ABSTRACT

MOUNTCASTLE, SHERRY. Challenges and Triumphs of the North Carolina Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894-1920. (Under the direction of Dr. Blair Kelley.)

This thesis describes the early development of the suffrage movement in North Carolina and the political and social challenges addressed throughout the movement’s history. It describes the leadership within both the suffragist and the antisuffragist groups in the state. Also addressed are the roles of gender, race, and politics in suffrage and antisuffrage literature. Special attention will be given to the important role of the state’s industrialists in opposing woman suffrage, and their motivation for doing so. Research includes the use of suffrage and antisuffrage records and publications, as well as numerous newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to gauge contemporary public opinion.
Challenges and Triumphs of the North Carolina Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894-1920

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DEDICATION

For all the encouragement and sacrifices,

I would like to dedicate this

Work to my supportive husband and chief editor,

Mike Mountcastle, my sons Mark and Matthew,

and my biggest cheerleaders, my parents,

Johnny and Judy Robinson.
BIOGRAPHY

I received my BA in history in 1999 at North Carolina State University. I have a husband, two sons, a daughter-in-law, and a grandson. I am currently employed as an instructor at Johnston Community College in Smithfield, NC. I live in Benson with my husband and my youngest son.
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Introduction

Most of the published work relating to the North Carolina suffrage movement has emphasized the important role that gender and race played in the public debate on suffrage. A. Elizabeth Taylor’s 1961 article in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, “The Woman Suffrage Movement in North Carolina,” focused primarily on the movement’s development, chronology, and early structure. Taylor outlined the public debate in the legislature on how voting might soil morally superior women’s pristine petticoats should they stoop to the level of enfranchised men. She focused on the structure and strategy of the suffragists in attempting to overcome the gender biases so prevalent during the period. Anastasia Sims, in *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women’s Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930*, also focused on gender roles. Although she mentioned industry and race in the suffrage debate, her work centered more on the role of woman’s clubs, and the social and legal restrictions North Carolina’s women faced prior to enfranchisement.

Sims, mentioned industry’s opposition to suffrage, her work focused primarily (as indicated by its title) on the Southern leaders of the movement and the sociopolitical obstacles suffragists encountered. *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question*, by Elna C. Green, likewise addressed the cultural transitions taking place simultaneous to the woman suffrage issue. Green gave some attention to the fact that large industries, like textile mills, ignored woman’s club entreaties for better conditions for working women and children, thus helping to stimulate growth in the suffrage movement. She tended to focus on antisuffrage women in particular, with special emphasis on the dynamics of woman suffrage on class distinctions, gender, and race.

I contend that while race and gender played a significant part in North Carolina’s suffrage movement, the role of North Carolina’s industrialists is equally important. Textile mill owners used their money and political influence to create and sustain antisuffrage rhetoric centered on race and gender roles. While race and gender concerns certainly affected opinions on the suffrage issue, textile leaders (the primary members of the antisuffrage groups) hoped to distract and detract from issues relating to industrial reform. Suffragists throughout the nation sympathized with and supported labor restrictions for women and children. The only antisuffrage organization to form in North Carolina sprang up practically overnight within weeks of the debate over ratification of the 19th Amendment in the state’s legislature. The State’s Rights Defense League and the North Carolina Rejection League appeared fully funded at creation, with newsletters and brochures, as well as a headquarters in Raleigh. Membership in these groups, though small, included the wealthiest men and women in the state, all connected in some fashion to the cotton industry.
I believe that the cotton coalition deserves a more central place (alongside race and gender) in evaluating the suffrage movement in North Carolina. Primary sources are difficult to find directly linking the state’s cotton men to antisuffrage factions; they did not leave behind a trail of receipts. They did, however, sign their names openly to the roster of the State’s Rights Defense League. I suggest that the link motivating them to defy woman suffrage legislation can nevertheless be subtly teased out from other evidence. Nationally, as suffrage for women spread over time in the North and West, labor reform measures did likewise. North Carolina’s spokesman for the textile industry, David Clark, battled woman suffrage almost as enthusiastically as he fought against child labor reform. He worked against national legislation and supporters of both causes in Washington, D. C., as well as in North Carolina. North Carolina’s textile industry dominated its northern neighbors, and the regulations that might infringe on the high profits industrialists made through cheap labor—regulations the state’s suffragists felt compelled to initiate—were particularly unwelcome.

“Suffrage Development in North Carolina” chronicles the growth and development of woman suffrage in North Carolina. It is an overview of the chronology of events, from the first loosely organized group in Asheboro in 1894 to the vast statewide organization that became the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League. “Textile Manufacturers and Suffrage” describes the role of the textile industry in opposing suffrage for women in North Carolina. This chapter also outlines the effects of woman suffrage on industry in other states, and the fact that most of the primary leaders who opposed the ratification of the Anthony Amendment had a financial stake in textile mills. They feared that reform measures initiated by voting women would make serious inroads into their profits if industrialists were forced to pay a minimum wage to workers or dismiss young children from their employ.
“The Rhetoric of Gender and Race” describes these two traditional yet important elements in the suffrage movement in North Carolina. Sustaining white supremacy and the political and social subordination of women motivated many opponents of woman suffrage in the state. Suffrage women struggled to overcome cultural norms embedded in society for generations. “Special Session and Woman Suffrage” highlights the climatic and disappointing final days of the legislature’s debate over ratification of the Anthony Amendment. Antisuffrage congressmen, mostly from large textile and cotton producing areas (as noted in previous chapters), rallied their supporters against the increasing numbers of suffrage supporters. A divided General Assembly stalled on the question, allowing Tennessee the opportunity to become the thirty-sixth and final state to vote for the Nineteenth Amendment. Without the aggressive campaign of the textile coalition against suffrage, North Carolina suffragists might have succeeded in realizing their dream of becoming the thirty-sixth state to endorse the Anthony Amendment, thus granting voting rights to women across the nation.
Suffrage Development in North Carolina

Like so much of the rest of the South around the turn of the twentieth century, North Carolina resisted the growing national movement to enfranchise women. State politicians were very protective of the political control they brokered around the state. Just when they thought they had found a way to secure their all male, white supremacist political machine, North Carolina’s women began to organize themselves into a powerful and irritating lobby. For over twenty-five years, suffrage supporters battled, lobbied, persuaded, debated, or cajoled political representatives and the general public to the suffrage cause.

In many ways, the North Carolina suffrage movement mimicked the national movement. By the early 1900s, women had already begun to assume roles in social reform efforts throughout the country, especially those concerning temperance, labor, and child welfare. Women’s clubs, civic organizations, war work, temperance unions, and other progressive causes provided a sort of incubator from which future suffragists developed organizational, speaking, and lobbying skills. Through this experience, women came to understand and appreciate their limits within the existing political system. Influencing legislators too often proved a difficult task without the power voting rights could afford. As a result, many women in these groups found suffrage the common cause for which they might unite. Historian Elna C. Green wrote that suffrage “ultimately became one of the largest mass movements of women in American history.”¹ Southern women participated, albeit a generation behind the rest of the country.

With a more industrial economy, urban population, established middle class, and
greater access to higher education, women in the North led their southern counterparts in
suffrage work. In the South, these factors developed at a much slower pace—consequently,
so did the suffrage movement. However, as much of the South began the shift from rural to
urban populations, those same factors critical to northern suffrage work finally came into
place. This “New South” consisted of a small but growing middle class, better education (for
some), and an increasingly industrial economy. These factors, as well as the club work
experience, helped create an infrastructure similar to that in the North. This allowed suffrage
workers to develop and sustain a movement in North Carolina during this period. ²

Despite these similarities, southern suffragists faced many obstacles that their
northern sisters did not. They worked to expand the electorate at a time when most southern
states, including North Carolina, had successfully managed to limit it. They sought to
broaden the social and political role of women in the most conservative, traditional region of
the country. Perhaps, even worse, woman suffragists represented a movement whose
antebellum roots had germinated in northern abolitionist soil. North Carolina Democrats,
through a combination of Jim Crow and physical intimidation, had managed to recover their
white, male, political hegemony that had been compromised during the Reconstruction years.
Any perceived threat to their political monopoly, such as suffrage, caused suspicion, anxiety,
and ridicule. ³

For example, in 1897, Yancey County Republican J. L. Hyatt introduced the first bill
for woman suffrage in the North Carolina Senate. A self-proclaimed follower of Abraham

³ Majorie Spruill Wheeler, New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in
the Southern States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xiii-xv.
Lincoln’s philosophies, Hyatt believed Lincoln favored giving women the ballot. Unfortunately, the rest of the senate did not share his view. Democrats and Republicans alike, with what seems to be a peculiar sense of humor, referred the bill to the Committee on Insane Asylums, upon which Hyatt served as chair. Despite his best efforts, he could not convince his fellow senators to refer the bill to another committee because “it was plain that they thought the right committee had the bill.”

The idea of allowing women the right to vote seemed laughable to the 1897 legislature. Their amusement appeared to come from the notion of a woman doing a man’s job—voting. At this early stage of the movement, rejection of woman suffrage seemed likely to be a product of legislators’ unwillingness to even imagine North Carolina’s women stepping outside of their prescribed social spheres.

Hyatt’s proposed bill came only three years after the first woman’s suffrage club was organized. In 1894, Helen Morris Lewis arranged the first meeting of what would become the North Carolina Equal Suffrage Association in the Buncombe County Courthouse. She, along with Asheville Mayor Thomas W. Patton and other local civic leaders, toured the state, gave speeches, and encouraged others to form local suffrage leagues. Throughout 1895, Lewis canvassed the state with prominent figures like Laura Clay of Kentucky, Belle Kearney of Mississippi, Elizabeth Yates of Maine, and Frances Willard of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Lewis continued making speeches throughout 1896. She believed that her efforts were taking effect because “some of the old prejudices were wearing away.”

When asked to justify her stand on woman suffrage, Lewis stated:

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6 Taylor, 47.
It matters not whether women desire to be emancipated or not; that has nothing to do with the justice of the question. When a convict’s term has expired, the law does not consult him as to his preference of liberty or imprisonment. A man is not argued with as to his approval of his right to the ballot. It is given to him as the birthright of an American citizen. Some women, through a lack of enlightenment, prefer to be aliens in their own land, but this is no excuse for a government to grind under its heels the most God-given law of justice. All the professions, occupations, and higher education to which women are now entitled have been gained by rooting out prejudice and superstition.  

Lewis sounded much like early feminists of the mid-1800s who were influenced by Enlightenment ideas of equality. Many believed that they deserved to vote because all human beings, regardless of gender, were equal. Early records indicate that suffragists founded their movement primarily on ideals of justice. Undaunted by the failure of Hyatt’s suffrage bill, Lewis continued to agitate. She even ran for public office. She lost her 1899 bid for the Superintendent of Water in Asheville, but the positive feedback from many citizens left her optimistic about future political prospects for women. For Lewis and her supporters, suffrage represented an extension of the basic ideals of the founding fathers—a government of and for the people meant all people, including women. She couched her arguments in terms of simple justice based on birthrights as United States citizens.

Though Lewis and others in the nascent North Carolina Equal Suffrage Association continued to stump the state in an effort to increase support, enthusiasm slowly stagnated. Not until 1913 did suffrage advocates enjoy a relatively strong and sustained resurgence of interest, due in part to the National Woman Suffrage Association. Both the state and national

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7 Woman's Journal (Boston and Chicago: 1870-1917) XXV 24 November 1894, 372.
8 There are numerous sources dealing with the early ideology of nineteenth century feminists. For a good description, see Elisabeth Griffith, In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
9 Woman's Journal, XXX (3 June 1898), 176.
groups had suffered from poor leadership during the early part of the century. This greatly affected the membership and organizational dynamics within the movement. However, by 1913, both organizations experienced renewed interest and leadership. Carrie Chapman Catt introduced her “Winning Plan,” which called for national involvement on a state by state level. Catt sent experienced suffragists to North Carolina (and other states) to assist local groups with training, organization, and strategies. New pockets of suffrage support developed as a direct result.\(^{10}\)

First, a small group of women organized in Morganton in July, followed by Greenville citizens a few months later. Anna Forbes Liddell and Susanne Bynum officially chartered the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League with a total of forty-nine members. At their first meeting, held in Charlotte, members elected Mrs. Archibald Henderson of Chapel Hill as president. Mrs. R. E. Reilley of Charlotte became vice president. Liddell and Bynum enlisted the help of the president of Virginia’s Equal Suffrage League, Lila Meade Balentine. She made speeches before women’s groups promoting the ballot for women in the twentieth century. National suffrage organizer Lavina Engle of Baltimore spent several weeks in North Carolina as well, helping local chapters organize. Members represented the typical “New South”—educated middle class women who were far removed from the traditional planter class of antebellum North Carolina. Their spouses tended to be small businessmen and professionals. These women organized themselves and launched local chapters in Bakersville, Charlotte, Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Kinston, New Bern, Goldsboro, Reidsville, Washington, High Point, Asheville, Hickory, and Salisbury.\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Wheeler, 216. Green, *Southern Strategies*, 4-5.

\(^{11}\) Taylor, 51.
Suffrage work in North Carolina seemed promising. Yet some enthusiasts refrained from active participation under pressure from powerful men’s groups. For example, North Carolina’s college women could not organize school chapters of the League. The members of the Boards of Trustees (all male) actively prohibited it, deeming suffrage activism “unladylike.” Katherine B. Rondhaler, wife of Salem College’s president, wrote Mary Henderson in November that though she was very interested in the movement, she found herself being “held back by our Board of Trustees and their general attitude, not wishing me to appear publicly in committee [suffrage] work on account of the college.” Board members feared that the college’s image might be tarnished if the president’s wife stepped outside the bounds of a woman’s domestic sphere and agitating in unladylike fashion for suffrage. Rondhaler encouraged others to participate, nevertheless, and expressed frustration at the general “conservatism in the matter” among the women in Winston-Salem at the time. Obviously, she felt herself excused, but not the women who did not share her special restrictions.\(^\text{12}\) Some female college students, on the other hand, felt restraint unnecessary. State Normal School students held parades and gave speeches. One law student enthusiastically charged women to “raise fewer dahlias and a lot more hell. The place is here. The time is now. The opportunity is yours. It is not the time for women to be alone. They must work together.”\(^\text{13}\)

Though some men openly opposed woman suffrage activity, others embraced it. Several prominent men joined the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League. Mary

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Henderson’s husband, Dr. Archibald Henderson from the University of North Carolina, not only joined the movement, but also traveled and spoke on its behalf. He stated:

A government is not yet complete that withholds from its most enlightened women what it freely gives to its benighted men... The right of women to vote does and should rest upon the same basis as does the right of man to vote... The simple question of abstract justice proves that women should not be discriminated against on account of sex.⁴

Like many in the movement, his suffrage ideology stemmed from the notion that citizenship alone entitled women to the same privileges at the polls as men. Voting symbolized equality and justice for North Carolina’s women.

Another male suffragist and one of its most eloquent speakers was North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Walter Clark. His enthusiasm, oratory skills, and the clout of his position on the state’s Supreme Court kept him in demand as a speaker. He produced numerous private letters advising suffrage leaders on strategy and tactics. He wrote pamphlets, speeches, and editorials urging men who were “just” to give women the political power they deserved. He occasionally addressed suffrage organizations at home and in other states. In January, 1914, he was invited to speak before Virginia’s Equal Suffrage League. Copies of his speech were reprinted in the form of brochures and widely distributed. In trying to convince the men of the South to allow women at the polls, he appealed to their chivalrous natures. He told his Virginia audience:

In ten great states of this Union and one territory they [women] have been granted the suffrage by the majority of the men, the women themselves not voting. Shall the men of the South be less just or less chivalrous? I am a native-born Southerner. I have shed my blood in your service, in the ranks for your armies... I can therefore speak frankly to my own people. We have

⁴ News and Observer 19 April 1914.
boasted of our chivalrous regard for women, and there are none that more
deserve it than those of the South; but in honest truth...the South has been and
is still a laggard. We praise them in phrase which often is exuberant, and
which to some may seem extravagant; but judged by our actions towards
them, men of the South, we have not been sincere. We have treated them like
spoiled children. We have given them honeyed phrases which they do not
ask, and denied them the substantial right to which they are justly entitled.\footnote{Walter Clark, “Equal Suffrage,” An Address by Chief Justice Walter Clark of the North Carolina Supreme Court before the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia (Richmond: 30 January 1914)}

Copies of this particular speech, as well as a similar one given a year later before the
Equal Suffrage League of Greensboro, North Carolina, became part of the literary armor
used by activists. Clark’s stature as a judge in the state’s highest court lent dignity and
sincerity to an issue that had once been scorned as “insane.” Men like Clark and Henderson
certainly helped the suffrage cause. In fact, Mary Henderson, in a slight exaggeration, stated
toward the end of 1914 that membership in the state chapter was

\ldots made up almost, if not quite, as many men as women...the women of North
Carolina have been always the friends and helpers of the men; and these men
have now awakened to the fact that simple justice demands that women have a
voice in making the laws which govern them and their children.\footnote{As quoted in Taylor, 52}

While many men \textit{did} support women suffrage in North Carolina, women always
made up the majority of its support. It is clear from much of the rhetoric used by supporters
at this time that they clearly understood the importance of endorsements from prominent
North Carolina men. They walked a fine line between remaining “ladylike” in a society that
greatly valued nineteenth century traditions of “women’s spheres” while simultaneously
challenging that role for women in North Carolina’s society. Reports of suffrage activities
by pro-suffrage newspapers provided detailed descriptions of the beauty, femininity, and
charm of suffrage ladies as well as the content of the speeches suffragists presented for their cause. 17

Suffrage League strategists carefully presented themselves as Southern ladies at all times. President Henderson addressed delegates to the annual convention by reminding them that “the chief work of the year has been the effort to arouse interest throughout the state without arousing opposition.” Their obvious lack of militancy raised eyebrows within the National American Woman Suffrage Association. One national leader, Madeline McDowell Breckinridge, dryly remarked that “North Carolina suffragists seem to think they could get the vote without anyone realizing they wanted it.” Yet militant exercises like the ones used in the North by radical activists like Alice Paul would probably have had a negative effect given North Carolina’s conservative climate. Southern culture, even within the evolving “New South,” frowned on loud protests, picketing, and parades by women. These things were much too public and much too unladylike. Local newspapers often covered these dramatic national (and sometimes international) events. Local citizens frowned upon such antics, as evidenced by the editorials that soon followed. North Carolina strategists for the Equal Suffrage League carefully orchestrated their activities to avoid alienating potential supporters. They preferred indifference to opposition. 18

One of their most important weapons involved the extensive use of North Carolina newspapers, particularly those that had already expressed support. Raleigh’s News and Observer, the Charlotte Daily Observer, and others reported positively on the events of the League. They posted notices, articles, and editorials throughout the decade. John B. Greer,

18 Smith and Wilson, 217.
of Moravian Falls, even attempted to publish a paper devoted solely to suffrage in 1914. He charged thirty cents per year for a subscription. *The Dixie Suffragist* lasted less than a year. *Woman's Journal* of Boston took over its subscription list. Many of North Carolina’s newspapers published special editions designated specifically to the suffrage question. *The Charlotte Observer* devoted its November 1, 1914 edition to the State Suffrage Convention held in the Queen City. Included were statements of endorsements from prominent North Carolinians, lists of Suffrage Leagues, and poems created to interest readers in the cause.

One jingle designed to sway favorable public opinion stated:

While you are voting Curly Locks mine  
Who will wash dishes and go feed the swine?  
You needn’t worry about it, my dear,  
I shall not vote every day in the year.19

Much of the rhetoric used by those opposed to suffrage included diatribes about how voting would take women out of the home, interrupting their busy schedules, thus disrupting the family. Supporters often used cartoons and jingles like this one to diffuse the impractical arguments.

Henderson also challenged citizens to join the suffrage cause:

Women of Carolina: Your state needs your service. For the sake of your homes and your children, lay aside your smaller tasks for the time and flock to the standard of a larger service.

Men of Carolina: Your state needs the service of its women, who are with you, coworkers for the glory of the Old North State. Your women need your help. They call to you today for the freedom your fathers and our own laid down their lives to gain. So long as women are enslaved, the nation can not be free. The status of its women is the measure of a nation’s freedom.20

20 *The Charlotte Daily Observer*, 1 November 1914.
Henderson appealed to the patriotic, dutiful Southern lady and gentlemen. Ideas like honor, duty, and freedom resonated with Southerners, many of whom still resented being on the losing side of the Civil War. Antisuffrage supporters had also used this type of propaganda to persuade people to support their cause, as Henderson knew full well. She twisted the argument to suggest that only the unpatriotic would oppose suffrage for women.

Judge Walter Clark also attended the convention. His speech presented a much sharper tone than that of the ladies. His position and gender served as a buffer to what probably would have been a much harsher critique of his words had he been a woman. He suggested that men who opposed suffrage were “backward,” calling those fearful of change “stragglers in a retreating army.” Judge Clark believed that the power and funding behind the antisuffrage movement came from cotton manufacturers, not average citizens who had taken the time to logically consider the matter.\(^{21}\)

With well-known and respected supporters like Judge Clark advocating for them, suffragists felt sufficiently bolstered to officially lobby for an amendment to North Carolina’s Constitution that would enfranchise women. A special committee within the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League was established in 1914 for legislative work. With Mary Henderson appointed as chairperson, the committee swarmed the capital to garner support. Through letters and personal interviews, Henderson found that nineteen legislators favored suffrage for women. Fifteen confirmed their opposition, while the remainder responded that they had not decided. When the legislature convened in January (1915), suffragists moved their headquarters into the Yarboro Hotel nearby. Through daily visits, letters, newspaper articles,

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\(^{21}\) Walter Clark, “Equal Suffrage,” Address given by Chief Justice Walter Clark of the North Carolina Supreme Court before the Equal Suffrage League at Greensboro, North Carolina, 22 February 1913. Although titled the same as his Richmond address, this is a different speech.
and other literature, they managed to persuade legislators in both houses to introduce a bill for women’s voting rights. Additionally, they persuaded the United States Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, to address the legislature on their behalf. He assured his audience that women suffrage would most certainly come to North Carolina, like it or not. He reminded them of women’s numerous qualifications to vote, including their moral superiority over men. “If the women have sense enough to keep out of the penitentiary and morals enough to go to church, who will say that they are not fit to go to the polls?” He assured them that women would vote for peace, as should be their right. “If there is any one question that I think woman ought to have a voice in it is whether war should destroy her home and leave her the mother of fatherless children.” He concluded by reminding them that none of the states that had tried suffrage had ever abolished it.\textsuperscript{22}

Several days later, both houses held a joint hearing on the suffrage question. The most prestigious visitor to speak was Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She told North Carolina’s lawmakers:

> On the Fourth of July they tell us that the voice of the people is the voice of God...but in the accompaniment of God there is a soprano as well as a bass. And what men have been calling the voice of God is nothing but a bass solo...When Emperor William [of Germany] ascended to power he declared he was ruler by divine right, and the papers made much fun of him. But I don’t think he was more ridiculous than our American divine right of sex.\textsuperscript{23}

Dr. Shaw’s suggestion of patriarchal tyranny played favorably in the press. She refuted the antisuffrage’s male superiority rhetoric through religious imagery hoping that her audience,

\textsuperscript{22} Taylor, 56. \textit{News and Observer} 31 January 1915.  
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Greensboro Daily News} 3 February 1915.
in the heart of the Bible belt, would appreciate the injustice imposed on North Carolina’s women by denying them the franchise.

Another speaker, Mrs. Archibald Henderson, continued with this theme. She told legislators that “women were not given a social conscious by God to be deprived of that conscience by man.” She felt that the indifference shown by some women toward woman suffrage was irresponsible. Mrs. Al Fairbrother assured legislators that gaining their political rights at the polls did not suggest that they had a particular quarrel with men. Mrs. Eugene Reilly, a former president of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, argued that exercising their voting rights would not make them less respectable to men. Mrs. T. W. Lingle of Davidson told legislators that women needed to vote, especially those “less fortunately situated” than she—yet she needed the ballot as well. She believed that those with the power to vote held the power to change and improve their circumstances. The President of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Mrs. Adelaide Goodno, told her audience what critics believed many of them secretly dreaded to hear. Women involved in temperance work looked forward to using the ballot as an “instrument of reform.”

Two days later, on February 4th, the House debated the issue. Representative Gallatin Roberts of Buncombe County addressed the assembled on behalf of the proposal. He seemed painfully aware that his efforts would fail, admitting that nearly three-fourths of the House, he felt sure, opposed woman suffrage. But he told them “you will live to see the day when women will be voting in every nook and corner of North Carolina.” Opponents argued that voting would “besmirch the pure robes of womanhood.” A. N. Benton of Columbus told his colleagues that “the place of a woman was in the home, not at the polls.”

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24 News and Observer 3 February 1915

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Women should stay at home, “where she had more influence in shaping society than she would at the ballot box.” Representative Henry Page told fellow lawmakers that the only woman of his acquaintance who wanted to vote was “incapable,” implying that not only were women mentally inferior, but that most really did not wish to vote. This theme, though expressed in generally subtle terms, remained nevertheless, part of the antisuffrage argument. One prominent North Carolinian made the careless remark to the press that he was “in favor of giving the ballot to women, and also to children six years of age.” Women, understandably, became outraged. The unnamed speaker apologized numerous times for this sarcastic and unflattering statement. Judge Clark reported that this gentleman thereafter “kept a silence so profound that it can almost be heard.” After further debate, the House voted to postpone the measure.²⁵

On February 18, the Senate met to discuss the issue. F. P. Hobgood of Greensboro spoke on behalf of suffrage. Like Roberts, he also admitted his doubts that the measure would find favor in the Senate, but he delivered a short history on the woman suffrage movement. Opponents to the measure were “backward” and voting should be considered “a right, not a privilege,” he told his fellow senators. The Senate chambers were no more accommodating than the House had been. R. D. Johnson of Warsaw believed that votes for women would also mean jury duty for them—he felt that this constituted a shameful role reversal (the husband would stay home and “rock the cradle” while the woman performed public duties). He scathingly told the men who supported this “trash” to learn to sew and wear skirts. Using these and other arguments reminiscent of the separate spheres ideology of the nineteenth century, the Senate finally tabled the discussion, effectively killing a potential

²⁵ Ibid. Clark, “Equal Suffrage” (February 1915).
amendment to the state constitution granting women the right to vote. Although this attempt at suffrage failed, the nippy social and political climate surrounding the issue showed signs of thawing. Eighteen years earlier, a similar proposal had died in the Committee on Insane Asylums without even the benefit of serious debate. On this day, not only did suffragists get their bill introduced, but women actually addressed the legislature on their own behalf, alongside male supporters. Women recruited and appreciated the men who joined their cause (they appreciated anyone who would help increase their membership), yet they had gained enough confidence to directly speak publicly on the own behalf. They couched their arguments in the familiar themes of justice, freedom, and rights. They believed themselves to be moral, upstanding citizens who deserved the same right to vote as any man.  

Despite their disappointment over the bill’s defeat, suffragists resolved to push forward. National leaders sent speakers to help rally support. They sponsored a booth at the North Carolina State Fair in October, garnering support (through signed petitions) and distributing flyers and brochures to the public. Speakers at their annual convention reported continued growth in their membership. President Henderson reminded members of a few of the reasons for woman suffrage:

I could urge upon you woman’s right to the ballot on the ground of simple human justice, of mere humanity; I could discuss her rights as a taxpayer, or her need of protection in industry. I could show woman’s intellectual and moral fitness for the ballot—her peculiar interest in matters concerning civics, health, education and morals. I could make an appeal through her need of protection in matters that concern her dearest interests—the things that affect her children and the conduct of her home.  

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27 As quoted in Taylor, 59-60 from the Asheville Citizen 29 October 1915.
Another guest, United States Congressman J. J. Britt, a North Carolina Republican, stated that “women possess too large a share of the intelligence and goodness of society to be omitted from the voting equation.” This annual meeting, like other suffrage activities, received widespread attention from Tar Heel newspapers, helping to keep the issue prominent and the public conversant with current debates.²⁸

By 1917, supporters once again felt confident enough to challenge the legislators in the Capital City. This time, they petitioned for presidential and municipal suffrage, thinking that even a limited enfranchisement would be better than nothing. The Senate, after hearing practically the same arguments submitted two years earlier in the state amendment proposal, finally voted to submit the idea of municipal suffrage before a referendum of the voters, i.e., white men. Supporters used terms like “slavery” and “bondage” to describe the current status of North Carolina women. However, this proposal died in the House, primarily due to concerns that should it pass, black women would be eligible to vote. Legislators acknowledged that woman suffrage must include black women (they did not see how they could exclude them), and a few raised objections. Representative George Pritchard pointed out that woman suffrage had been a great success in all the states that had tried it. He “regretted” that the race issue had ever been broached. The house rejected the bill forty to sixty-three.²⁹

However, during this same session, lawmakers returned to the notion of a state constitutional amendment enfranchising North Carolina’s women. Once again, heated debate ensued. Some wanted to take it to the voters. Obviously, politicians valued the opinion of constituents who could retain them or vote them out of office. Suffrage for women had

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²⁸ Ibid.
become interesting news to many North Carolina residents. Newspapers across the state often carried local, national, and international suffrage news—sometimes on the front page. North Carolina high school debate clubs chose woman suffrage as a topic for discussion. Suffrage agitators tirelessly reprinted and distributed literature. Senators and representatives understood the power of public opinion, particularly as it related to their job security.\textsuperscript{30}

Amid the turmoil, the House decided to table the issue. The Senate then debated the merits of presidential suffrage for women. North Carolina Democrats, whose members constituted some of the strongest opposition, became increasingly uneasy as supporters reminded them that it was enfranchised women in other states who elected Woodrow Wilson as President in 1916. In fact, the Democrats at the national level supported woman suffrage. But North Carolina Democrats could not bring themselves to join their national brethren. W. D. Pollock of Kinston expressed concern that allowing females to vote would jeopardize tranquillity in the home. He fiercely objected to dragging delicate Southern women into the “mire” of politics. Other opponents submitted that most women had no desire to go to the polls. W. M. Person feared woman suffrage would loose a “black peril” upon society. “My cook would vote while my wife would not,” he exclaimed. Thomas A. Jones of Asheville, who had introduced the bill, replied that Person’s cook deserved to vote if she was that much more patriotic than his wife. Some feared that woman suffrage would encourage large numbers of black women to vote, which would, in turn, embolden black men to once again try to participate in elections. Many politicians had reason to worry. Official scrutiny, particularly by anyone outside the state (or the South), into the disfranchisement process against black men would not be welcome. Yet most of the debate centered not on race, but

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. Smith and Wilson, 216.
on perceived gender roles and how suffrage would affect society should women be loosed upon North Carolina voting booths. Ultimately, like the suffrage bills that came before it, this one died on the Senate floor.\textsuperscript{31}

By the spring of 1917, patriotism trumped politics for both suffragists and their opponents. The United States entered the World War raging in Europe. Suffrage activities stalled as women organized for war work. Major suffrage events planned for the year were canceled. Suffrage supporters strongly believed the extraordinary efforts of patriotic women in war work would serve them well in the next meeting with North Carolina’s legislators. By November, North Carolina’s Equal Suffrage League president, Mary Cunningham, confidently declared:

> Women in war service have opened the eyes of the men of North Carolina to the fitness of women for all kinds of service, and surely suffrage has won more converts, and more suffrage education has been administered this year than in all previous years.\textsuperscript{32}

Women, it seemed, were finally out of their kitchens and into public arenas—perhaps the first time for many whose rural lifestyle seldom brought them out of their homes. Stepping outside the bounds of home and hearth to aid their countrymen at war brought only praise from even the most conservative lawmakers; their patriotism was appreciated. President Henderson reflected that “every stroke given for war work by North Carolina women strengthened our cause in the state just that much.” Suffragists used their war work, and the fight for democracy, as a means of indirectly promoting the cause and their membership rosters.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Taylor, 178. \textit{Greensboro Daily News}, 10 April 1918.
\textsuperscript{33} Taylor, 177.
By the end of 1917, membership in the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League had risen from a mere one hundred to over one thousand. By the spring of 1918, heartened supporters once again lobbied their representatives. At the Republican Convention held in April, Cunningham convinced delegates to put a plank in their platform outlining support for woman suffrage. Without objection, the plank stated:

As a matter of justice to the women of the nation, many of whom are taxpayers, and compelled to earn a living, and all of whom are rendering patriotic service to our country in the prosecution of the war, the Republican party of North Carolina is in favor of the right of suffrage to women.\(^{34}\)

Like Republicans in much of the nation, North Carolina Republicans supported suffrage for women in the hope that women would become a powerful part of their constituency. They wielded little power and had dwindled in number (helped along by leading Democrats purge of blacks from the electorate a few years earlier). Suffragists found the Democrats less accommodating. The delegates to the Democratic Convention thought the issue too divisive. They refused to adopt a woman suffrage plank on their party platform.

Though disappointed, suffragists remained optimistic, and with good reason. By the end of the year, they had received endorsements by a number of organizations from all over the state. The State Federation of Women’s Clubs, with only two dissenting votes, declared their support for woman suffrage. The North Carolina Trained Nurses Association followed, as did the North Carolina Farmer’s Union. Expressions of support had already come in from numerous labor organizations in the state.\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\) Taylor, 178  *Greensboro Daily News*, 10 April 1918.
\(^{35}\) “Suffrage Conference 1918,” Gertrude Weil Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History.
In early 1919, the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League held a rally in Raleigh. Once again, William Jennings Bryan came to speak, this time before an audience of more than three thousand people—including many of North Carolina’s most prominent citizens. Governor Thomas Bickett, Supreme Court Chief Justice Walter Clark, and Lt. Governor O. Max Gardner attended. Bryan warned opponents, “You can’t keep it from coming and you might as well help and reap some of the honor...Shame on the Democratic Party if you should allow the Republican Party to have the honor of giving women the right to vote.” Those in attendance were well aware of the proposed Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution that was causing quite a stir across the nation. One of its strongest opponents, United States Senator Lee Overman of North Carolina, predicted that passage of the Anthony Amendment (as it was called) would be a reaffirmation of the Fifteenth Amendment, repeating the “black peril” argument so popular among antisuffrage propagandists in the South. National debate over the suffrage issue continued to rage, but a Republican Congress passed the bill in June of 1919.36

Significantly, when the national amendment was first proposed (and subsequently killed by a narrow margin), national suffragists targeted four United State senators who had rejected it. Two of them lost their re-election bids in the fall. The suffrage movement had developed a national momentum that would not be easily halted. Although suffrage bloomed late in the South, supporters like Bryan remained convinced that North Carolina’s conservative Democrats could not stop the impetus generated by state and national suffragists. Even if North Carolina refused to allow women access to the polls, it seemed likely that the federal government would eventually impose woman suffrage on the states.

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36 Taylor, 179. Smith and Wheeler, 215  Gardner was an outspoken supporter for woman suffrage.
Bryan believed that endorsing the national amendment would ensure that women supported Southern Democrats in future elections.

Despite Byran's accurate assessment of national politics regarding the suffrage movement, the 1919 legislative session once again refused to adopt any form of suffrage for North Carolina's women. A proposal for municipal suffrage managed to pass in the Senate, but was killed in the House vote. Disappointed suffragists assured North Carolina lawmakers that voting rights for women were not a passing fancy but a serious issue. Patsy Smith voiced her commitment to the suffrage cause and stated that women "were going to have it." North Carolina's suffragists had already collected signatures from twenty-six state senators in early February. They had sent them to North Carolina's senator in Washington, Lee S. Overman, hoping to change his mind about endorsing the Anthony Amendment. The Amendment would usurp existing state laws on voting. This would allow women in the mostly Southern states (where woman suffrage was an anathema to many state legislators) to secure the right to vote. However, North Carolina suffragists made it clear that they preferred the endorsement of Carolina men. As one suffragist, Mrs. Palmer Jerman, put it, "We are jealous that our first toddling steps shall come from our own."37

Jerman's remark remained unheeded. Despite intense debate in both the House and Senate, the General Assembly once again voted against suffrage. Undeterred, suffragists continued to press for reform. Perhaps they were heartened by the fact that the number of supporters in the legislature increased each time the issue came up. This time the House killed the bill by a forty-nine to fifty-four vote, much closer than decisions in the past. Also heartening was the fact that newspapers reported details of the debate in their columns.

37 News and Observer, 26 February 1919. Senate Journal, Regular Session 1919, 343
Raleigh’s *News and Observer* noted that the legislature’s vote was “disappointing in the extreme,” calling the House “far behind the best thought of the times.” More importantly, the press made much of the debate available for public scrutiny. Iredell’s Representative, Harry P. Grier stated that the proposal to grant women voting rights was the “most pernicious legislation ever proposed in the General Assembly.” He felt it wrong to throw women into the “vortex of politics.” Others suggested that women did not want to vote, while some urged their colleagues not to endorse the bill just because supporters argued that it would happen anyway. “So is old age, and so is death,” responded Stanley Winborne of Hertford, “but women and men try to conceal the first and delay the last as long as possible. There is no use for us to reach and meet this evil because they say it is coming.”

Opposition in the Senate made good copy as well. Hallet S. Ward tied the suffrage movement to the “region of the Bolshevist.” He argued that the “sunny South” was a land of “peace and contentment.” He suggested that “one box of mice could break up the whole General Assembly, if it were composed of women.” Supporters praised women for their war work, calling suffrage a “concrete recognition of the service” that should be “speedily given.” H. S. Williams stated that he had yet to hear a valid reason not to give women voting rights. He urged the House to endorse suffrage in an “appeal for the women who had served the state so patriotically and brilliantly, but who had not been given adequate representation in the affairs of government.” Debate in both houses was intense. *The Greensboro Daily News* called it “the most spectacular” event of the session.

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A few months after this disappointing loss, North Carolina’s suffragists watched with delight as the Nineteenth Amendment made its way across the country for ratification by the states, having passed both the U. S. House and the Senate. It would now require the support of thirty-six states in order to become part of the Constitution. By the time North Carolina’s General Assembly convened for a special session in the summer of 1920, thirty-five of the necessary states had already ratified the amendment. The special session, which had been called by the Governor to discuss pressing tax issues, came under tremendous pressure at both the state and national level to discuss the suffrage amendment.40

Suffragists exploded in a flurry of activity. Gertrude Weil, a northern educated Jewish woman from Goldsboro, became the North Carolina Suffrage League’s new president. Energetic, intelligent, and poised, she led them through what would become their toughest period. For the first time, antisuffragists began to organize in direct opposition to the League. Until this time, antisuffrage protest had merely been a loose network of politicians and editorialists. Suddenly, a well funded, well structured organization blossomed practically overnight just as the General Assembly resumed for their special session—a session in which they would most assuredly vote on the ratification of the Anthony Amendment. Many believed that the “Vice Trust” Walter Clark had accused of secretly funding antisuffrage rhetoric had merely put a public (and feminine) face on their organization. Led by Mary Hilliard Hinton, the Southern League for the Rejection of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment developed just in time to lobby against ratification. They stressed the threat posed to the family unit if women voted. Enfranchised women would emphasize the individual, not the family, as the most important element in society. To save

40 Wheeler, 161-162.
their families, Southern tradition, white supremacy, and their femininity, these women
lobbied furiously against the amendment. Both they and the North Carolina Equal Suffrage
League set up Headquarters on Fayetteville Street. 1920 photographs dramatize the irony of
the two organizations nestled together in Raleigh’s downtown area, dichotomous flags flying
parallel to one another.41

Antisuffragists like Hinton came from some of the state’s oldest families. Hinton’s
residence, Midway Plantation, had been in her family for generations. They were an old,
established family well connected to North Carolina politics and commercial agriculture.
Like many antisuffragists, Hinton represented the white elite planter class who wanted to
protect the established social hierarchy that had existed in North Carolina (and the South)
since well before the Civil War. Of the ten states that failed to ratify the 19th Amendment,
nine were in the South. The main issues that dominated their literature regarding woman
suffrage were rooted more in the fear that suffrage might topple the existing social hierarchy
than whether or not a woman had a natural right to vote. Most antisuffragists did not want to
see the patriarchal pyramid of southern power fall under the strain of equal suffrage for
women. White men ruled from on high, supported by a complex network of race, class,
tradition, and gender. Like dominoes in a child’s game, antisuffragists feared that voting
rights for women would include black women, which would, in turn, encourage black men,
to vote. White supremacists believed that woman suffrage would create a crack in the
foundations of their power structure, making it subject to destruction given enough wear and
time. Antisuffrage women, though denied top honors, nevertheless embraced their relatively

41 Smith and Wilson, 218. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White
Clark often use the term Vice Trust to refer to industrialists in both the alcohol (whiskey) and textile businesses
high summit on this pyramid, attained through a long lineage in the planter class. They represented “the highest type of southern womanhood,” the guardians of the traditions and culture of the “Old South.” They feared the economic and social changes generated by women of this “New South” idealism, including woman suffrage.42

Textile Manufacturers and Suffrage

North Carolina’s wealthy textile moguls and their associates feared the passage of the Anthony Amendment because of its potential to wreak havoc with their labor management system—a system that had proven quite lucrative for two decades. North Carolina mill owners, as well as cotton industrialists throughout the South, used large numbers of low-paid women and children to produce their textile products. In fact, girls and boys made up nearly twenty-five percent of the work force in North Carolina mills.\textsuperscript{43} To mill owners, this had become an important and necessary part of their workforce. Eighty-seven out of one hundred counties had reported a labor shortage as late as 1916, especially in cotton counties.\textsuperscript{44} Hiring women and children gave Southern industrialists a tremendous advantage over their northern competitors who toiled under protective labor legislation that limited the age and work hours of industrial wage earners, and often imposed a minimum wage. North Carolina mill men had taken advantage of the state’s indifference toward labor reform by using poor laborers to amass huge fortunes.

One example of the use of the exploited labor of women and children in North Carolina’s textile industry can be found in Linda Frankel’s study of a textile mill in Henderson in \textit{Women, Paternalism, and Protest in a Southern Textile Community: Henderson, NC 1900-1960}. Frankel points out that the dramatic growth of the textile industry “was predicated on the ability of mill owners to suppress resistance and control the

\textsuperscript{43} Anastasia Sims, \textit{The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women’s Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 195
\textsuperscript{44} Jeffrey Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, \textit{A History of African Americans in North Carolina} (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1992)
labor force." Long hours, low pay, and very limited opportunities for advancements marked the typical working environment for mill laborers. "Mill owners sought out those workers whose positions in economic and sexual hierarchies made them more vulnerable, dependent, and grateful for employment." Frankel contends that textile manufacturers not only underpaid their employees, but also used the unpaid work of small children as "helpers" to their older siblings. Families depended upon the mills to make their living, and owners used that dependency to manipulate their workers. Cotton men used a combination of paternalism, lockouts, evictions, blacklists, and political hegemony to suppress workers' protest and retain a compliant, cheap workforce to sustain their high profits. Women and children who worked in cotton mills had little, if any, recourse to improve their conditions.

At first, North Carolina women attempted to improve the plight of working women and children through women's clubs. Mill towns became a sort of mission field for club women. They referred to themselves as "public housekeepers," and attempted to uplift the working class through classes on sewing and the "beautification" of one's environment. They established nurseries for small children to be placed in while their mothers worked. They even established libraries. Products of the developing middle class, North Carolina's club women looked for projects outside the home in which they could work for the public good in their communities. Yet all these good works for civic betterment had limited results. Small mill towns maintained a reputation of being impoverished, uneducated communities. Gertrude Weil, a prominent member of both the Suffrage Movement and the Women's Club Movement, reflected years later on the inadequacy of their efforts. "Looking back on it, I

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46 Ibid, 34-36, 69-99, 131. Frankel also states that paternalism and control were extended through company housing, stores, churches, etc.
can see that it was a rather superficial thing to do. An uncle of mine told me it would be much more to the point if ‘you would go to the board of directors of the mill and tell them to pay those people a decent wage’—but I didn’t have the courage.”

47 Most women felt that pressing the issue too forcefully would violate a Southern woman’s informal code of conduct observed by “ladies.”

Much of the rhetoric of this period stressed that women, charged with rearing and nurturing boys to become future leaders, could use their considerable powers of moral persuasion as leverage to affect positive changes for society. Politicians praised the efforts of the ladies, offering (though seldom following through with) support for their fine work. Yet club women remained concerned over the prominence of child labor in North Carolina industries. In fact, child labor became the main topic of discussion at the 1909 State Federation of Women’s Club Conference. Keynote speaker Dr. C. E. Stiles told his audience that better health care in country communities, where child mortality rates continued to rise, would alleviate the need for cotton mill men to hire children under fourteen. He believed that “a high death rate among children necessarily meant a labor scarcity, and labor scarcity necessarily meant child labor.” He felt the answer to the problem would be to address the “child death rate and in a short time the cotton mills would have all the labor it needed over fourteen years.” He blamed the child labor problem not on the exploitation of low-income families by mill owners, but the shortage of adult workers caused by the high mortality rates of rural children.

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48 Newspaper clipping found in Gertrude Weil Papers, NCDAH
As historian Anastasia Sims points out, club women soon discovered that “indirect influence and moral suasion proved to be unreliable leverage in politics.” Southern gentlemen politicians praised their noble gestures, but “…the power of femininity was no match for the entrenched economic and political forces such as the textile” industry and the “Democratic machine.” Obviously, powerful politicians did not feel the need to accommodate a group of politically impotent women, especially when their proposals might disrupt the economic mainstay of the textile industry. Frustrated, more and more North Carolina women discovered that they needed voting rights in order to affect change.49

One North Carolina suffrage leader, Mrs. Josephus Daniels (wife of the editor of the News and Observer, a strong suffrage advocate) lamented the fact that the state’s women had no real voice in government to address “great industrial problems” that affected large numbers of working women. She wrote that women voters elsewhere in the nation had used their political clout to improve factory conditions, and affirmed that North Carolina women, if given the ballot, would most assuredly initiate industrial reform.50 As the suffrage momentum accelerated, activists and their supporters clarified their intention of addressing the labor issue as one of their first acts as constituents. “All political parties know that women are going to vote their political convictions. They also know that women have entered politics to bring about reforms that men have ignored.”51 North Carolina suffragist Mrs. C. A. Shore reported to the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League that “we know we are feared as a political power.”52 In 1915, Anna Howard Shaw, an ordained minister and

50 Equal Suffrage Association Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History. Mrs Josephus Daniels, Everywoman Magazine (July-August, 1920).
51 Otelia C. C. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, UNC Chapel Hill.
52 Ibid. File 55.
leader in the National American Woman Suffrage Association, spoke as a special guest before a joint hearing of committees from North Carolina’s Senate and House of Representatives who were considering municipal suffrage. She told the men that suffrage for women “would better social conditions and improve the lot of working women” in the state. In 1920, the Democratic candidate for president, Governor James Cox, expressed his view that intelligent women were needed at the polls, and described the type of legislation that had been passed in states where women had been given the franchise. “They knew what mother’s pensions were; they had an understanding of the guarantee which was given to every man and woman who went into the factory, mill, or mine, through the adoption of the Workmen’s Compensation law.” He countered arguments that women were too emotional to vote by stating that women had “caught a glimpse very quickly of the importance of turning from [emotional] reaction toward progress.”

North Carolina’s wealthy textile magnates had good reason to cast a wary eye upon increasing suffrage activities across the nation. They watched closely as labor reform measures began to spring forth in other states shortly after granting women voting rights. David Clark, the industry’s leader, had intimate knowledge of national politics and the connection between woman suffrage and labor reform. He and his colleagues understood that nationally, the women’s right activists had been gaining strength throughout the Progressive Era. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) president Carrie Chapman Catt credited much of the successful state campaigns to the expansion of the Progressive Movement. As the South became more industrialized, class distinctions

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53 Taylor, 57.
54 News and Observer, 20 July 1920.
became more pronounced, and progressive ideas began to grow in North Carolina as well. As Sims put it, North Carolina was considered “a shining star in the New South constellation; a leader in the economic development, a model of Southern Progressivism.” Industry blossomed, and many families migrated from their rural farms into the small towns and cities to work. Industrialists and large farmers made tremendous profits, and became much more economically polarized from the working class. As the “New South” developed, a professional, small, middle class emerged made up of teachers, engineers, and small businessmen. Lacking the tight ties of business and kinship of the old planter class, this nascent middle class embraced Progressive values and new ideologies frequently at odds with the values of North Carolina’s social elites.

This influx of Progressive ideas, particularly those promoting labor reform and suffrage for women, caused David Clark and his cronies a great deal of unease. They had merely to cast an eye upon other states that had already granted women voting rights to understand the nature of this threat to cotton manufacturers’ profits. For example, in 1893, Colorado became the second state to grant women full suffrage (Wyoming had granted full suffrage to women from its very beginning in 1869). Utah and Idaho followed in 1896, California in 1911, and Kansas, Oregon, and Arizona in 1912. Worse yet, at least for North Carolina’s cotton men, women in these suffrage states used their political power to help lobby for and pass labor legislation. This included restrictions on child labor and working hours, and imposed minimum wage safeguards as well.

57 Edna C. Green, Southern Strategies, xiv.
For instance, in 1905, ninety percent of Wyoming’s women voted. Women were credited for numerous reforms initiated after their enfranchisement, including ten hour work days for women, equal pay for equal work for male and female teachers, penalties for child neglect, abuse, or cruelty, and the banning of child labor in certain industries. In 1893, the majority of Colorado’s women also voted. There they served as judges, jurors, and legislators. They greatly influenced reform legislation, including child labor laws, the creation of a Minimum Wage Board (specifically to oversee wages for women), an eight hour work day for women, a workman’s compensation package, the Industrial Disputes Act, and a law making employers liable for industrial accidents. Utah, Idaho, Oregon, Arizona, and Washington passed similar legislation following the enfranchisement of women, particularly child labor laws, minimum wage laws, and regulations limiting working hours and other conditions in industry. California, noted for its large female electorate, established a commission to oversee minimum wage rates, conditions of women and children in industrial work, limit hours of work, and prohibit minors from working in some industries. Kansas legislators passed similar legislation upon the urging of their female voters. They even created a Department of Labor and Industry and required that at least one factory inspector be a woman. National suffragists proudly touted the power of a woman’s vote, especially as it affected child welfare and labor reform.59

One avid supporter of suffrage for North Carolina’s women, Supreme Court Justice Walter Clark, believed that the textile industry feared the effects of womens’ votes so much that they bankrolled the opposition. In a letter to Henry Watterson in 1919, he wrote:

59 Ibid. Much of this material can also be found in brochure and broadside form in the Equal Suffrage League Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History.
The serious opposition [to woman suffrage] has been financed by the Whiskey Interests and the Cotton Mill owners of New England and the South. The former feared the suppression of the whiskey traffic and the latter the suppression of the exploitation of child labor, and of the competition of insufficiently paid labor of women in the mills.\(^6\)

Judge Clark was intimately acquainted with the opposition. His son, publisher David Clark, enjoyed a privileged relationship with textile owners, acting as their spokesperson and lobbying against child labor laws during this period. As "an apologist for the Southern textile manufacturers, [David Clark] tried to nullify any reform inclinations by sending women's club members newsletters featuring paternalistic, caring industrialists."\(^6\) David Clark played an important role in the fight against ratification of the 19\(^{th}\) Amendment. Although a North Carolinian, he ventured into national politics whenever an issue involving child labor legislation reared its ugly head. He organized the Executive Committee of the Southern Cotton Textile Manufacturers Association for the sole purpose of fighting against proposals put forth by the National Child Labor Committee. He urged them to go so far as to refuse to accept government contracts with clauses in them that placed restrictions on child labor, especially during World War I. He even went to the Supreme Court to successfully challenge federal labor legislation that restricted the work of women and children. He created a powerful lobby for Southern cotton men in both national and state politics, and railed against suffrage supporters in both Washington, D.C. and North Carolina. David Clark even accused New England textile manufacturers of financing federal child labor reform in an effort to sabotage the high profits that Southern cotton men enjoyed due to unregulated labor. He further declared that union organizers hoped to gain a foothold in North Carolina's

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\(^6\) Green, “Those Opposed,” 317; Smith and Wilson, 216.
factories through aiding the state’s suffrage movement and encouraging labor reform legislation. Both labor reform and unions were Northern imports, and he understood how distasteful some conservative North Carolinians found ideas that were not home grown, much to the advantage of the wealthy mill owners.62

Despite the textile industry’s best efforts, public opinion toward the wealthy mill owners became more negative as outspoken suffrage supporters touted the harsh conditions under which women and children toiled. In an effort to salvage the somewhat tarnished reputations of cotton industrialists, North Carolina Governor Thomas Bickett declared before the state’s General Assembly in 1917 that

Our manufacturers ask for no subsidies and no special privileges of any kind. They do ask and deserve to be treated with sympathetic consideration. As a class, they are humane, forward-looking men, earnestly desirous of making the most of our natural resources, and they rightly resent being thought of as cannibals who delight to feast on the flesh of women and children.63

He further declared that these same industrialists would most certainly entertain reasonable, “practical regulations” so long as they didn’t come from “professional agitators.” The governor’s defense of cotton men indicated the intimacy between powerful politicians and industrialists.64

After David Clark successfully lobbied Washington politicians to defeat the proposed 19th Amendment in October, 1918, by a slim margin (and with the help of the very deep pockets from southern textile industrialists), his father Walter responded that

Suffrage for women is largely a labor movement is shown by the further fact that the senators who prevented the submission of the suffrage amendment to

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64 Ibid
the state legislatures, were almost wholly from the New England and South Atlantic states, where the cotton mill owners largely furnish the funds for the campaigns of the successful parties. When before did the Republican Senators of New England and the Democratic Senators of the South pull together in stubborn opposition? In the West the whisky interests opposed Suffrage. But the bond of union in the opposition to it by New England and the Solid South is furnished by the cotton mills. 65

Interestingly, the only southern states in which both senators voted against the 19th Amendment at this time were South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama—the four leading textile manufacturing states in the South. The same is true of the Child Labor Bill. 66 A similar corollary could be found in North Carolina. The strongest opponents to suffrage in the state came from the piedmont, the area with the greatest number of cotton mills. It also held a larger percent of working women and children than other parts of the state. Almost thirty legislators voted against suffrage for women three times, but six (one senator and five representatives) voted against it on every occasion between 1915 and 1920. North Carolina legislators who “repeatedly and consistently” voted against proposed suffrage bills in the General Assembly came from the textile regions of the state. 67

Despite David Clark and the mill owners’ best efforts, state and national suffragists continued to agitate for a woman’s right to vote, often using the potential power of labor reforms as a beacon to attract more members. Across the nation, including the South, suffrage support increased nearly tenfold after the failure of a national child labor reform bill in Washington. 68 David Clark, backed by North Carolina cotton manufacturers, personally led the opposition. Many southern women who had favored the bill felt the powerlessness of

66 Morgan, 175.
the disfranchised. As National suffragist Alice Stone Blackwell stated, “those who pay the
taxes should have a voice as to the amount of tax and the way in which money shall be
spent.” She believed that women’s views were not represented in states without woman
suffrage, the proof being that those states continued to lack “humane and protective
legislation and the poor enforcement of such legislation where it exists,” particularly
legislation banning or restricting child labor in factories. Suffragists further argued for the
vote “because over eight million women in the United States are wage workers, and the
condition under which they work are controlled by law.”69

As the proposed 19th Amendment gain momentum and support (having received the
endorsement of all but one of the necessary number of states needed for ratification), public
interest increased and citizens across North Carolina sent letters to local newspapers
expressing their opinions. Many addressed the issue of the “cotton trust” backing the
antisuffragists so that they could retain their political control of the General Assembly and
forego any nasty labor reform bills. Mrs. John S. Cunningham, an active suffragist, sharply
criticized mill men and their political stooges who publicly suggested that women should not
vote because her rightful place was in the home, not dirty polling places. She wrote:

I have never had much respect for the objector who claimed that women
should not vote because they should stay at home when every day that the sun
rises thousands of North Carolina women go out to earn an honest day’s living
and a spot that they may call home where they may lay their heads at night in
peace and serenity, and owe no man anything. To my mind, every man or
woman who employs women to carry on their business or who lives by the
toils of working women in mill, factory or other industry, should either shut
up his arguments of the home-staying woman, or shut down his place of
business where women work from sunrise to sunset to keep the wheels of
industry running...If it is right for women to be breadwinners and tax payers it

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69 Bjorkman, 144, 146, 232. Equal Suffrage League Papers, NCDAH.
surely can be no disgrace for women to know something about their
governments and the laws under which they live.\footnote{Otelia C. C. Connor Papers, Letter to a Greensboro Newspaper Editor 21 August 1920, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.}

Dr. Lewis B. Wilson, a University of North Carolina professor, wrote in his editorial for the News and Observer that the state’s women would most certainly support child labor and welfare laws when they gain voting rights. Another professor, Dr. James M.Bell, agreed.\footnote{News and Observer, 8 August 1920.} Mr. Eugene Street of Glendon shared this opinion. He further blamed mill men for the South’s poverty. The “sole cause of the South’s low wage scale is the labor of the millions of children...and women” in the cotton industry. He accused industrialists of paying less than half what others earned in the rest of the nation for comparable work, causing widespread “poverty and illiteracy” in North Carolina. He predicted that

> Women suffrage will take the cheap child labor out of cotton production by establishing schools of sufficient length of term, with a compulsory law that will compel attendance, and will take the cheap women labor out of cotton production by establishing a minimum wage scale for women.\footnote{News and Observer, 20 July 1920.}

Street looked forward to women voters bringing the region’s economy up to the national average through reform legislation. Industrialists generally remained silent against these sort of claims, and tried to push the debate away from industry and toward race, state’s rights, or a woman’s sphere. They feared too much public dialogue on the subject.

Perhaps just as intimidating to North Carolina’s cotton manufacturers was the alarming list of state and national organizations falling into the suffrage camp as the ratification issue loomed ever closer. The American Federation of Labor, National Grange, National Women’s Trades Union League, North Carolina Federation of Business and
Professional Women, United Mine Workers, United Textile Workers of America, and numerous other organizations formally endorsed woman suffrage. This roster of worker-friendly organizations understandable alarmed industrialists who preferred not to have the women who labored in their cotton mills indebted to union organizations for helping them gain the right to vote. Not only did suffrage potentially threaten to disrupt the profitable infrastructure of the state’s cotton mills, it also suggested the possibility of labor unions infiltrating the state at some point.\(^{73}\)

Mill men led the state’s antisuffrage campaign and printed broadsides that linked suffragists to organizations outside the conservative South. Generally ignoring the labor reform issue (at least publicly), they instead focused their arguments against suffrage on other issues, such as race, proper gender roles, and the potential for outsiders to infiltrate the Old North State with their radical and unpatriotic ideas. One pamphlet proclaimed, “The 19th Amendment a Socialist Measure!” It further proclaimed that passage of the Anthony Amendment would

Destroy that balance of power between Nation and State which has done so much to keep our Republic secure [and] will play straight into the hands of the Socialists who wish to destroy our form of government and inaugurate the reign of the Soviet! What are you doing to prevent the passage of a measure which threatens the existence of our Republic?\(^{74}\)

Carrie Preston Davis, a Virginia antisuffrage leader who came to North Carolina to help the Southern Rejection League and the State’s Rights Defense League spread their

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\(^{73}\) Bjorkman, 199. *News and Observer* 7 June 1920 and 15 August 1920.

\(^{74}\) North Carolina Equal Suffrage League, “Antisuffrage” folder; Scrapbook, Weil Paper. NCDAH. I have not found any receipts or other evidence directly linking North Carolina’s industrialists to the antisuffrage treasury. However, they made up the primary membership of the state’s antisuffrage groups. They produced newsletters, brochures, and pamphlets. They also rented space in downtown Raleigh during the summer session in 1920. Suffrage supporters accused the antis of receiving funding from the textile coalition (who do not directly deny it), and the circumstantial evidence leads me to agree with that assessment.
message, told listeners that suffragists were not patriots, but were "...aligned with Socialists, Bolshevists, and other radical organizations." Suffragists had forced their ideas through other state legislatures, like New York, "against the will of the people." They also declared that all suffragists adhered to the "Socialist dogma of economic independence for married women, which is a step toward the destruction of the home and family." They accused suffragists of courting favor with both Democrats and Republicans, but "in reality, their love and allegiance is given to the Socialist—the only other party...." Supporters like W. T. Post countered that the public knew better. Suffragists had earned the support of most intelligent people. He claimed that suffrage "advocates have ceased to be regarded [as] sex perverts, Bolsheviki, Atheists, Socialist, Communists, lunatics, idiots or even just plain damn fools."  

Socialism played a negligible part in North Carolina suffragists' battle for voting rights. Nevertheless, the antisuffragists used this rhetoric to try to persuade North Carolinians, most of whom remained conservative despite the state's reputation as a Progressive stronghold in the New South, that woman suffrage was just another radical idea propagated by political leftists. The same argument conveniently helped to keep union organization at bay.

The coalition of textile owners, large cotton farmers, and others associated with wealthy industrialists rarely addressed the labor issue as an argument against the 19th Amendment. They did not even formally organize until just a few months prior to when the state's special session was announced. But when the only two antisuffrage groups did form,

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75 News and Observer 20 May 1920.
76 State's Defense, 17 August 1920
77 Weil Papers, Newspaper clipping, no date. [Most likely the summer of 1920]
it was like a roll call for the cotton industry’s elite. The State’s Rights Defense League, as the men’s version of the antisuffrage group called themselves, consisted of forty men who elected William Holt Williamson as their president. 78 Williamson also served as president of Pilot Cotton Mills. His family controlled one of the largest fortunes in the state. Colonel Charles Johnson, a wealthy cotton merchant, served on the executive committee. Other members included: Romulus Nunn, President of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad; Frances M. Taylor, Halifax County farmer, merchant, and legislator; Roger W. Winston, an attorney for the state’s railroads; Walter Murphy, another railroad attorney and merchant; Robert Holt, grandson of textile pioneer Edwin Holt and owner of a bank and textile mills; Charles E. Johnston, a cotton broker from Raleigh; Fumifold Simmons, who solicited bankers and railroads for political funding; and other men prominent for their ties to textile or commercial agriculture in North Carolina. 79

North Carolina’s Rejection League, the women’s antisuffrage organization, also illustrates the connection of the antisuffragists to North Carolina’s planter class and textile industrialists. President Mary Hilliard Hinton’s family featured prominently in North Carolina’s conservative political history. She lived on one of her family’s three large plantations and was the niece of former Democratic Governor Elias Carr. He had been responsible for a controversial deal with the railroad in which he had granted them a ninety-nine year lease, against the wishes of most of the public. Mary Poole Staton, who married into a wealthy farm family business, also joined. Additionally, the Southern Rejection League maintained an advisory board made up of men, including textile mogul Williamson,

78 News and Observer, June 30 and July 20, 1920.
Colonel Wilson Lamb, and other men well connected to the legislature, industry, and cotton farming in the state.\(^80\)

The textile coalition that so heavily controlled the antisuffrage organizations in North Carolina knew their enemy. They collected and read suffrage literature urging women to support suffrage so that they could “clean up” industries that exploited the labor of women and children. City newspapers reported the public endorsements suffrage associations received from organized labor. Outspoken suffrage supporters, like North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Walter Clark, openly supported both suffrage and organized labor.\(^81\) Many textile owners had already witnessed the reform efforts of suffrage women in mill towns as they attempted to ease the difficult lives of working women—acceptable activities for Southern women so long as they remained politically impotent. If working women voted, they might be tempted to vote with low-waged men, thus doubling the potential electorate of the working class. When it appeared possible that North Carolina lawmakers might seriously consider ratifying the 19\(^{th}\) Amendment during a special session of the General Assembly in the summer of 1920, two well organized and well funded antisuffrage groups suddenly appeared in Raleigh. In fact, considering their membership rosters, it is a safe assumption that there would not even have been an organized resistance to suffrage without the textile coalition. Nearly all the members of the State’s Rights Defense League and the North Carolina branch of the Southern Rejection League came from the elite class of industrialists, planters, and their associates. They all depended on cotton in one way or another for their

\(^{80}\) Ibid, also “Scrapbook,” Weil Papers.
\(^{81}\) Chief Justice Clark contributed articles to *American Federationist*, and openly accused industrialists of fighting against suffrage because of the potential for poor women laborers to use their elective power to work toward expensive (to the mill owners) labor reform measures. Mill men were not keen to see women appreciate the power of labor unions, either.
livelihod. They made numerous references to the connection between suffrage and Socialism (although there was little), and even called attention to labor unrest in states like New York and the militancy of women there. The textile coalition feared the power of enfranchised women for many reasons, but paramount among them was the potential to initiate true labor reform.
The Rhetoric of Gender and Race

Never until today has educated, Christianized woman come into consciousness of her power and responsibility. Never until today have her activities extended beyond the limits of her own household. Today the world is calling her, and she is responding, sometimes against her own inclination, often against the wishes of man, but the summons is imperative—she must obey. The welfare of future generations calls to her.\(^2\)

When Sallie S. Cotten, the leader of North Carolina’s Women’s Clubs, wrote that passage in 1913, interest in the suffrage debate had begun to intensify and local suffrage supporters soon organized across the state. Tarheel women had ventured beyond the domestic household and into the public arena to serve their local communities in Women’s Clubs around the state. Here, they worked to improve their communities through library, sanitation, prison, education, and labor reform measures within their clubs. As this often proved limiting, they braved public exposure to petition their state legislators for assistance in these noble endeavors. However, without voting rights, their voices carried little clout with the state’s lawmakers. But the club work was not wasted. As Cotten put it, the

Experience has been the university in which they have learned [about] themselves and other women and has seen man as one of the species and not as individual husbands and fathers. They have gained respect for their own opinions, toleration for the opinions of others, and the necessity of cooperation for the successful accomplishment of all aims. They have discovered the needs and weaknesses of themselves and their homes, and have learned how to improve both. Their knowledge has been increased...and having seen the needs of the world they have become interested in striving to make their own part of it a little better.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) As quoted, Ibid, 151.
Many club women became suffragists, and the clubs in which they initiated those first steps outside the woman’s sphere of domesticity served as think tanks from which they could safely develop their opinions. Club work remained acceptable so long as members limited their projects to extensions of a woman’s accepted place in society (i.e. the home), such as “cleaning” up roadways and water, improving education, “beautifying” neighborhoods, and nurturing the needy. Southern men placed Southern ladies atop a pedestal for their moral and spiritual superiority over men. Club work tended to reinforce this ideal through community work that served others and improved the quality of lives of the under privileged. Critics applauded this service until some club women embraced woman suffrage as an extension of club work.

One critic, Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire, observed that

The women most active in promoting woman suffrage are least active and zealous in performing the great and essential functions of womanhood—and the best wives and most prolific mothers, and most admirable homemakers are very generally indifferent to these supposed ‘woman’s rights’ if not strongly opposed to them.\textsuperscript{84}

Like many religious leaders in the state, Cheshire believed that a woman’s place should be in the home, subservient to her husband (and all men). Another religious leader, Brother E. A. Elam of the Christian Advocate echoed this sentiment. He believed that woman suffrage violated Bible teachings that the man should rule over the woman, a consequence of the first sin of Eve in the Biblical story of creation. A woman’s duty should be toward her husband and children, and her husband headed the household. “If any are disposed to find fault with this position, they are disposed to find fault with the will of God Almighty and not of the will

of man.” Like many conservative men, Elam feared that political equality would breach divinely established gender roles, making it “clear that she cannot hold office and perform the duties of politics and remain at home at the same time. Whenever woman abandons home, …she at once rejects the will of God.”

Newspaper editorials referenced Biblical arguments as well. Jordan Carawan of Pamlico quoted scripture to punctuate his objections, and called it “a sad day in North Carolina when women were allowed the ballot.” E. Daniel Flowers of Knightdale voiced a common antisuffrage mantra when he editorialized in the News and Observer that women should not vote because men represented them at the polls. Flowers felt that since a woman’s place was in the home, Christian women who understood their godly place would have no desire to vote. He suggested that if suffragists truly wanted to make the world better they would stay home and raise good children, teaching little girls that “modesty and quietness are the charm of women.”

Suffrage supporters countered with numerous editorials referencing Biblical female leaders, such as Deborah in the Old Testament, and accused antisuffragists of taking “parts of the Holy Scriptures and [quoting] it to suit their own views when some other portion will throw a different light on the same subject.” Representative W. O. Sanders wrote that he “was not so much afraid of woman suffrage taking woman out of her proper sphere in life as…of manhood suffrage eventually wrecking every hope of the race, even as it has up to the present time corrupted every department of government.” He felt that intellectually, men and

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85 Woman Patriot 7 August 1920, 3. Equal Suffrage League Collection, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, PC 1618, Raleigh, NC.
86 News and Observer 26 June 1920.
87 Ibid, 29 July 1920.
women were equal. "I would not be so contemptible as to consider myself entitled to any privilege or prerogative which my wife is not permitted to enjoy. Let the women vote."88

To many men, suffrage symbolized an intrusion of outside ideas that would tear down traditional ideas of gender. North Carolina’s conservative traditions, nourished for decades within the nation’s Bible belt, helped foster a feeling of moral superiority to other areas in the country. Woman suffrage reeked of feminism, a horrible import from which North Carolina’s women needed saving. A Southern woman remained poised and modest; she refrained from actions that might compromise genteel behavior. Woman suffrage necessarily forced North Carolina’s women outside the home and into the public arena. Antisuffragists sharply criticized suffrage work as masculine. *The State’s Defense*, the antisuffrage publication jointly published by North Carolina’s Southern Rejection League and The State’s Rights Defense League, often cited examples and jokes on the subject, such as:

Mrs. Suff: “I don’t see how any intelligent woman can be an anti?”
Mr. Ruff: “That’s where my wife and you are different. My wife had rather be an ‘aunty’ than an uncle.”89

Suffrage workers countered such criticisms through published brochures, carefully worded speeches, fashionable clothing, and elegant demeanors. In *Everywoman Magazine*, the Equal Suffrage League’s monthly publication, Susan Franks Iden reported that she had found suffrage women of all classes to be

No strange or alarming species of woman, no masculine creature trying to usurp the place of man, leaving her hearth unswept and her children uncared for.
Suffragists of Raleigh, suffragists of North Carolina, wherever I have come across them, even back into the far away hill and mountain coves, have been

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88 Ibid 11 August 1920.
89 *The State’s Defense*, Equal Suffrage League, NCDAH.
just natural, human, folksy sort of women, maybe with a little keener sense of humor than other people, the saving grace that has been necessary when they have heard themselves described by the antis as strange, unwomanly, aggressive sort of beings. 90

Repeatedly, those opposed to suffrage argued that women lacked the emotional and physical constitution for activities at the polls. Delicate creatures, women needed to remain at home and attend to their domestic duties. Suffragists initial arguments reflected ideology centered on justice, freedom, and natural rights. In the late 1800s, North Carolina's first woman to venture into the public debate, Helen Morris Lewis, argued eloquently for a woman's right to vote based on a woman's rights as a citizen. As suffrage support grew and the first true debate entered the state's legislature, those opposed steered away from engaging against justice and rights arguments and instead stressed the differences between the sexes. As a result, suffragists tried to capitalize on these presumed differences by restating their position based on an argument of women's moral and spiritual superiority, thus their vote would “clean up” politics. Truly patriotic North Carolina women had a “duty” to support suffrage. 91 Yet notions of the proper role of women in society dominated a good deal of literature on both sides. Antisuffrage supporters pointed out the breach to home and family that voting women would assuredly cause in civilized society. Suffrage supporters claimed that the new and changing world required more from responsible women than merely rocking cradles and cooking supper. Both groups defended their positions in terms of duties expected of North Carolina women.

As suffrage support increased, and public debate in the state legislature and newspapers captured more attention, opponents began to consider the potential political and

90 Everywoman's Magazine, Equal Suffrage League, NCDAH.
social impact female voters would have on race relations in North Carolina. The debate spread from the legislature throughout the state.

Again I have been fearful that the entrance of woman into politics would have a very unfortunate effect on race relations in North Carolina. For thirty-five years after the Civil War all the political energies of our people were absorbed in the struggle to maintain in our borders a white government. For this we fought with our backs to the wall, because we believed such a government to be essential to the integrity of the white race, and the survival of a white civilization. 92

As this speech given by North Carolina Governor Bickett before the General Assembly expresses, anxiety about the potential voting power of African Americans at the polls became a large focus of those opposed to the Anthony Amendment during the summer of 1920. White supremacists dominated the General Assembly, and their biggest concern was that if black women gained the right to vote, it might open the door for black men to return to the polls. For much of the past two decades, suffragists had promoted their cause in idealistic terms of equality, justice, freedom, natural rights, and citizenship—arguments which could also be applied to African-Americans. While contemporary articles reported on the complex racial issues posed by woman suffrage, it did not dominate the rhetoric until the last few weeks of the movement. This new threat of a national amendment, however, brought the race question to the forefront of organized antisuffrage propaganda. Suffrage opponents argued that if women voted, then black women would vote. Antisuffrage women feared that more black women would go to the polls than white women. Southern Democrats had managed to successfully disfranchise black men with transparent strategies such as

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literacy tests and physical violence. Historian Glenda Gilmore wrote that white Democrats in the state opposed woman suffrage because “their political religion was white supremacy,” and they

Began by preaching it against woman’s suffrage, even though the old sermon barely fit the new sin. White supremacy’s most powerful symbol, the puffed-up black male voter who conflated political and sexual power, shriveled when the threat was female.

For years, white supremacists had managed to keep white women out of public life with the threat that they needed protection from licentious black men who preyed upon helpless white females. The fact that suffrage would primarily affect black women left opponents searching for ways to make the old myth accommodate this new problem. They feared that, unlike black men, black women would be able to pass the literacy test and register to vote. White supremacists had often resorted to violence to discourage black men who challenge these voting restrictions. However, organized physical violence openly exercised against women, white or black, violated antiquated notions of southern chivalry. Suffrage that included black women posed a serious dilemma for North Carolina Democrats.

L. J. H. Mewborn, of Sauston, North Carolina, lamented that after all his personal efforts to “redeem” his county from black votes in the past might have been for nothing. “Now to think all the hard work I have done is going down in the political mud and scum to…be thrown away!”

Most of the expressed outrage came from the eastern counties whose large black populations made them particularly vulnerable if women voted. Suffrage supporters, while

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94 Gilmore, 205.
95 Ibid, 204-209.
quick to argue that numerically, white women would have much greater power than black women, found it expedient to reassure both sides that woman suffrage did not mean social equality. Many suffrage women did not feel particularly threatened by the votes of black women. Some considered it their right, too, while others believed that the small number of eligible black women who could vote would pose no real threat to white supremacy. One stated that North Carolina suffragists could “glory in the fact that they had raised the noble woman of the South above that of the Negro.” Politicians who supported the cause assured their white audiences that black women would be subject to the same discrimination by officials who had managed to disfranchise black men just a few years earlier. Many believed that woman suffrage would actually protect white supremacy due to the increased numbers of white voters suffrage would provide. Though initially reluctant to bring up the issue of race, suffragists did not hesitate to apply racist spins on the topic to help win support from legislators and white voters. The President of the Equal Suffrage Association of North Carolina, Gertrude Weil, reminded citizens that the 19th Amendment did not establish voting qualification laws—the individual states did. “The proposed amendment would give the United States no more power to enforce the Negro woman’s right to vote than the United States now has to enforce the Negro man’s right to vote.”

Eleanor Morgan of Goldsboro claimed that the “race problem” harped upon by the antisuffragists was “imaginary.” She reminded the good (white) citizens of North Carolina that white women outnumbered black women by a ratio of seventy to thirty. Morgan further emphasized the injustice of the growing number of North Carolina women receiving higher education who remain politically unequal “to any black man, however low he may be

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97 Scrapbook found in Gertrude Weil Papers, NCDAH.
98 *News and Observer* 29 June 1920.
intellectually or morally. Southern chivalry is beautiful and precious. Would that it were practical." In a white culture that for centuries had been saturated with notions of superiority over African Americans, touting the destruction of the established hierarchy struck a nerve. Both sides wanted to protect their position at the top, while guiding public opinion into believing that their camp provided the insurance that would guarantee white supremacy. Suffragists avoided the issue early on, but once forced to address it, assured white citizens that the racial divide would remain intact.

The suffrage movement in North Carolina caused particular problems for the incumbent Democrats. Most of them had won their seats on a platform of white supremacy. Like most of the South, North Carolina’s political power resided in one party. The racist rhetoric used to gain entrance to political office merely reflected the attitude of constituents. On June 3, 1919 the proposed 19th Amendment headed for the states for ratification. By the time it reached North Carolina legislators in the summer of 1920, the national Democratic Party had begun to encourage North Carolina Democrats to support ratification. They hoped to secure women’s support for their party when it appeared ratification was imminent. However, North Carolina Democrats remained strongly opposed. Many felt that a federal amendment posed a direct threat to their control of election laws—laws that leaders of the powerful Democratic machine had imposed twenty years ago to strip black men of any political power in the state. Legislators preferred the federal government to keep its distance regarding elections in North Carolina. Even so, Chief Justice Walter Clark predicted that the federal government would eventually challenge the state’s voting irregularities; it was only a

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99 News and Observer 18 July 1920
matter of time. He believed the best remedy would be to have the state grant women suffrage first.\textsuperscript{100} They would be more likely to vote for the party that enfranchised them.

State Democrats helped elect President Woodrow Wilson, and his win at the White House strengthened Southerners politically. Not only was Wilson a Southerner, but his Chief Justice, House and Senate leaders, and advisors came from the South. Southerners also chaired most of his important political committees. Wilson counted on the aid of Southern Democrats to get his policies through Congress. Although reluctant at first, Wilson eventually endorsed woman suffrage (he hoped to improve his reelection potential among Progressives), and he needed to call on the support of Southern Democrats again. Wilson knew that ratification of the Anthony Amendment would require at least one or two Southern states.\textsuperscript{101}

As the deadline approached for the Special Session, President Wilson sent a telegram to Governor Bickett urging him to get his state to pass the amendment. It stated, “I am sure I need not point out to you the critical importance of the action of your great State in the matter of the Suffrage Amendment.” Bickett reluctantly agreed to do so, and reminded the president that he did not personally support ratification. On August 13, the Governor personally addressed the General Assembly. Antisuffrage women filled the rotunda, passing out “pale red ribbons and propaganda” while suffragists watched “unconcerned.” Suffragists chose yellow roses to distribute to their supporters. Crowds spilled into the adjoining hallways and doors. Seats filled, and the overflow stood throughout the building. The \textit{News and Observer} reported that there had never been such a large crowd in the legislature in the history of the

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, 76-78, 80.
state. Bickett began by voicing his personal disapproval of woman suffrage. He stated that he feared that “the entrance of women into politics would have an unfortunate effect on race relations.” However, he conceded that the amendment would pass in “some state” within six months, and that “it would be the better part of wisdom and of grace for North Carolina to accept the inevitable and ratify the amendment.”\textsuperscript{102}

Despite encouragement from the President to Governor Bickett to urge North Carolina Democrats to ratify, opposition to the Anthony Amendment remained strong. Supporters rallied as well. Editorials shot opposing views back and forth like bullets. Antisuffragists disapproved of what they believed to be Bickett’s abandonment of them and his “imposition” of the Anthony Amendment on the people of North Carolina.\textsuperscript{103} State’s Rights Defense League President W. H. Williamson sent a message to Tennesse legislators who were also reviewing the proposed amendment. He declared that antisuffragists “were going to win in spite of pressure from the White House.” “Fight to the last ditch, and then some,” he urged fellow opponents.\textsuperscript{104} Newspapers filled their front page with local, national, and international suffrage news.

One of the dominant themes found in newspaper opinion pieces struck a particular chord with traditionalists. Those opposed to ratification often repeated the pre-Civil War claim that the federal government, should ratification succeed, would be violating state’s rights. They argued in antebellum fashion that the state should not be forced to accept the dictates of the federal government when it came to deciding which of its citizens should be eligible to vote. Suffragists countered that “no intelligent person in North Carolina believes

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{News and Observer}, 14 & 15 August 1920.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 15 August 1920.
the ratification of a Federal Suffrage Amendment is any more a violation of state’s rights than was the ratification of the Federal Prohibition Amendment" which state lawmakers and citizens approved.\textsuperscript{105} The opposition really feared the disruption that women’s voting rights would cause to race and gender roles in North Carolina society.

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Everywoman's Magazine}, Equal Suffrage League Papers, 9. NCDAH
Special Session and Woman Suffrage

As the North Carolina Legislature met in special session during the summer of 1920, suffragists agitated even more fiercely for their cause. The newly formed antisufrage groups did likewise. Each group printed and distributed brochures, newsletters, and speeches. They gave interviews and wrote articles and editorials for local newspapers. Suffrage issues dominated the headlines. Activists aggressively lobbied House and Senate members. Tension began to build, and the politics turned petty. Antisufrage workers infuriated suffragists on occasion by deliberately misquoting them. Additionally, signed suffrage petitions had been printed and delivered to Asheville, but when suffragists arrived to pick them up, they found they had been sabotaged. Someone had removed the original petitions and put bogus ones in their place. Antisufragists also chose this time to ignite the race question, insisting that women at the polls would open the doors to black domination and the fall of white supremacy. They also reported to the press that local suffragists owned, read, and claimed allegiance to *The Woman’s Bible*. Most suffragists had never even heard of the text, much less owned it.106

Suffragists had never before had to deal with organized resistance with a membership actively seeking to destroy suffrage. Suffrage leaders solicited help from the National American Woman’s Suffrage League, pro-suffrage politicians, and sympathetic newspaper editors. Floyd J. Tippett, publisher of the *Hertford Herald*, advised suffragist Rose Young that she should

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106 Telegram from Elizabeth Earl Jones to Gertrude Well 9 August 1920, Gertrude Well Papers. Letter from James Evans to Rose Young (copied to Gertrude Well) 18 June 1920. *The Woman’s Bible* is a feminization of the *Bible* written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In it she attacked the use of scripture to keep women’s status secondary to men. She claimed an androgynous God who held everyone equal.
Get into as many country weeklies as possible the strongest presentations possible of the misrepresentation of the antis. Particularly, stress the threat that, in the event women get the ballot, the state will be overwhelmed with the votes of Negro women. You know there is an educational qualification in our laws which cuts out almost all Negro votes in the state. This it is alleged will not apply to women. This statement is untrue...articles dealing with this language should be in plain but forceful language, and it should severely attack the spirit of untruthfulness that originated it and keeps it in circulation...My suggestion on propaganda is to select your antagonist’s weakest argument and make it his chiefest.\(^{107}\)

The “black peril” argument antisuffragists promoted so heavily in their rhetoric appeared to Triplett to be their weakest. Young and Weil followed his advice, refuting outlandish claims and reporting instances of the antisuffragists’ “spirit of untruthfulness” whenever possible. But perhaps one of the most outrageous actions by an antisuffragist occurred during the final hour of the Senate debate over ratification of the Anthony Amendment.

The timing of the special session of the General Assembly could not have been more dramatically staged. With only one more state needed to ratify the 19\(^{th}\) Amendment, political leaders were sensitive to the views of their constituents. Antisuffragists plied them with letters and petitions; suffragists did the same. Several newspapers printed numerous letters (often in the same issue) from citizens expressing support for ratification. Meetings, parades, and rallies grew more intense and frequent. Letters and telegrams from Weil to Carrie Chapman Catt reported that the tally for support in the legislature had reached fifty per cent. Should there be a tie, protocol dictated that Lt. Governor O. Max Gardner would break the tie

\(^{107}\) Letter from Floyd J. Triplett to Rose Young 21 June 1920, Gertrude Weil Papers. He believed the statistical argument that white women outnumbered black women was logical and would be accepted by most people.
with his vote. Weil, Catt, and the suffrage ladies of North Carolina were understandably excited, as Gardner had proven himself a strong ally of suffrage in the past.\textsuperscript{108}

Unfortunately, antisuffrage leaders motioned for the issue to be postponed until the regular session began the following year. This proposal unexpectedly passed by one vote, assuring that North Carolina would not be the final, deciding state to ratify the 19\textsuperscript{th} Amendment. Had the suffragists miscalculated their support? It appears not. It seems that one suffrage supporter had been missing from his seat on the legislature during the call for the vote. Obediah Teague had committed to voting for ratification. Had he cast it, there would have been a tie. Gardner, another yea vote, would then break the tie and force a vote, most likely ratifying the Anthony Amendment. Teague had been placed out of commission by antisuffrage Senator Lindsey C. Warren, of Washington, who had locked Teague in a bathroom just before the vote was called. Years later, Mr. Warren’s son recalled that his father had bragged about the incident. He, like Weil, must have calculated the votes beforehand and found them favorable to the suffragists.\textsuperscript{109} A disappointed reporter, Nell Battle Lewis remarked, “It was quite a sensation to be a young southern woman just slapped in the face by her state.”\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{110} As quoted in Smith and Wilson, 218.
Conclusion

By the time North Carolina’s General Assembly convened for its regular session in 1921, the 19th Amendment had already received the hard-fought endorsement of Tennessee. North Carolina women gained the right to vote without the direct help of their own legislature. Yet North Carolina’s suffrage movement cannot be counted a failure. During its twenty-six year history, opposition changed from blatant ridicule by the 1897 legislature to a marginal defeat of the Anthony Amendment in 1920. Over time, the expectation of women’s roles began to evolve slowly beyond the scope of domesticity, thanks in large part to the careful debate and public role of the state’s suffragists. They deserve credit for bringing the issue of woman suffrage to the forefront of public discussion, particularly in such a conservative stronghold.

Primarily, historical dialogue has centered on the issues of race and established gender roles when analyzing the North Carolina suffrage movement. Both factors figured prominently in the shaping of public debate. Politicians treasured the white male political powerhouse they fought so hard to regain after Reconstruction. Any threatened fissure within the state’s white, male monopoly aroused the ire of Democrats. Their objection that the 19th Amendment violated state’s rights reflected their fear that the federal government might hold them accountable for their questionable voting laws. Additionally, should suffrage open the door to black voters, North Carolina’s entire social structure would be at risk. Many of the same leaders who had forced blacks out of the state’s electorate remained active during the suffrage crisis. They wanted to keep all avenues of potential social equality tightly closed as well. State representatives reflected the opinion of many of their
constituents, and aggressively fueled the fires of public opinion as the threat of the federal amendment loomed closer. Suffragists' strategy regarding the race question was to merely ignore it in the early years, and instead focus on natural rights arguments. But when they began petitioning the state's elected officials in earnest, debate ensued and strategists for the suffragists switched to a numbers game. They consistently maintained that white women outnumbered black women, thus ensuring the reign of white supremacy if women were enfranchised.

Gender roles, like race, also ignited heated dialogue, and North Carolina suffragists carefully presented themselves in public as ladies of refinement and grace. Less aggressive than their northern counterparts, North Carolina women used domestic analogies to emphasize a woman's duty to vote. Having participated in club work, many white, middle-class women appreciated a means to promote goodness in a socially acceptable structure. They worked to better society through sanitation reform, education, health, beautification, and the general uplifting of the poor in North Carolina's ever increasing industrial and urban landscape. Cleaning, nurturing, and "beautifying" things qualified as women's work. They also attempted to alleviate the harsh conditions under which the growing industrial labor force, made up of large numbers of women and children, toiled daily. However, they quickly realized that reforms stalled at the door of the legislature for those who could not vote. These limitations motivated most club women to support suffrage. Like women in other regions of the country, North Carolina women came to appreciate their limits outside the elective process.

This realization not only helped swell the ranks of suffrage supporters during the last ten years of the movement, it also stimulated action by the state's cotton industry—its
wealthiest citizens. Historians have given scant attention to the importance of textile moguls and their stake in the suffrage question. The cheap labor provided by women and children in North Carolina’s textile factories ensured the competitive edge of the state’s cotton men against their northern counterparts. Club women had tried in vain to convince state legislators to enact labor reform measures to protect these low-paid, exploited employees. Frustrated, more women came to view suffrage as the only means by which they might successfully press politicians to take their requests seriously. Labor restrictions in the North and West, where woman suffrage already existed, intimidated mill men. It is no coincidence that most of the antisuffrage ranks were filled by those with close connections to the cotton industry such as mill owners, commercial agriculturists, and railroad executives. Because their money and power linked so closely with Democratic officeholders (many of them were officeholders), they had tremendous control in the General Assembly. Suffragists openly declared their intention of using the ballot to gain labor reform measures in the legislature. With high profits at stake, industrialists organized a resistance using race and gender roles, and ignoring the labor reform issues that concerned suffragists. By focusing the battle on race and gender—two hot buttons in the white dominated, patriarchal South—cotton men hoped to steer clear of labor issues and their potential losses from new labor reform measures. By manipulating public debate along the lines of the two issues close to the heart of many North Carolinians, industrialists hoped to distract and detract from an open discussion of labor reform.

It is no wonder that, as the Anthony Amendment appeared on the horizon, these men and women scurried to create the state’s only organized (and short-lived) antisuffrage organization. Unlike the suffragists’ grassroots initiative that took two decades to build,
antisuffrage forces had the enormous fortunes of these cotton men at their disposal. Suffrage papers frequently noted the financial status of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League and discussed means to raise revenue. The State’s Rights Defense League and the North Carolina Rejection League appeared fully financed, led by the state’s wealthy cotton men.

It is significant that the antisuffrage groups used gender role and race arguments (as evidenced by their newsletters and editorials) but avoided addressing the issue of labor reform that the suffragists repeatedly brought to public attention. The antisuffragists knew the impact that woman suffrage had made upon states whose electorate already including women: minimum wage reform, child labor laws, pension legislation, and restrictions on working hours. Their leader, David Clark, had been battling with these issues in Washington, D. C., for years. His well-known opposition to woman suffrage stemmed, in part, from his fear of industrial reform in his home state by Tar Heel women. Yet, with the noticeable exception of Governor Bickett’s address before the legislature defending the reputation of industrialists, David Clark and the textile coalition steered clear of public debate on labor reform and instead chose to appeal to prejudices strongly imbedded in Southern society regarding race and gender. Emotions ran high across class lines when opponents touted threats of racial equality should women be granted the right to vote. Antisuffragists made it their primary public reason to denounce woman suffrage for the state’s women. Also emotional, though declining somewhat in its effectiveness by the summer of 1920, was the woman’s sphere’s argument. By this time, women suffrage had gained a large following, as evidenced by the increase in the Equal Suffrage League’s membership as well as the increased numbers of editorials supporting women’s voting rights. Antisuffrage leaders sought to play an offensive game, leaving the suffragists to defend
themselves against arguments about racial equality and gender roles—emotional issues both groups understood required proper political spins in order to gain public support for their respective cause. By focusing attention on these two important factors, antisuffragists did not feel compelled to enter into debates on labor issues. Suffrage attempts to engage them on labor reform fell short.

While much of the evidence regarding the financial support of North Carolina’s cotton industry for the antisuffragists might be circumstantial, they can be tied directly to antisuffrage membership rosters. The fact that Chief Justice Walter Clark made public statements proclaiming that cotton men funded the opposition is an important factor as well. His credibility as a public figure, a State Supreme Court Judge, and the father of the biggest supporter of and mouthpiece for the textile coalition (David Clark) supports the fact that the state’s industrialists did not want suffrage supporters to succeed. Suffragists clearly stated their intentions of petitioning for labor reform once they had gained the franchise. Other states whose women had the right to vote had successfully helped to pass numerous labor restrictions, a proud fact that national suffragists touted. Industrialists felt safer within the argumentative confines of race and gender rather than broaching the subject of the rights of the working poor.
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