. The suffrage campaign was purposefully vague. In an attempt to appeal to a very broad audience, suffragists suggested all the things that the vote could do, but not specifically what aims they held.

While suffragists successfully campaigned with modern methods, the original hopes for sexual equality suffered. They won the vote, but not much else. The confederation of clubwomen decayed in the years after 1920. While many enemies of suffrage had feared that women would organize together, women split between political parties. Their campaign had created an approachable vision of woman voters, but in doing so, they neglected the nuances of what they thought the vote *should* do. They created an argument that appealed to many because it did not hold significance one way or the other. The suffrage ideal was a commodity, not a cause.

That being said, suffrage was a significant victory for woman's rights. But, the campaign of the 1910s, raises concerns over whether a slower, more deliberate campaign for equality could have been more beneficial to the entirety of woman's rights than the feminized suffrage campaign orchestrated by NAWSA and the NWP.

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