

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: CONGRESSIONAL WIDOWHOOD AND
GUBERNATORIAL SURROGACY: A
RHETORICAL HISTORY OF WOMEN'S
DISTINCT PATHS TO PUBLIC OFFICE

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Communication

More than fifty women have ascended to elective office through a matrimonial connection; the current study is a rhetorical history of these ties to office. Specifically, this study explores the rhetorical leadership of six female candidates who assumed office via one of two matrimonial paths—gubernatorial surrogacy and congressional widowhood—between 1920 and 1968, a period often referred to as the “doldrums” of the women’s rights movement.

By examining the public discourse created by and about these female candidates and officeholders, the study explores how these women used the rhetorical resources available within their historical context to expand their capacity to act publicly. Drawing upon and stretching the cultural constructions of maternal authority and spousal duty, these leaders rhetorically established, employed, and expanded matrimonial paths to office. Their public discourse not only served to justify their candidacies, it also had important implications for women’s history, female equality, and gender ideology.

To that end, this study explores the ways in which these rhetorical performances helped advance the cause of female equality and opportunity during the

doldrums. It accounts for the ways in which the candidates and officeholders studied helped women make progress electorally, moved the nation closer to the ideals of representative democracy, and contributed to our “public vocabulary” regarding women and institutional power. This project emphasizes the ways that, through the exercise of their rhetorical agency, these women helped create powerful justifications for female campaigning and office holding while helping to shape notions of femininity in ways that facilitated greater female agency, opportunity, and public activity.

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RHETORICAL HISTORY OF WOMEN'S DISTINCT PATHS TO
PUBLIC OFFICE

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2013

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Dedication

For Jason.

Acknowledgments

One of the best things about finishing this dissertation is finally having the opportunity to say “thank you” for the countless conversations, suggestions, and acts of kindness that got me to the last page.

For 14 years, the University of Maryland’s Department of Communication has generously given my writing and wondering a place to call home. Many members of the department supported my work as an M.A. and Ph.D. student, but I owe the greatest debt to my advisor, Dr. Shawn Parry-Giles. Neither one of us could have predicted what Shawn was getting into when she took me on as an advisee in 1999; in the years since, she has been an advisor in the fullest sense of the word. For me, Shawn has been a valued teacher, a tireless editor, and the best kind of friend. She challenged me, encouraged me, and calmed my doubts. She helped me navigate unexpected career opportunities, ensuring that I never had to choose between being a speechwriter and earning a Ph.D. When professional opportunities pulled me away from my dissertation, it was Shawn’s genuine enthusiasm for this project that kept me coming back. My study allowed me to survey the lives of women of uncommon grace, courage, integrity, and intellect who, through their work, made a real difference in the lives they touched. The same can be said of Shawn, whose example and scholarship have inspired many students, including me. I will always be grateful for her faith in me and for her unwavering support of my work – in all of its forms.

The members of my committee have been patient and supportive, always ready with new suggestions and kind critique. I am grateful to Dr. Trevor Parry-Giles for his advice and encouragement – and for making me raise my hand when the

White House was looking for a graduate student to help their speechwriting team.

Without that push, I would have missed some of the best moments and friendships in my life. I thank Kathleen Kendall, Kristy Maddux, and Nancy Struna for challenging me and helping me complete this dissertation. I am also grateful for the generous contributions of James Klumpp, Mari Boor Tonn, and Leah Waks.

During my years in the department, I have greatly benefitted from the wise words and work of my UMD colleagues. Alyssa Samek and Belinda Stillion Southard have been constant supporters of and contributors to this project. I am grateful as well to Lisa Burns, Lisa Corrigan, Amy Heyse, and Heather Davis Epkins. A special thank you is owed to Tiffany Lewis, who generously shared her research on municipal housekeeping with me.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of several scholars, archivists, and institutions. The Schlesinger Library and the Margaret Chase Smith Library provided financial support for my archival work. Kathy Shoemaker, an archivist at Emory University; Cynthia Evans, curator of the Bell County Museum; and Shaun Hayes with the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center provided critical research assistance. Angie Stockwell, collection specialist at the Margaret Chase Smith Library, and Janann Sherman, professor at the University of Memphis, were exceptionally generous, sharing their insights and research about Chase Smith.

In between courses and chapters, my work as a speechwriter introduced me to people who have greatly influenced the way I think and write. I thank Emily Kropp Michel, Ann Molinaro Park, and Ed Walsh for adventures in the EEOB. I am grateful

to Connie Godwin, DeLynn Henry, Robyn Engibous, Kim Daniels, and Andrew Davis for being such supportive colleagues and true friends. I met Brian Bolduc and Stephen Spruiell in the final stages of this project, but their contributions were significant; both helped me laugh through some tough days, inspired me to be a better writer, and reminded me that anything is possible when you're surrounded by good friends. I am grateful for the friendship and constant encouragement of Ann Corkery, Ed McFadden, Shushannah Walshe, Robert Draper, Peggy Noonan, John McConnell, and Bill Kristol. A special thank you to McKie Campbell, who saved the day with an anecdote for the last chapter in the last hour before the dissertation was due.

I have benefitted greatly from the friendship of two men who took a chance on me: Matthew Scully and Ted Stevens.

Five years ago, Matthew put me on a plane and changed my life. He has taught me so much about writing, but even more about living. And while I rejected his proposed title, "Mama Grizzlies: Hear Them Roar in American History," I valued every piece of advice and encouragement he offered along the way. For a whole generation of writers, Matthew is the standard to which we aspire. We never can quite reach it, but we are so much better for the attempt. I am forever grateful for Matthew's example and for the friendship of he and his wife, Emmanuelle.

As I finish this dissertation, my one regret is that Ted Stevens is not alive to see it. The four years I spent as his speechwriter were some of my happiest. He gave me time off to study for comps and he was the first person to ever call me, "Dr. Hayes." Before the university sanctioned it, Ted Stevens deemed it so. He would have enjoyed this moment all the more because of the document that concludes my

graduate career. Always a workhorse, never a show horse, Ted Stevens never quite got the credit he deserved. But he was a tireless advocate for gender equality and political opportunity for women. His commitment to such causes opened doors for a lot of women, including me. I miss him every day, and I am deeply grateful for the continued friendship and support of his wife, Catherine Stevens.

I end with those who were there when it began – the people who loved and supported me even before this journey. I am deeply grateful to my family – those given and those chosen – who have offered immeasurable support.

In a very happy coincidence, my brother, Colin, and I completed our graduate studies at the same time. Writing a dissertation can be a long and lonely road, but in those last few months, Colin traveled it with me. It was a great comfort and a real joy to cross the finish line together. And my sister, Erin, was generous with her time and talents, offering ideas and words of encouragement along the way. Whenever I got discouraged, Erin was always there with a well-timed call or note. A long overdue “thank you” to both of them and to Whitney and Everett; Tod, Ben, and Nate; and Anne Marie, Walter, Jamie, Susana, and Nathan for the many times they checked in and cheered me on.

I am grateful to Jen, who gave me the great gift of her confidence and prayers, and Kristin, who dreamed this for me before I had the courage to dream it for myself. And I thank Elliott for being a great husband to Kristin and a dear friend to me. I am grateful to Mimi for offering her endless support, helping me put things in perspective, and bringing Andrew, Owen, and Liam into our lives.

There isn't enough room here to thank Brian Hughes for all he has done for me – or what he has meant to me – over the last seven years. A dear friend and constant collaborator, my work – and the experience – is always better when he's there. Like almost everything I've written over the last few years, he read, proofed, and improved substantial portions of this dissertation – a kindness I can never repay.

A special thank you to Linda and Ed Swanson, who gave some much-needed encouragement at a critical moment. And to Ken and Patti Ciak, who provided a quiet place to write during a difficult time.

I am grateful to my mother and father, Pam and Brian Hayes. Everything I have done as a writer began at their dining room table, where they let Erin, Colin, and me have our say. They encouraged us to try on ideas, test our arguments, form opinions, and change our minds. This dissertation is the result of their love and encouragement. Together, they taught me to love words and the endless things that they can do.

But without Jason no word in this dissertation would have ever been written. Perhaps the only thing harder than being a Ph.D. candidate is being married to one, and Jason pulled it off perfectly – with all the patience, good humor, and interest in abstract concepts that requires. For seven years, Jason sat beside me every day in the tiny office that we share as I labored over drafts and wrestled with new ideas. He worked long hours to support my endeavors. He took trips to archives, photographed old newspapers, listened to entire chapters, and offered endless encouragement, advice, and support. In part, this study is the story of all the wonderful moments that

can come from a marriage; I could only write it because I have lived it. For that, and so much more, I thank Jason – and dedicate this dissertation to him.

Finally, I thank the women in this study for having the courage to go first, for doing hard things in the years when they were the hardest things to do, and for making a way for all the women who have followed and the many more to come.

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of May 17, 2008, during what should have been a restful break from a busy spring session of the U.S. Senate, Senator Ted Kennedy suffered two seizures. Speculation ran rampant about what could have felled the liberal lion, who seemed healthy just days before as he led the debate over a labor bill. The following week, Kennedy's staff announced he had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of brain cancer. The news stunned Washington, DC, and set off a flurry of quiet conjecture about what the future would hold for the senior senator from Massachusetts. On May 22, only a day after being released from the hospital, Kennedy made at least part of his future intentions clear; he had not decided if he would leave the Senate, but he knew who he hoped would replace him when he did: his wife of 16 years, Vicki Reggie Kennedy.¹

Kennedy passed away in August of 2009, having served 46 years in the U.S. Senate.² Ultimately, his widow chose not to run to replace him, but rumors persist that she may eventually campaign for his seat.³ While the possibility of a Vicki

¹ Ian Bishop, "Ted Kennedy: I'd Like Wife to Take Seat," *New York Daily News*, May 21, 2008, accessed June 1, 2008, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/ted-kennedy-wife-seat-article-1.329056>; Lois Romano, "The Steadfast Wind in the Senator's Sails," *Washington Post*, May 30, 2008, accessed June 1, 2008, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-05-30/news/36774098_1_vicki-kennedy-heather-campion-brain-biopsy.

² John M. Broder, "Social Causes Defined Kennedy, Even at the End of a 46-Year Career in the Senate," *New York Times*, August 26, 2009, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/us/politics/27kennedy.html?pagewanted=all>.

³ Katharine Q. Seelye, "With Kerry's Exit Expected, Hopefuls Wait in the Wings," *New York Times*, December 21, 2012, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/22/us/departure-by-kerry-creates-senate-opportunities-in-massachusetts.html>; Mary Ann Akers and Phillip Rucker, "Prominent Democrats Want Kennedy's Widow to Run for His Senate Seat," *Washington Post*, August 15, 2010, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/14/AR2010081402970.html>. In August 2010, nearly one year after her husband's death, members of the Democratic Party establishment in both Massachusetts and

Kennedy candidacy remains a somber hypothetical, it is not without precedent. Historically, familial ties to power were some of the first means by which women sought and secured elective office. The most common familial tie is the “matrimonial connection” between officeholder and political wife, which forms the foundation of two paths to office. The first path is what this study will call “surrogacy.” Through this route, which has been used most often in gubernatorial contests, the wife literally becomes the husband’s electoral surrogate, running in his place when term limits or other legal barriers prevent him from seeking re-election. Via the second route, known as “congressional widowhood,” a woman fills a vacancy in public office that has been caused by the death of her spouse.⁴

Together, these two paths to public office have been responsible for the gubernatorial and congressional careers of more than fifty women. Of the thirty-four women who have served as governor of a state, two ran as surrogates after their husbands were barred from re-election, and a third, Democrat Nellie Tayloe Ross of

Washington, DC, encouraged Vicki Kennedy to run, hoping she could oust the Republican who had been elected to complete Ted Kennedy’s term. As recently as December of 2012, Vicki Kennedy reportedly topped a list of candidates that the governor of Massachusetts was considering to fill a Senate vacancy.

⁴ For a better understating of the terms used to describe this category of office holdings, see Alzada Comstock, “Women Members of European Parliaments,” *American Political Science Review* 20 (1926): 384; Irwin Gertzog, *Congressional Women: Their Recruitment, Integration, and Behavior* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 19; and Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon, *Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 82. There are several terms for this route to office. Some early works, like Comstock’s study of female members of European parliaments, derided the route as “sentimental nepotism.” In his landmark study on female congressional recruitment, Gertzog called this path “widow’s succession.” Recent studies, like the one conducted by Palmer and Simon, have referred to this group of women as “congressional widows.” This term not only accounts for the path to office, but also notes the legislative office to which these women ascended. For these reasons, the current study will use the more contemporary term “congressional widowhood.”

Wyoming, filled the vacancy caused by her husband's death.⁵ The political practice of congressional widowhood spans over eighty years and was responsible for the election or appointment of the majority of women who secured a congressional seat in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶ Of the 242 women who have served in the U.S. Congress, forty-six were widows immediately appointed or elected to the seat held by their late husbands.⁷ Another three widows did not succeed their late husbands immediately, but eventually secured office.⁸ Through these two paths—widowhood and surrogacy—women finally opened the doors to the statewide elective offices that had long eluded them.

ELECTORAL ACTIVITY AS CONTINUITY DURING THE DOLDRUMS

Despite their deep and historic roots in American democracy, these two gendered paths to office remain relatively unexamined. The scant analysis of congressional widowhood is primarily the work of political scientists who have attempted to explore political ambition among widows, compile composite pictures of their backgrounds, and better understand how and why they either decide to run for re-election or choose to retire after a single term.⁹ Even less is known about the lives

⁵ "History of Women Governors," Center for American Women in Politics, last modified February 2013, accessed April 14, 2013, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/govhistory.pdf.

⁶ Emmy E. Werner, "Women in Congress: 1917-1964," *The Western Political Quarterly* 19 (1966): 20.

⁷ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 107th Cong., 1st Sess., 2006, H. Con. Res., 5. The widows referenced are Ruth Hanna McCormick (R-IL), Leonor Sullivan (D-MO), and Nicola Tsongas (D-MA).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 996.

⁹ For accounts that discuss congressional widows' backgrounds or apply political ambition theory and Rhode's cost-benefit calculations to their careers, see Charles S. Bullock III and Patricia

and careers of electoral surrogates, those women who ran in place of a spouse in order to keep an elective office in the family. To date, no scholarly work approaches these women as a distinct class of officeholders, and the limited literature available consists solely of a handful of biographies.¹⁰

The sparse scholarly literature regarding surrogacy and widowhood reveals a deficit in our knowledge about women's political history in general, and women's rhetorical leadership in particular. Recent work has given us a much more complete and nuanced picture of women's history, but gaps remain. We still have a relatively limited understanding of the efforts that advanced female equality, enhanced female agency, expanded public opportunity, and altered gender ideology between 1920 and 1968, a period often referred to as the "doldrums" of the women's rights movement.¹¹

Lee Findley Heys, "Recruitment of Women for Congress: A Research Note," *The Western Political Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (September 1972): 416-23; Palmer and Simon, "Political Ambition and Women," 127-138; Lisa Solowiej and Thomas L. Brunell, "The Entrance of Women to the U.S. Congress: The Widow Effect," *Political Research Quarterly* 56, no.3 (2003): 283-292; and Werner, "Women in Congress," 16-30.

¹⁰ For biographical accounts of gubernatorial surrogates, see Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984); Ouida Ferguson Nalle, *The Fergusons of Texas, or "Two Governors for the Price of One": A Biography of James Edward Ferguson and His Wife* (San Antonio: Naylor, 1946); Jack House, *Lady of Courage: The Story of Lurleen Burns Wallace* (Montgomery: League Press, 1969); and Anita Smith, *The Intimate Story of Lurleen Wallace* (Montgomery: Communications Unlimited, 1968).

¹¹ The term "doldrums" has its origins in maritime history. It was used by sailors to describe the stillness of the air in an area of the ocean near the equator, which prohibited progress and movement. The term has been used by historians and woman's rights activists to describe two periods of the woman's movement: 1896 through 1910, and the period extending from the successful efforts of suffrage in 1920 through the increased activism of the 1960s. Some historians believe this second doldrums period ended in 1963 with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. Others mark its end at 1968, when feminist consciousness and activism were decidedly on the rise. The current study adopts the position that the post-suffrage doldrums spanned from 1920 through 1968. For information about the 1896-1920 doldrums, see Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 255; and Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10, 139. For information about the doldrums period following 1920, see Jo Freeman, *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 5-6; Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline Castledine, eds., *Breaking the*

In recent years, several scholars have disputed the common misconception that women were inactive during this period.¹² Their work complicates our understanding of the doldrums by documenting female pursuits in reform, lobbying, and federal policy-making.¹³ Historians have also authored detailed accounts about women's work within the political parties.¹⁴ Yet, the female candidacies of surrogates and widows have been overlooked as a source of continued progress. Due to this oversight, we often fail to fully consider the capacity of matrimony to open up spaces of empowerment for women. The few accounts that actually examine matrimonial ties typically address only the relationships between presidents and first ladies.¹⁵ Thus, the campaigns and careers of surrogates and widows are worthy of study in part because they remain largely unaccounted for in our current scholarship about women's history. Analyzing them can help us understand how electoral efforts served

Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985 (New York: Routledge, 2011); Lelia J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Joan Jensen and Lois Scharf, eds. *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983).

¹² For information about female activity aimed at greater equality following 1920, see Freeman, *A Room*, 5-6; Sally J. Kenney, "It Would Be Stupendous For Us Girls': Campaigning for Women Judges Without Waving," in *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*, ed. Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline Castledine (New York: Routledge, 2011), 224; Melissa J. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 5-6; Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*; Jensen and Scharf, *Decades of Discontent*; and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

¹³ Jensen and Scharf, *Decades of Discontent*; Kenney, "It Would Be Stupendous For Us Girls," 224; Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace*; Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*.

¹⁴ For an account of women's work in the political parties, see Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*; and Melanie Susan Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party, 1854-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

¹⁵ For an account of political marital partnerships, see Kati Marton, *Hidden Power: Presidential Marriages that Shaped Our Recent History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001). To this author's knowledge, no account to date has solely investigated the lives and discourse of both gubernatorial surrogates and congressional widows.

as a thread of continuity, sustaining female progress during the doldrum decades between the first and second waves.¹⁶

Studying this group of women also gives us insight into how women used their rhetorical agency to lead and help shape gender ideology. In their pursuit of and performance in public office, widows and surrogates created a powerful rationale for female office holding that drew upon and expanded existing notions of femininity. When they announced their candidacies, widows and surrogates were primarily viewed as wives. The primacy of this role heightened the saliency of gender ideologies that were part of the context surrounding their campaigns. According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell,

the wives of candidates challenge the public and press differently than do women candidates for public office. Women candidates ask voters to revise the relationship between women and public power. By contrast, candidates' wives raise the more problematic issue of the relationship between women, *sexuality*, and power.¹⁷

¹⁶ According to the “waves” metaphor, the woman’s movement has two periods of heightened activism: the “first wave,” which spanned from the 1848 meeting in Seneca Falls, New York through passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, and the “second wave,” which began in 1963 with Betty Friedan’s publication of *The Feminine Mystique* and ended in the mid-1980s. Recently there has been widespread debate among scholars about the metaphor’s use and usefulness. This study aligns itself with those critiques, agrees that the waves metaphor has many limitations, and finds the metaphor’s failure to account for women’s widespread activity in the period of the “doldrums” deeply troubling. However, the metaphor is deeply entrenched in our teaching, writing, and modes of thinking about the woman’s movement. Despite enumerating its problems, we have yet to identify a suitable overarching framework that can account for the multiplicity of women’s voices and activities. As Nancy Hewitt notes, it may be impossible to completely “jettison” the metaphor, but we can “destabilize” it through scholarship that challenges “standard chronologies” and “make[s] clear that efforts to advance women’s interests and gender justice never disappear completely but continue in local areas or muted form until changed circumstances allow them to ignite broader mobilizations.” Therefore, this study does not reject the wave metaphor entirely, but it does answer the call to complicate it considerably. Nancy Hewitt, “Introduction” in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 1-14. For a discussion of the metaphor’s limitations, see Kathleen A. Laughlin, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, and Eileen Borris, “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” *Feminist Formations* 22 (2010): 76-135.

¹⁷ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Shadowboxing with Stereotypes: The Press, the Public, and the Candidates’ Wives* (Cambridge, MA: Joan Shorenstein Center, 1993), 1.

Surrogates and widows complicate gender norms because they do all of the above. As both political candidates and political spouses, their challenge to the established order is simultaneously subtle and direct. Given the unique nature of their candidacies and careers, studying their public discourse provides us with the opportunity to explore the intersection of gender ideology and political activity, particularly as it pertains to women in positions of political power.

MATRIMONIAL PATHS TO POWER: SCOPE OF THE CURRENT PROJECT

The current study approaches widowhood and surrogacy not as footnotes in the larger story of women's history, but as subjects worthy of deeper investigation in their own right. It addresses several questions about matrimonial paths to office that scholars have yet to explore. First, it seeks to understand how widows and surrogates used their rhetorical agency to discursively address the social construction of politics as a "masculine" space. In doing so, it identifies the rhetorical strategies and discursive themes that these women used to craft a justification for female campaigning and office holding. This analysis also accounts for the shifting rhetorical strategies that women adopted over time as they evolved from a wife into a candidate and, ultimately, an officeholder.

By analyzing individual candidacies as they unfold, we are able to account for a woman's rhetorical contributions to the cultural conversation about gender and power in her historical moment. We are also able to see how, collectively, these women helped shape broader rhetorical arguments and identities that empowered and constrained future candidates. To accomplish these goals, the study blends several

critical concepts into an approach for analysis that is then used to study the discourse produced by and about six female candidates who traveled matrimonial paths to office during the doldrums.

Subjects and Discourse Covered by the Current Study

While more than fifty women have ascended to office through a matrimonial connection, the current study focuses on six candidates who campaigned between 1923 and 1968, during the doldrums of the women's movement. Two of these women, Miriam Ferguson and Lurleen Wallace, were gubernatorial surrogates. Ferguson, the first female governor of Texas, ran for office when her husband, a former governor, was barred from placing his name on the ballot.¹⁸ She served two terms as governor (1925-1927, 1933-1935). Her tenure in office not only set the precedent for surrogacy; it also served as the inspiration for Lurleen Wallace's gubernatorial campaign in 1966.¹⁹ Wallace won her race as well, becoming the first female governor of Alabama. Her term in office, from 1967 through 1968, was short-lived, but it is an example of the ways in which women who ascend to office through matrimonial ties can make important contributions through their rhetorical leadership.

The current study also analyzes the campaign and tenure of Nellie Tayloe Ross, the first female governor of Wyoming. Ross's husband, William, was in the middle of a four-year term as governor when he died suddenly in 1924. Within days, the Democratic Party recruited Nellie Tayloe Ross to run in the special election to

¹⁸ Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 216.

¹⁹ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 272-273.

replace him.²⁰ Sworn into office just two weeks before Miriam Ferguson, Ross became the first female governor in the United States and completed her husband's unfinished term. Defeated for re-election in 1926, Ross went on to become the first female director of the U.S. Mint, a position she held for 20 years.²¹ As both a widow and a governor, Ross carved out a career in the overlap between gubernatorial surrogacy and congressional widowhood, illuminating commonalities and differences between those two electoral paths.

Three congressional widows are also featured in this study: Mae Ella Nolan, Edith Nourse Rogers, and Margaret Chase Smith. Nolan, the first female congresswoman from California (1923-1925), was actually the first widow to assume her husband's seat in Congress.²² Her tenure mapped the boundaries and expectations for this path to office, making her an important subject for the current project. While Nolan's tenure in office lasted only two years, dozens of women followed the path she pioneered, helping to shape and expand the congressional widowhood tradition. One of these women was Edith Nourse Rogers, who was elected in 1925 to the U.S. House seat previously held by her husband. Nourse Rogers ultimately represented her Massachusetts district for 35 years, making widowhood the means by which the longest-serving congresswoman in history initially secured office.²³

²⁰ Virginia Scharff, "Feminism, Femininity, and Power: Nellie Tayloe Ross and the Woman Politician's Dilemma," *Frontiers* 15 (1995): 87.

²¹ Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead, "The Changing Face of the Governorship" in *Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors*, ed. Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 5-6.

²² Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

Among congressional widows, Margaret Chase Smith is perhaps the most well known. After assuming her husband's seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, Smith became the first woman to win election to the U.S. Senate in her own right (1940-1973). She also became the first woman to have her name placed in nomination for the presidency by either of the two major political parties.²⁴ An important trailblazer in elective office, Smith demonstrates the ways in which congressional widows used this unique path to office to carve out greater electoral opportunities.

The current project analyzes the discourses produced by and about these female candidates and officeholders. Underpinning this analysis is archival research aimed at locating two types of rhetorical artifacts: First, speeches and other public texts, and second, memos, correspondence, and other texts that Ronald H. Carpenter has identified as "extrinsic" to the rhetorical text itself.²⁵ This second activity is in keeping with Carpenter's call for "rhetorical studies to embody more historiographical methodology" that uses "'extrinsic' materials to form conclusions about discourse."²⁶ In this study, such materials help illuminate rhetorical choices, elucidate the events leading up to the public discourse under examination, and reveal the process through which the discourse came into being.²⁷

²⁴ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 197-200.

²⁵ Ronald H. Carpenter, "Postscript: A Disciplinary History of Rhetorical History," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 222.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

One possible reason why the campaigns and careers of surrogates and widows have remained relatively unexamined is the difficulty in securing the texts and other discursive materials produced by and about them. Often, the public and private texts related to their political careers were not well maintained. For some, there is no central repository of materials, making it nearly impossible to generate a cohesive historical record of their tenures in office. For others, papers simply no longer exist, having been destroyed or lost. One advantage in studying the six women featured in this project is the abundance of textual materials available for analysis. The officeholders selected are among the few for whom quality archival materials are still available, and this project makes extensive use of them.

The primary texts analyzed by the current project include public speeches, private memos and correspondence, and press reports. In the cases of Governor Ross and Senator Smith, this study also relies upon autobiographical works and memoirs. These public and private documents help illustrate the ways in which these women developed their own public personas as political leaders while contending with the advantages and obstacles posed by their status as political wives and the ideological expectations accompanying these complex roles. Primary source materials for this study were procured through research at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, which holds documents pertaining to the history of female partisan and electoral pursuits as well as primary texts from Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers' career; the Bell County Museum, which houses materials from Miriam Ferguson's campaigns and two terms as governor of Texas; and the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, which holds materials from Nellie

Tayloe Ross' career. Primary materials by and press coverage about Lurleen Wallace came from the Manuscript Division at Emory University and the Alabama Department of Archives and History. And the chapter on Margaret Chase Smith makes great use of the abundant records available at the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan, Maine.

It is important to note at the outset that the choice of these subjects carries with it certain class, sexuality, and race considerations. The candidates studied here were white, heterosexual women who, by virtue of their marriages, occupied a space of socioeconomic privilege. Within this study, the term "white" is used in a way that reflects the historical, political, and cultural conditions in the United States. As Rogers Smith has observed, the nation was founded on a belief in "white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male superiority," which was closely tied to the prevailing social and political philosophies of western and northern Europe. In the United States, such assumptions helped fashion a "second-class citizenship, denying personal liberties and opportunities for political participation to most of the adult population on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and even religion."²⁸ Yet, the female experience of this status was not monolithic. Female citizens were marginalized by these assumptions, but many were simultaneously privileged by their race, ethnicity, sexuality and/or class. These advantages opened up opportunities for political leadership that would have been closed to women of color, newer immigrants to the United States, lesbians, and poorer women. As a result, one of the hallmarks of

²⁸ Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2-3.

women's history is the wide variety of experiences, expectations, and opportunities among women.

In their efforts to secure office, the women studied here often drew upon notions of an ideal womanhood that were not universal in terms of female experience or expectations. Despite these limitations, the discourses produced by and about them have important implications for women's history and our understanding of ever-shifting gender ideology. By analyzing the speeches and other rhetorical texts produced by and about the six female politicians featured in this study, this project aims to shed light not only on how they discursively addressed the challenges presented by their campaigns, but also how they confronted and contributed to the larger cultural conversation about gender and power. In addition, this project traces the evolution of the matrimonial connection from its earliest manifestations through its use during the doldrums of the women's movement. Since the careers of the women studied span from 1923 to 1968, this longitudinal study allows for the examination of the evolution of gender ideologies over time, assessing the impact these ideologies had on female officeholders in their specific historical contexts.

The Critical Lens

Part of the challenge confronting any rhetorical critic is finding the most effective interpretive framework for the discourses they seek to study. The critic must choose among the many methodological and theoretical tools available to craft a perspective uniquely suited for their work. To that end, the current study blends several concepts—many of which have shown a particular capacity for addressing

female rhetorical agency. Collectively, these concepts form an approach capable of yielding scholarly insights into the discourses related to the six candidates studied.

In its most basic sense, this study is a rhetorical history that looks not only at the discourse produced *by* female leaders with a matrimonial tie to office, but also at the discourses *about* them. The way I view these textual materials is a direct reflection of my understanding of the term “rhetorical.” For me, “rhetorical” refers not to a discipline, subdiscipline, or specific set of scholarly problems to be solved; rather, it refers to what Martin J. Medhurst identifies as “a general way of existing in the world ... [a belief] that all of life is the domain of the rhetorical, not merely those formal occasions that call for speech or discourse.”²⁹ In keeping with this definition of “rhetorical,” I believe that words are action and constitute a special form of leadership.³⁰ As a critic, I seek to understand the ways in which individuals and groups use discourse to lead. In particular, I am interested in the ways they use rhetoric to address, engage, and alter the ideological, social, and political forces of their historical moment, including cultural conceptions of gender.

²⁹ Martin J. Medhurst, “Afterword: The Ways of Rhetoric,” in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 219.

³⁰ As Leroy Dorsey notes, “leadership is grounded in the nature and practice of rhetoric.” According to David Zarefsky, rhetorical leadership, “comes about through the exercise of prudence, the practical art of balancing and accommodating competing interests to maximize opportunities and minimize constraints.” Leroy G. Dorsey, “Introduction: The President as a Rhetorical Leader,” in *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership*, ed. Leroy G. Dorsey (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2002), 5; David Zarefsky, “The Presidency Has Always Been a Place for Rhetorical Leadership,” in *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership*, ed. Leroy G. Dorsey (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2002), 39.

With these goals in mind, this project operates in the overlap between rhetoric and history identified by David Zarefsky.³¹ First, part of the interpretive lens for this study draws on the approach to rhetorical history that relates to “the study of historical events from a rhetorical perspective.” This approach adopts the assumption that history is “a series of rhetorical problems” that discourse attempts to address, and it is up to the rhetorical critic to assess “how, and how well” rhetorical responses resolve them.³² Second, the lens for interpretation employs the type of rhetorical history that Zarefsky calls “the historical study of rhetorical events.” This perspective requires the rhetorical critic to see discourse as “a force of history” capable of shaping the “ongoing social conversation.”³³ Drawing upon these two senses of rhetorical history, the current study explores how a group of widows and surrogates rhetorically responded to the problems that confronted them as female candidates and leaders. It also examines the political and rhetorical contributions that widows and surrogates, through these discursive performances, made to our ongoing social conversation about gender and political power.

Due to the nature of the paths to office studied and the specific questions I seek to address, the interpretive lens for this project places an emphasis on critical concepts well-suited for exploring issues of gender, particularly as they relate to constructs of femininity that influence female public activity. According to Karlyn Kohrs

³¹ Zarefsky defines the four senses of rhetorical history as “the history of rhetoric, the rhetoric of history, historical studies of rhetorical practice, and rhetorical studies of historical events.” David Zarefsky, “Four Senses of Rhetorical History,” in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 26.

³² *Ibid.*, 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Campbell, “gender is not a physical or biological given; it is enacted and performed.”³⁴ Far from being concrete, static, and well-defined, notions of gender are socially constructed. Ideas about femininity continually evolve, shaped by contextual forces, gendered performances, and new discourses. Throughout American history, contributions to this cultural conversation have been woven together, yielding a complex web of prescriptions and expectations for female behavior. This web of ideology has served to both expand and constrain female rhetorical agency, which includes one’s ability to speak, to be heard, and to contribute to broader cultural debates.³⁵

Any attempt to investigate discourses produced by women must not only account for the exercise of agency, but also the contextual forces, including prior discourses, that enlarge or narrow the rhetorical choices available to them.³⁶ To that end, the current study operates from the positionalist perspective, which is rooted in the work of Celeste Condit. She defines the positionalist perspective as an alternative to the “situational perspective.” Whereas the situational perspective “highlights the actions of individuals in very narrowly defined historical events, ... the positional perspective highlights the broad and mostly anonymous shifts and forces of language in

³⁴ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 1 (1998): 2.

³⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2 (March 2005): 1.

³⁶ This approach to agency is consistent with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s call to adopt a view that “reject[s] absolutely any binary that forces a choice between the autonomous individual and some form of determinism.” Campbell, “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” 5. See also Julie Nelson-Kuna and Stephanie Riger, “Women’s Agency in Psychological Contexts,” in *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 170.

history.”³⁷ This perspective accentuates the wide array of forces that make up the context surrounding a rhetorical act, enabling the rhetorical critic to observe an individual’s public discourse and the contextual factors that facilitated it.³⁸

There are several aspects of the positionalist perspective that make it an effective approach for the current study. First, its interrogation of broader contexts enables us to better see how contextual forces affect women’s rhetorical choices and guide their decisions either to adopt or ignore certain discursive strategies.³⁹ Second, the positionalist perspective enables rhetorical critics to address the immediate and long-term, positive and negative implications of women’s rhetorical choices.⁴⁰ Third, by encouraging deep and nuanced analyses, positionalist studies can help the critic uncover alternative representations of femininity and explain why certain constructs were salient in certain historical moments.⁴¹ Finally, by looking at rhetorical practices both in specific contexts and over a period of time, the positionalist perspective helps broaden the notion of “effect” that guides our scholarly inquiries.

³⁷ Celeste Michelle Condit, “Opposites in an Oppositional Practice: Rhetorical Criticism and Feminism,” in *Transforming Visions: Feminist Critiques in Communication Studies*, ed. Sheryl Perlmutter Bowen and Nancy Wyatt (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1993), 209.

³⁸ Kristy Maddux, “Feminism and Foreign Policy: Public Vocabularies and the Conditions of Emergence for First Lady Rosalynn Carter,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 31 (Spring 2008): 29.

³⁹ E. Michele Ramsey, “Addressing Issues of Context in Historical Women’s Public Address,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 27 (Fall 2004): 353-354. According to E. Michele Ramsey, this broader sense of context is not limited to cultural forces, but can also include the political, social, historical, economic, and technological.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 366-367.

This final benefit of a positionalist approach conforms to James Jasinski's "constitutive framework" for measuring rhetorical impact.⁴² Rather than focusing solely on a rhetorical act's instrumental impact on its immediate audience, the positionalist approach encourages the examination of broader questions, including how certain rhetorical constructions obtain and maintain their salience within a linguistic culture.⁴³ In turn, this shift allows for the exploration of broader consequences, such as how the rhetor draws upon and contributes to our "public vocabulary." As Kristy Maddux explains, this term refers to the "popularly contested, always shifting, cultural reservoir of ideology" that serves as both a "negotiated space of compromise" and a "discursive resource bank offering the grounds for public discourse."⁴⁴ A rhetor's discourse can alter or bolster the culture's shared public vocabulary.⁴⁵ Such a perspective is particularly well-suited for the study of discourses produced by female rhetors because it allows us to account for the discursive forces that informed their choices as well as the profound impact such choices had beyond the rhetor's immediate historical moment. By exerting her rhetorical agency, a woman can impact the public vocabulary in ways that help expand or constrict the rhetorical options available to future female rhetors.

⁴² James Jasinski, "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 73-74.

⁴³ Ramsey, "Addressing Issues," 354.

⁴⁴ Maddux, "Feminism and Foreign Policy," 32.

⁴⁵ Condit, "Opposites in an Oppositional Practice," 209.

To that end, this study adopts a broad view of historical context in order to explore how notions of femininity both constrained and empowered gubernatorial surrogates and congressional widows. It investigates the competing gender ideologies present in the relevant historical context and the ways each female officeholder rhetorically addressed, stretched, challenged, and in some cases, changed them. Often these efforts involved what Kenneth Burke has called “casuistic stretching,” a process by which new principles are layered upon old identities.⁴⁶ According to A. Cheree Carlson, this strategy has particular appeal for women, who are frequently caught between their traditional roles and contemporary circumstances that require change. Carlson notes that casuistic stretching allows women to address this tension by displacing traditional terms, moving them from “an accepted context” into “a new territory.”⁴⁷ In the process, “the new context ‘borrows’ respectability from the established context.”⁴⁸ As the current study will demonstrate, this process was often evident in the discourse produced by surrogates and widows as they evolved from wife to candidate and office holder.

This study is thus a rhetorical history that uses a multi-faceted framework for the interpretation of discursive texts. That framework blends the positionalist perspective with an understanding of public vocabulary, casuistry, and constitutive impact. Using these rhetorical tools to view the discourse produced by and about

⁴⁶ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 229.

⁴⁷ A. Cheree Carlson, “Creative Casuistry and Feminist Consciousness: The Rhetoric of Moral Reform,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

surrogates and widows helps us observe how these female candidates exerted their rhetorical agency to respond to the particular problems of their time. Chief among these problems were notions of femininity that constrained women's ability to campaign for and hold elective office. The interpretive lens enables us to observe how women overcame these challenges by crafting a rationale for campaigning and office holding based upon matrimonial ties. And it offers the opportunity for new insights into issues of legacy and impact by illuminating the historical and rhetorical implications of their leadership.

OUTLINE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

In the wake of the suffrage victory, women experienced a sad irony. Armed with the vote, they finally had the ability to elect greater numbers of women to public office. Yet, the lack of a unified and energized women's movement deprived potential candidates of the institutional, financial, and electoral support they needed to compete with male incumbents and opponents. Within four years of securing suffrage, women had found a way to overcome these challenges in two new paths to political office that were predicated upon matrimonial ties. Using the paths of congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy, women continued to advance the cause of female equality and opportunity during the doldrums.

As some of the first women to have access to statewide elective office, widows and surrogates helped usher in a new era in the female political experience. While female activists had long participated in partisan politics, widows and surrogates were able to exert their agency in spaces that had long excluded women. They actively campaigned for office and pursued their policy agendas from within the

halls that housed institutional power. In light of the fact that it took more than seventy years to win the fight for female suffrage, it's reasonable to assume that, by circumventing the usual route to office, surrogates and widows hastened women's entrance into Congress and gubernatorial office.

Widows and surrogates also helped the nation move closer to the ideals of representative democracy. They brought the faces and voices of more women into the electoral process, expanding the scope of issues and experiences in the public sphere. Through their campaigns and careers, they helped constitute women as political leaders and participants. As candidates, they also spoke to female voters directly, helping heighten women's sense of political efficacy and encouraging them to exert their own agency by using their voice and their vote. In an era when the lack of a robust women's movement meant role models were in short supply, they served as important examples of female leadership. But their greatest legacy is their collective contributions to our culture's on-going conversation about gender and power. Through the exercise of their rhetorical agency they not only helped create powerful justifications for female campaigning and office holding, but also helped shape notions of femininity in ways that facilitated greater female agency, opportunity, and public activity.

As Chapter One will illustrate, women had long used the characteristics associated with domestic femininity and the roles of wife and mother to justify expansions in female public activity and opportunity. This tendency can be seen in the discourses of municipal housekeepers, partisan mothers, and suffragists that used expediency arguments. As this study will demonstrate, widows and surrogates drew

from and expanded upon this rhetorical strategy. In their discourse, they engaged in a process of casuistic stretching, expanding conservative notions of femininity in ways that provided a powerful rationale for electoral activity and office holding. In the process, these female candidates helped shape our public vocabulary. They recast the terms “wife,” “mother,” and “widow” in ways that enhanced their public, political dimensions. Their discourse also contributed conservative justifications for progressive activities to the reservoir of rhetorical resources that future women could adopt and employ.

In this way, the contributions made by widows and surrogates were not only historical, but also rhetorical in nature. While they accomplished many firsts and secured important victories, their greatest legacies are the rhetorical tools they fashioned that made traditional notions of femininity compatible with electoral activity. These discourses not only helped widows and surrogates secure public office; they also enhanced the rhetorical choices available, enabling future rhetors, particularly would-be office holders, to advance female progress and enlarge woman’s sphere of political influence.

Preview of Chapters

The first chapter of this dissertation serves as the historical foundation for the current study. It provides an extended history of female political activity from the colonial period through the post-suffrage period. Included is an account of the salient gender constructs that comprised the context framing these activities and the expediency-based discourses that women used to address them, including municipal housekeeping and partisan mothering. The chapter also explores the significant

obstacles facing potential female candidates and the ways in which the special status granted to widows and select spouses helped women transcend them. This process of transcendence began to formulate the rhetorical justification for congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy.

Chapter Two explores the emergence of gubernatorial surrogacy and congressional widowhood as paths to office at the dawn of the doldrums. Four landmark campaigns are analyzed: Mae Ella Nolan's election to her deceased husband's seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1922; the gubernatorial campaign waged by Miriam "Ma" Ferguson in Texas in 1924; the campaign and tenure of Wyoming's first female governor, Nellie Tayloe Ross; and the campaign of congressional widow Edith Nourse Rogers in Massachusetts in 1925. Collectively, this group of women helped transform spousal ties into powerful mechanisms for achieving elective office. In keeping with the discourses of municipal housekeeping and partisan mothering, as well as expediency-based appeals used by suffragists, these early widows and surrogates rhetorically engaged in a process of casuistic stretching that broadened the meaning of the terms "mother," "widow," and "wife." By layering new characteristics over these old identities, this group of women portrayed campaigning and office holding as an extension of wifely and maternal duty that aimed to serve the family as well as their community. In doing so, they established an electoral tradition and provided a rhetorical justification that would help female candidates achieve statewide office for decades to come.

Chapter Three studies the campaign discourse produced by and about U.S. Senator Margaret Chase Smith during her 1940 and 1948 campaigns. Running as a

congressional widow for a U.S. House seat in 1940, Chase Smith pushed the boundaries of that electoral tradition. She used the historical justifications associated with her path to office to articulate a more egalitarian view of political marriage and a broader sense of what constituted acceptable qualifications for female candidates. By stretching the boundaries of the traditional wife persona, Chase Smith portrayed political marriages as cooperative enterprises that gave wives legitimate credentials for public office. Such arguments advanced the widowhood rationale, transforming the widow from the keeper of an electoral legacy into an equal contributor to a two-person career that transcended death.

In 1948, Chase Smith campaigned for the U.S. Senate. She expanded electoral opportunities for women once again through appeals that were both progressive and conservative in nature. In keeping with the traditional, she aligned her campaign with the feminine traditions of good government and municipal housekeeping, highlighting women's purifying effect on politics. In a move that was more progressive, Chase Smith articulated a broader role for women in partisan activity based on their status as citizens. She appealed to female voters directly, encouraging them to run for office and to view themselves as a voting bloc worthy of serious appeals in electoral proceedings.

Taken together, Chase Smith's campaigns encouraged a greater sense of political efficacy among female candidates and voters, provided women with rhetorical resources that they could use to justify a larger presence in politics, and helped advance female equality and opportunity during the doldrums.

Chapter Four analyzes the gubernatorial campaign and short tenure of Alabama's Lurleen Wallace. The first female governor elected in thirty years, Wallace sought office in 1966 on behalf of her husband, who was barred from holding two consecutive terms as the state's chief executive. Her twenty-seven month evolution from first lady to candidate and office holder illustrates the ways in which gubernatorial surrogacy continued to function as a space of political empowerment for women. Specifically, an analysis of Wallace's campaign discourse demonstrates how she successfully fashioned the Southern Lady ideal into a justification for election and greater public action. On the campaign trail, her presence and performance provided women with an important role model in a region and at a time when many deeply questioned their political efficacy. As an officeholder, Wallace became an even more significant force for female empowerment, expanding the Southern Lady ideal to facilitate her rhetorical and legislative leadership on public spaces, mental health, and civil rights. Even though she maintained the sense of spousal duty inherent in the Southern Lady, she nevertheless found ways to stretch the construct so she could develop her own independent identity and voice. While Wallace never freed herself completely from the construct of the Southern Lady, she was able to give it new meaning during her final months in office. Engaging in discourse reflective of the "soft consciousness-raising" of southern second-wave feminists, Wallace highlighted gender inequality in health care and helped bring the Southern Lady into the twentieth century, where it could be used to expand female opportunity.

The Afterword explores the historical and rhetorical implications of the current study. It addresses the ways in which the candidates studied helped shape women's history, gender ideology, and female agency. Specifically, it explains how this group of women helped sustain and advance the march toward gender equality during the doldrums of the women's rights movement. By occupying a liminal space that offered greater rhetorical choices and electoral opportunities, these women accomplished important firsts and amassed vital victories. Moreover, in securing these achievements they crafted discourses that drew upon prevailing gender ideology and recast it in ways that were more compatible with new contexts and activities. While these strategies were not liberating for all women, such precedent-setting actions helped re-envision electoral politics in ways that were more promising and encouraging for many women. They also helped erode patriarchal institutions, create uniquely female electoral traditions, and bring new issues and new voices into the public sphere.

In the decades following the suffrage victory, matrimonial ties to office served as some of the earliest pathways to political office. By analyzing the discourses produced by and about six of the female candidates who traveled the widowhood and surrogacy routes, we can expand our understanding of women's history, gender ideology, and female rhetorical leadership. Doing so requires that we first return to the beginning and develop a better understanding of the contextual forces that shaped these candidacies and campaigns. We must start with an accounting of the discourses and ideological forces that framed white women's experiences from the colonial period through the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

CHAPTER 1: FEMININITY, SPOUSAL DUTY, AND ELECTORAL ACTIVITY, 1650-1920

American history is wrought with competing frameworks that have defined what constitutes “appropriate” feminine behavior, which activities and spaces make up “woman’s sphere,” and what roles women should play privately and publicly. These feminine ideals have their origins in gendered constructs that the colonists brought with them to the New World. Those constructs were then adapted to meet new challenges and societal changes as the thirteen colonies became one country. Over time, shifting notions of femininity created a complex landscape of gender ideology that women had to navigate in their pursuit of a broader role in public life. Any effort to explain the routes by which women secured elective office must first account for this history since these gendered constructs helped shape the context surrounding female candidacies and campaigns. This chapter provides that historical foundation by tracing the evolution of different notions of femininity—and their impact on female agency—from colonial times through the early twentieth century.

The first section of this chapter reviews the gender constructs that governed female behavior in the period leading up to the doldrums, including that of the helpmeet, the ornament, the republican mother, and the true woman. The second section details the ways in which female civic and political participation was framed, constrained, and facilitated by these gender ideals. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of the special status afforded to widows and “deputy husbands” in American public life. These classifications gave certain women the ability to craft

their own public identity by picking and choosing among existing gender constructs. In turn, their efforts created a space of political empowerment and professional advancement for married, white women of economic means—a space that would serve as the foundation for the electoral paths of gubernatorial surrogacy and congressional widowhood.

GENDER IDEOLOGIES: FRAMING FEMININE PUBLIC ACTION

The history of gender ideology in America is not a story of unimpeded progress with each generation throwing off old ideals in favor of newer, more empowering constructs. Nor, as Louise Tilly and Patricia Gurin note, is it the story of prevailing ideologies that vacillated between an emphasis on the perceived differences and similarities between the sexes.¹ Rather, the history of gender ideology in America is a story of boundaries expanding and constricting, often in response to and coordination with seemingly unrelated events like wars, technological inventions, and social movements. At times, such changes empowered women; at others, they constrained female public activity and agency. Ultimately, these changes yielded a complex tapestry of gender ideologies that wove together the conservative and the progressive, allowing seemingly incompatible notions of femininity to co-exist side by side. From the colonial period through the nineteenth century, these ever-changing ideologies found expression in different rhetorical constructs, including the helpmeet, the ornamental woman, the republican mother, and the true woman. In order to understand where women stood at the dawn of the doldrums, we must first account for the gendered forms present at the founding and the new ideals they helped create.

¹ Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin, “Women, Politics, and Change,” in *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 23.

Colonial Ideologies: The Help-Meet and the Ornament

The colonists came to America from many backgrounds and for many reasons. Together, they created a cultural hodgepodge of gendered expectations that reflected the diversity of female experiences in the colonial period. From community to community and region to region, different religious, social, and political forces exerted their influence and helped shape woman's experiences.² Despite this diversity, however, there were also areas of uniformity across the colonies.

First and foremost, the primacy of the family served as an institution among whites that helped order gender roles. According to Linda Kerber, the colonists "appear to have done little questioning of inherited role definitions."³ For them, the hierarchical and patriarchal family was the basic unit of society, and the white woman's role was defined by her activities in the home. The work of the family was divided along gendered lines. Women controlled day-to-day household activities while their husbands engaged in the public world of political and economic affairs. This gendered division of the family unit spawned two widespread roles for white women: the help-meet and the ornamental woman.⁴

According to Ruth Bloch, the help-meet ideal emerged from Puritan doctrine and emphasized woman's role as a wife. The construct was based on the belief that "women were weaker in reason; more prone to uncontrolled emotional extremes; and

² For a discussion of woman's experiences in different regions and communities during the colonial period, see Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

³ Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 19.

⁴ Ruth H. Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 (June 1978): 102-103.

in need, therefore, of practical, moral, and intellectual guidance from men.”⁵ In keeping with these assumptions, the ideal carved out a place for women that was subordinate to men and located in the home. As a help-meet, a woman was expected to embrace her uniquely “pious, frugal, and hardworking” nature and assist “men in furthering both spiritual and worldly concerns.”⁶ This arrangement gave women the benefit of male protection from the public world while allowing them to make their own unique contributions in the private home.

The second gendered construct found throughout colonial America was the ornamental ideal, which was based on ideas found in English literature and periodicals. This ideal was known by different names in different regions; northern women were described as “pretty gentlewoman,” and in the south, one was considered a “lady.”⁷ Like the help-meet, the ornamental woman was modest and pious, but she was also graceful and charming. According to Bloch, this construct suggested that “women were exquisite beings—beautiful, delicate, pure, and refined,” and should be judged by their “charm and fashionable female ‘accomplishments’ such as musical performance, drawing, and speaking French.”⁸ The construct’s emphasis on etiquette and social grace made it particularly well suited to the lives of upper-class, white women, who were even less likely to be involved in their

⁵ Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals,” 102-103.

⁶ Ibid., 102.

⁷ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 40.

⁸ Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals,” 103.

husband's work or political pursuits.⁹ Hence, since it was often adopted by white women of higher socioeconomic status, the ornament also came to represent a woman with a particular disinterest in business dealings and civic affairs.¹⁰

Throughout the late eighteenth century, gendered expectations for many American women were framed by the help-meet and ornamental ideals. Both constructs emphasized woman's unique nature, highlighted her role as a wife, and insulated her from public concerns. While many factors sustained and reinforced these norms, chief among them were religion and the realities of daily life. As Bloch has observed, whether a woman aspired to be a help-meet or an ornament, her primary identity was defined by her "relationships to God and man as Christian, wife, and social companion."¹¹ The demands of daily life reinforced these divine roles since, according to Mary Beth Norton, "women's inescapable responsibilities to households, husbands, and children confined their experience to the domestic realm more surely than could any abstract ideology."¹²

While there were commonalities in the gendered norms that these ideals expressed, it is important to note that there was also a measure of fluidity in how they were applied. Given their new environments, the colonists were often unable to strictly adhere to inherited ideals. Therefore, they adapted feminine constructs in ways that helped close the gap between expectation and lived experience. Louise

⁹ Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals," 103; Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 40.

¹⁰ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 35.

¹¹ Kerber, "Separate Spheres," 19; Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals," 103.

¹² Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 110.

Young notes that for this reason, in practice, women were actually given “an unaccustomed degree of freedom” in the New World and “Old World attitudes were loosened in fact if not in law.”¹³ Yet, while the help-meet and the ornament were not hard and fast dictates, they did become desirable goals. Even though most women fell short of attaining them, many white women aspired to them. Moreover, early Americans proved adept at using them to mark out the boundaries of the ideal roles and activities for women. In the revolutionary period, these ideals served as fertile soil from which new gendered constructs could emerge.

The Revolutionary Era: Republican Womanhood and Republican Motherhood

Throughout the colonial period, early Americans adapted their old ideals to fit their new circumstances. Beginning in 1775, the Revolutionary War served as a catalyst for further changes in inherited norms. The war effort blurred the lines between what was considered “appropriate” and “inappropriate” for women. It also eroded the distinction between masculine and feminine behavior.¹⁴ Old ideas about femininity were challenged directly as white women pursued activities previously coded as masculine.¹⁵ For example, female colonists participated in economic boycotts of British goods, engaged in wartime philanthropic activity, and provided aid to soldiers at troop encampments. Women also stepped in for their husbands, fathers, and brothers in commercial affairs, overseeing and maintaining family businesses and farms while their male relatives were off at war. For the first time,

¹³ Louise M. Young, “Women’s Place in American Politics: The Historical Perspective,” *The Journal of Politics* 38 (August 1976): 300-301.

¹⁴ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 225.

¹⁵ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 53.

some women even assumed an explicit political identity as they were moved or forced to openly express their loyalty to the fledgling nation or the British crown.

Traditional femininity was challenged by these public activities and by new ideas about the significance of white women's work within the home. Before the Revolutionary War, there was a general ambivalence about women's domestic activities. That sentiment changed as the home itself increasingly became an important front in the war. Many of the colonists' homefront strategies merged the public and private spheres by using domestic sacrifices to achieve the era's revolutionary goals. For example, women were asked to replace imported cloth with homespun materials, a tremendous undertaking since homemade cloth was difficult and time-consuming to produce. This kind of support for the war effort gave the roles and activities associated with the private sphere new meaning.¹⁶ They became politically significant and were at once both private and public in nature.

Once the conflict had ended and independence was won, these wartime disruptions in gender roles created an ideological quandary.¹⁷ Americans now needed to account for the public significance of women's war-time work and domestic contributions. They also had to bring traditional notions of femininity in line with the new nation's civic identity. During the 1790s, American intellectuals attempted to reconcile these issues by layering new meanings upon old ideals. According to Linda Kerber, their efforts blended traditional femininity with "a measure of critical bite"

¹⁶ For more information about the political, public impact of women's economic activities, see Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 155-170.

¹⁷ Sylvia R. Frey and Martin J. Morton, *New World, New Roles: A Documentary History of Women in Pre-Industrial America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 122.

and created “republican womanhood.”¹⁸ The new ideal of the republican woman brought “the older version of the separation of spheres into a rough conformity with the new politics that valued autonomy and individualism.”¹⁹ Underlying this effort was a process of casuistic stretching that expanded the boundaries of domestic femininity to account for publicly significant activity.

Republican womanhood altered traditional femininity not by rejecting it, but by recasting its values and virtues in patriotic terms. In the post-revolutionary period, many believed that the survival of the new republic rested on the public virtue of its citizens.²⁰ The republican woman ideal transformed this necessity into a feminine responsibility. Women, traditionally thought to be the more virtuous of the sexes, became the keepers of the country’s civic virtue.²¹ By tapping into her more virtuous nature and exerting her “great influence over men” (whether sons, husbands, brothers, or suitors), the republican woman would help ensure the survival of the republic through her relationships and activities in the domestic, private sphere.²² Of particular interest is the ideal’s emphasis on a woman’s relationship and presumed influence over her husband. Several historians have noted the special significance bestowed upon a woman’s role as a wife, which was highlighted, elevated, and celebrated in

¹⁸ Linda Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly* 28, no.2 (Summer 1976): 201; Kerber, “Separate Spheres,” 20.

¹⁹ Kerber, “Separate Spheres,” 20.

²⁰ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

speeches and other discourses about republican womanhood.²³ Being a good wife was no longer important only to one's family; it also became part of woman's patriotic duty and a metaphor for political partnerships among the new citizenry. According to Jan Lewis, the "republican marriage" was heralded as the model for political relationships in the nation's earliest days.²⁴ It is one of the earliest examples of the political importance that American culture placed upon a woman's spousal duty and marital authority.

Ultimately, the republican woman construct proved attractive because it helped a new nation satisfy both intellectual and practical concerns. Theorists like Benjamin Rush emphasized republican womanhood's ability to help blend Enlightenment liberalism with Christian theology.²⁵ According to such logic, if liberty was the ultimate goal of the republic and religious virtue represented the surest way to achieve it, then womanhood was a key means through which liberty could most effectively be maintained. Yet, republican womanhood was not only a theoretical necessity, it was also a practical and political one. The same ideas and political philosophies that Americans embraced as the rationale for their revolution also weakened patriarchy.²⁶ Gender identities that had once been relatively reliable were now destabilized and in conflict with the new republic's values. In order to

²³ Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Oct. 1987): 689-690; Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Summer 1997): 175; Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals," 102-103.

²⁴ Lewis, "Republican Wife," 689-690.

²⁵ Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood," 177.

²⁶ Kerber, "Separate Spheres," 20.

recapture some semblance of ideological stability, femininity had to be recast in terms consistent with the new political order. Republican womanhood was an attempt to acknowledge that the domestic sphere had crept outside of its boundaries, and there was no way it could be restrained at the war's end. Male politicians, who had written off the domestic sphere as inferior and inconsequential, were now forced to revise their perspective. Domestic activities had proven to be important weapons in the fight for independence. The Revolutionary War had not displaced the idea that white woman's place was in the home, but it had altered the importance of what they did there.²⁷ This realization forced early Americans to confer a new significance upon domestic life.²⁸ Republican womanhood was the means by which they did so, and it became the ideal to which many post-revolutionary women were expected to aspire.

But through what avenues would this new republican womanhood be expressed and fulfilled? In part, women could enact the ideal by exhibiting certain characteristics. Consistent with the process of casuistic stretching, women were still expected to conform to characteristics consistent with old notions of femininity. Norton has observed that the republican woman was not free from traditional norms; she was still expected to be “pure, tender, delicate, irritable, affectionate, flexible, and patient ... [as well as] modest, chaste, cheerful, sympathetic, affable, and emotional.”²⁹ However, new characteristics were layered upon old identities, which required that women do more than simply enact traditional norms. Kerber has

²⁷ Linda K. Kerber. *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 229.

²⁸ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 155.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

observed that, as republican mothers, women were now also expected to be “competent and confident . . . [as well as] rational, benevolent, independent, [and] self-reliant.”³⁰ According to Norton, this list of old and new “qualities was at once descriptive and prescriptive, serving both as a list of goals for feminine behavior and as an enumeration of characteristics exclusively and innately female.”³¹ By performing these old and new characteristics, women could successfully enact republican womanhood and prove their femininity.

Over time, motherhood became the best expression of republican womanhood.³² Of course, the American tendency to celebrate the maternal was not unique to this ideal. That inclination can be traced back to the publication of the novel *Pamela* in 1774. The book fused together the colonial period’s two dominant constructs—the help-meet and the ornament—and then transformed them into a new model for femininity: the moral mother. The moral mother was domestically competent, ornamentally appealing, and maternal. A variety of writings published and disseminated in America from 1785 through 1815 championed the ideal.³³ By the early nineteenth century, simply being a republican woman was not enough; the true power of femininity lay in republican motherhood.

The republican mother concept was rooted in the centuries-old Spartan mother, who raised her sons in ways that prepared them to “sacrifice themselves to

³⁰ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 206.

³¹ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 112.

³² Frey and Morton, *New World, New Roles*, 122.

³³ Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals,” 109.

the good of the *polis*.”³⁴ Similarly, the republican mother was devoted to both her family and her nation. She expressed this devotion by raising patriotic, virtuous, and civically-engaged sons and serving as a moral influence on her husband.³⁵ According to Kerber, “The Republican Mother’s life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue: she educated her sons for it, she condemned and corrected her husband’s lapses from it.”³⁶ Women were defined by their role as moral mothers and they “were given primary responsibility for shaping the minds, morals, and manners of their children, thereby contributing to republican stability by rearing virtuous citizens.”³⁷ According to Sara Evans, in the post-revolutionary period, this became a vital part of women’s civic responsibilities:

[A woman’s] patriotic duty to educate her sons to be moral and virtuous citizens linked her to the state and gave her some degree of power over its future. The responsibility of raising republican citizens offered women a political role which went well beyond common-law assumptions subsuming women’s legal identities into those of husbands or fathers. Now women had a civic role and identity distinct from men, a role essential to the state’s welfare.³⁸

While the republican mother construct left domestic femininity more or less intact, it expanded woman’s sphere by finally bringing the feminine private into contact with

³⁴ Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 188.

³⁵ Kerber. *Women of the Republic*, 283.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

³⁷ Frey and Morton, *New World, New Roles*, 122.

³⁸ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 57.

the masculine public.³⁹ At last, there was a political theory, however narrowly conceived, that accounted for female civic engagement.

However, the republican motherhood paradigm still imposed limits. Put simply, the ability to engage in public matters ended where direct political activity began. The republican mother served “a political role” through her relationships and responsibilities within her family, but she did not hold sway over her husband’s or son’s decisions at the ballot box.⁴⁰ Kerber notes that in this way a woman “was [now] a citizen but not really a constituent.”⁴¹ However, even with these limitations, the concept of feminine citizenship that republican motherhood offered was more broadly defined than any that had preceded it. Under this paradigm of the woman-citizen, the traditional domestic duties assigned to women were enhanced by a civic dimension, making women responsible for the teaching, guarding, and role modeling of republican values in the home. Women became the “monitors of political behavior of their lovers, husbands, and children.”⁴² They gained a national identity based primarily on their physical and emotional contributions, namely the birthing and raising of children and the support and monitoring of their husband’s political pursuits.⁴³ Under the republican motherhood paradigm, the full range of woman’s domestic responsibilities and relationships were imbued with a political significance

³⁹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁴² Amelia H. Kritzer, “Playing with Republican Motherhood,” *Early American Literature* 31 (1996): 150.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 158.

following the war. In all she did, a woman was expected to instill her family, and thus the community, with a sense of morality and patriotic duty.

Importantly, some scholars have found that, as is the case with all gender norms, there is evidence of “a gap between ideology and the real experience of women.”⁴⁴ For the current study, what is important is not the extent to which this ideal reflected the real lives of women, but that it was a well-publicized ideal that many women were encouraged and expected to uphold. Republican motherhood may not have been successfully enacted by most women, but it was internalized by many women who viewed it as an aspiration worth pursuing. Furthermore, the construct was propagated through a wide array of discourses. For example, Karen K. List reviewed three major post-Revolutionary party newspapers and fifteen magazines and found that they all conveyed the construct’s central characteristics and themes.⁴⁵ The ideal’s presence in discourses that communicated and debated gender ideology make it an important and useful tool for the current study.

In the wake of the Revolutionary War, Americans faced the task of building a new nation. The war had destabilized their society and created uncertainty that was reflected in the era’s anxiety about gender roles. In an effort to quell this anxiety and bring gendered ideologies in line with the political philosophies that guided the nation’s independence and founding, early Americans recast the values and virtues associated with the private sphere and gave women the patriotic duty to fulfill their domestic responsibilities in ways that would help sustain the republic. Specifically,

⁴⁴ Nash, “Rethinking Republican Motherhood,” 175.

⁴⁵ Karen K. List, “The Post-Revolutionary Woman Idealized: Philadelphia Media’s ‘Republican Mother,’” *Journalism Quarterly* 32 (1988): 72.

women were expected to exert their moral influence over their husbands and raise their sons to become patriotic citizens. Kerber notes that the ideology of republican motherhood was accepted and perpetuated by men and women alike, and eventually proved so influential that it became a “fourth branch of government, a device that ensured social control in the gentlest possible way.”⁴⁶ Through this powerful construct, Americans had “produced the terms and rhetoric in which much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century debate on the proper dimensions of female patriotism would be expressed.”⁴⁷

The Nineteenth Century: Domesticity and the Cult of True Womanhood

While republican motherhood may have set the stage for a debate about greater female participation, it did not represent the beginning of an uninterrupted expansion of woman’s sphere. In the early nineteenth century, American life was once again disrupted—this time by technological advancements that brought about industrialization, urbanization, and exploration. However, unlike the Revolutionary period, when dramatic changes served as the catalyst for greater female opportunities, the response to industrialization was conservative and much more restrictive. According to Evans, the uncertainty of the era served to push women further into the home, where they were “charged with preserving old values and [providing] a safe and stable haven against change.”⁴⁸ Siobahn Moroney notes that this shift culminated in a “domestic ideology [that] promulgated a vision of a woman as a gentle and pious

⁴⁶ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 200.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 69.

nurturer to her family and her home as a refuge from the stresses or even immorality of the commercial and political spheres.”⁴⁹ In this uncertain age, white women became the protectors of the domestic, private sphere, shielding it from the turmoil and disorder that characterized nineteenth-century public life.

The female experience in America had long been defined by domestic tasks, but in the 1800s, domesticity achieved the status of formal ideology, emerging as a more formal framework for female participation.⁵⁰ The roots of this ideology could be traced to colonial America, where domestic life was considered woman’s destiny.⁵¹ Societal pressures meant that few women created a life that did not include marriage, and lack of access to birth control meant that most married women became mothers.⁵² Marriage and motherhood sealed woman’s fate by tying her to the private sphere, where she was expected to play three complementary roles: wife, mother, and housemistress.⁵³ Kerber notes that in a roundabout way the Revolutionary War may have ultimately been responsible for the eventual celebration of these roles. After all, the war had disrupted private life and separated families, and so it makes sense that the peace that followed brought about a renewed appreciation of domestic activities and identities.⁵⁴ Kerber observes that even the republican mother construct, which

⁴⁹ Siobhan Moroney, “Widows and Orphans: Women’s Education Beyond the Domestic Ideal,” *Journal of Family History* 25 (2000): 31.

⁵⁰ Frey and Morton, *New World, New Roles*, 123.

⁵¹ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 34.

⁵² Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 559.

⁵³ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 39.

⁵⁴ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 47.

represented greater civic opportunities, “directed women’s newfound consciousness back into the home.”⁵⁵ Its ground-breaking potential was tempered by the fact that at its most basic level the new construct was essentially a form of politicized domesticity.

Whether because of further dislocation caused by industrialization or this longing for a nostalgic past, the cult of true womanhood emerged in the nineteenth century as a new framework for feminine behavior.⁵⁶ Its appearance marked a return to traditional femininity and a deepening of the ideological forces that spawned it. According to Barbara Welter, true womanhood was an extension of domestic ideology that judged women based upon “four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”⁵⁷ The true woman construct was popularized by novels and women’s magazines, and in stark contrast to the republican mother, “abjured public activity as unbecoming, even unthinkable.”⁵⁸ Whereas the republican mother had highlighted the ways in which women could transcend the private sphere, the cult of true womanhood reinforced the many ways in which women were still tied to it.

The cardinal virtue of domesticity gave women primary responsibility for the work of the household. It positioned the private sphere of the home as their natural

⁵⁵ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 57.

⁵⁶ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151. Barbara Welter’s landmark essay about this ideal covers the time period from 1820-1860. Welter notes that the term “true womanhood” was in frequent use by the mid-nineteenth century.

⁵⁷ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 152; Moroney, “Widows and Orphans,” 31.

⁵⁸ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 69.

place and “frowned upon women engaging in activities outside the home.”⁵⁹ Yet, although women were responsible for the care and maintenance of the domestic sphere, they were not the ultimate authority within it. The cult of true womanhood required they be submissive to their husbands, who were the ultimate domestic decision makers. Welter notes that the true woman, “in all her roles, accepted submission as her lot.”⁶⁰ Like domesticity itself, submission was in many ways a vestige of colonial life, where the word “helpless” tended to be reserved for women. In fact, according to Norton, women frequently used the word to describe themselves, signaling their “pervasive sense of inferiority.”⁶¹ Evidence that many white women considered theirs not only the fairer, but also the lesser sex, can be found in their own writings; women blamed their shortcomings on their “femininity,” complained that they lacked the capacity for logic and reason, and demeaned their own thoughts and abilities.⁶² It is true that there were women who stood as notable exceptions to this rule. Strong and confident figures like Abigail Adams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and other early reformers and women’s rights advocates were powerful contrasts to this feminine image. However, despite these examples, many women had already accepted their sex as inferior and, thus, were primed for the nineteenth-century prescription that they also be submissive.

⁵⁹ Moroney, “Widows and Orphans,” 26.

⁶⁰ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 162.

⁶¹ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 118.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 117-119.

The third cardinal virtue, feminine piety, was also rooted in the colonial and post-revolutionary experience. The first and second Great Awakenings inspired religious fervor among women and men alike. However, the second event actually feminized religion by assigning gendered terms to spiritual figures and practices. According to Sara Evans, “Christ appeared as the epitome of feminine virtue: loving, forgiving, suffering, and sacrificing for others.”⁶³ The confluence of Christian thought and gender ideology imbued religious symbols with feminine attributes, and it gave women some measure of religious authority. Welter observes that religion was seen as woman’s “divine right, a gift of God and nature.”⁶⁴ The cult of true womanhood capitalized on this belief and set forth the expectation that a woman “be another, better Eve, working in cooperation with the Redeemer, bringing the world back ‘from its revolt and sin.’”⁶⁵ In turn, this higher moral calling subjected women to higher standards for sexual conduct. Thus, in keeping with the fourth and final virtue, women were expected to be not only pious, but also sexually pure.⁶⁶

While the linking of the spiritual and the feminine gave women greater authority on moral matters, it also served as a barrier to questioning and changing the traditional order. According to Norton, religious tradition stressed “contentment with one’s lot,” and it “pressed upon women a conservative outlook, one that stressed

⁶³ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 73.

⁶⁴ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 152.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

accepting present conditions rather than encouraging attempts at change.”⁶⁷ Not until later in the nineteenth century when female reformers and leaders in the women’s movement used feminine morality as a rationale for expanding female rights and opportunities would the feminization of religion become a liberating force. Until then, the cult of true womanhood served to restrict woman’s sphere of influence, serving as the means by which white women were pushed further into the private domain of the home.

Competing Rhetorics: Arguments from Expediency and Natural Rights

In their quest for greater opportunities and rights, nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century women’s rights advocates found they had inherited a conflicted set of ideologies. The constructs of republican womanhood and republican motherhood were effective starting points for expanding woman’s sphere; while they did not suggest that women were equal to men, they began to stretch domestic femininity in progressive ways and helped shape a path that could move the debate in a more liberating direction. Conversely, the help-meet, the ornamental woman, and the true woman emphasized feminine difference and identified the home as the female domain. And, of course, following the Revolution, discourses defining what it meant to be an American highlighted an individual’s freedom and natural rights. The tension between these different notions generated two distinct discourses, both of which were used by female reformers.

The first discourse is what many scholars, including Aileen Kraditor, call the “argument from expediency.” Resting upon traditional femininity, “expediency

⁶⁷ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 127.

arguments . . . were themselves expedient, tailored to fit the realities of an industrial age.”⁶⁸ This argument form “presumed that women and men were fundamentally different, so that it would be beneficial, that is desirable and prudent, to give women rights because of the effect on society.”⁶⁹ Confronted by conservative notions of a woman’s proper sphere and appropriate responsibilities, reformers folded earlier ideals into their arguments for equal rights. The argument from expediency drew upon true womanhood, the help-meet, and the ornamental woman in order to craft a subversive rhetoric that challenged traditional femininity even as it seemingly embraced it.

The second discourse was based on the concept of natural rights. This argument form rested on the same principles that men had used two generations earlier when they demanded political equality from their English rulers.⁷⁰ Rather than calling attention to the ways that men and women were different, the argument from natural rights focused on the ways that, as independent citizens, they were the same. If all men were created equal and had the inalienable right to consent to the laws by which they were governed, it followed that women should expect the same.⁷¹

Upon close analysis of several nineteenth-century texts, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell found that “most woman’s rights advocates mixed these arguments, often

⁶⁸ Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 72.

⁶⁹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 1:14.

⁷⁰ Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, 44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

in a somewhat self-contradictory way.”⁷² Hence, female reformers “did not choose to argue simply on the basis of women’s human character (that is, likeness to men) or simply on the basis of women’s unique sexual character (that is, difference from men). Women voiced these two kinds of arguments in almost the same breath.”⁷³ Although adopting both argument forms (rather than privileging one over the other) may seem to be a counterproductive approach, in practice it gave women’s rights advocates a well-stocked rhetorical arsenal from which they could draw for various audiences.

The vote ultimately became the symbolic fulfillment of these arguments, an end point that both forms posited as their logical conclusion. According to Nancy Cott,

[female suffrage] harmonized the two strands in foregoing woman’s rights advocacy: it was an equal rights goal that enabled women to make special contributions; it sought to give women the same capacity as men so they could express their differences; it was a just end in itself, but it was also an expedient means to other ends. “Sameness” and “difference” arguments, “equal rights” and “special contributions” arguments, “justice” and “expediency” arguments existed side by side.⁷⁴

This mixing of argument forms allowed women’s rights advocates to address the diverse ideological commitments of various audiences, but it also bequeathed to the next generation a contradictory web of gendered ideologies and discourses. In failing to resolve the ideological dispute that the strategy itself embodied, the movement’s rhetoric in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries set the stage for a post-

⁷² Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her*, 1:14.

⁷³ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of American Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

Nineteenth Amendment showdown. Nancy Cott observes that since it drew upon both natural rights and expediency arguments, the suffrage movement “deeded to its successors a Janus face” and many female “activists embraced the whole image.”⁷⁵ This decision would ultimately become the source of an ideological tension that would remain unresolved for decades to come, but in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it facilitated a slew of reform victories. By employing a complex rhetorical strategy that drew from natural rights and expediency, women gained greater property rights, easier access to divorce, greater educational opportunities, and ultimately, the vote.

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN U.S. HISTORY

By the time women won the right to vote in 1920, the road toward greater electoral opportunities stretched out across four decades. Each era preceding the suffrage victory produced feminine ideals that were leveraged to bring women into increasingly closer contact with the public world of politics, trade, and business affairs. Little by little, women took steps toward more public roles that gave them greater autonomy. The organizations associated with “benevolent femininity” and nineteenth-century reform, the major political parties, and, to a more limited degree, elective office, served as the crucibles from which these small victories sprung forth. Within these arenas women expanded their ability to engage in civic matters. Ultimately, their work in these organizations helped them achieve important rights like the vote and the ability to hold office in every state.

⁷⁵ Cott, *The Grounding of American Feminism*, 20-21.

Expediency arguments facilitated much of the progress that women had made by the late nineteenth century. While anti-suffragists and others used traditional notions of femininity to try and narrow woman's sphere, female reformers and women's rights activists turned their opponents' logic on its head and used those same constructs to justify equal rights and opportunities. For example, in 1787 Benjamin Rush used his influential treatise, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," to transform republican motherhood into an effective rationale for expanding women's access to education. He enumerated several reasons for granting women greater educational opportunities, with the third being woman's unique responsibility for shaping the next generation of citizens.⁷⁶ Rush rested his case upon notions of feminine difference; in doing so, he created the archetype of "an educated woman who could be spared the criticism normally addressed to the Learned Lady because she placed her learning at her family's service."⁷⁷

Benjamin Rush was not alone in his use of traditional feminine constructs to advance progressive goals. In the nineteenth century, the use of expediency arguments became a common strategy for those who supported not only women's educational pursuits, but also their philanthropic, reform, and benevolent activities. These efforts involved a wide range of volunteer activities that increasingly found women operating outside of the home.

Reform, Philanthropy, and Benevolent Femininity

⁷⁶ Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education, July 28, 1787," in *Women in Early America*, ed. Dorothy A Mays (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 449.

⁷⁷ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 228.

The expediency strategy facilitated women's involvement in the reform culture of the 1800s. According to Rebecca Edwards, the colonial, revolutionary, and industrial eras' notions of female piety and virtue collectively created an "ideology of female moral superiority [which] offered a rationale for women's involvement in a host of reform activities."⁷⁸ Eventually these efforts would encompass political work, but before venturing into the world of partisan affairs, women expressed their patriotism by engaging in benevolent activities.⁷⁹ In the process, they built an empire of organizations, associations, and groups that not only provided relief from a variety of social ills, but also served as the precursor to what would later become state and federal agencies devoted to health and human services.

In the wake of the religious fervor that defined the Second Great Awakening, American life in the 1820s and 1830s included a rich tapestry of reform efforts. According to Lori Ginzberg, suffragists, temperance activists, abolitionists, and ultraists "sought not merely social change but spiritual transformation, the moral regeneration of the world." She further attributes the "evangelical impulse" with providing "the framework in which radical social change was articulated in the antebellum period."⁸⁰ Existing notions of woman's proper place and roles fit well within this framework. Thought to be innately connected to all things spiritual, moral, and virtuous, women were viewed as naturally suited for reform work. In keeping

⁷⁸ Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

⁷⁹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 110-111.

⁸⁰ Lori D. Ginzberg, "'Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash': Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s," *The Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986): 601.

with this assumption, their participation in the various movements of the day was positioned as a logical extension of the private sphere. In fact, Bloch notes that many of the era's "respectable female roles—wife, charity worker, teacher, sentimental writer—were in large part culturally defined as extensions of motherhood, all similarly regarded as nurturant, empathetic, and morally directive."⁸¹ The missions of female reform organizations meshed well with these roles and encompassed a wide array of issues and causes.⁸² The founding of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the National Association of Colored Women, the American Woman Suffrage Association, the Female Benevolent Society, the Female Moral Reform Society, the National Woman Suffrage Association, and a host of other organizations meant the landscape of women's civic opportunities had never been quite as vast. By the 1890s, when the General Federation of Women's Clubs was founded as an umbrella organization linking many of these groups together, its membership rolls numbered more than 100,000.⁸³

The work undertaken by benevolent and reform groups was consistent with traditional notions of femininity. Many of the issues they sought to address were proper subjects of concern for pious and moral women, and movements like temperance had a direct tie to the home, meaning women's participation was easily justified. The voluntary approach these organizations adopted also facilitated acceptance; since they were not considered professional pursuits, reform and charity

⁸¹ Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals," 100.

⁸² Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 95.

⁸³ Suzanne Lebsock, "Women and American Politics, 1880-1920," in *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 42.

existed in the nexus between the masculine public and the feminine private. This unique position between two worlds required a new ideological construct that would bring reform and philanthropy in line with the private sphere. That need was fulfilled by the concept of benevolent femininity, which Lori Ginzberg describes as “a morality defined by ‘female traits’ and . . . women’s mandate to promote it.”⁸⁴ Aided by this form of femininity, women joined associations, clubs, and movements of all kinds and moved further out of the home and into the public spaces. In the process, they enlarged the scope of what was considered relevant to domestic life, claiming a wide range of public concerns in their local communities as part of their domain and justifying such cooptation on the basis of their morality.

Participation in the era’s plethora of associations and groups not only expanded the private sphere, it also provided women with unprecedented opportunities to learn valuable organizational skills. Through their memberships they learned how to organize and hold meetings, conduct fundraising campaigns, petition state and local governments, and lobby federal agencies and officials. Armed with these skills and a desire to advance their specific cause, many women began entering the political parties in greater numbers, an avenue that offered new opportunities to achieve their civic goals.

Women’s Activism Leads to Partisanship

While the female reform groups and benevolent associations of the early 1800s were impressive from an organizational standpoint, their success in achieving many of their broader goals was limited. Paula Baker notes that their work “hardly

⁸⁴ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 17.

made a dent in the social dislocations of industrial society.”⁸⁵ In part, this was because the voluntarist approach was aimed at the local level, and many of the problems women sought to address were statewide or national in scope. Realizing that formal government resources were needed, women crossed over into party politics.

From the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, a slow shift served to bring the world of reform in closer contact with the world of partisan affairs. This transition had two important consequences. The first was the feminization, or what Baker has called the “domestication,” of politics. Through this process, “women passed on to the state the work of social policy that they found increasingly unmanageable.”⁸⁶ Female reformers had claimed poverty, maternal and infant care, and education as just some of the areas within their sphere of influence. As their work in these areas expanded, they realized that state and national institutions were needed to pursue their domestic agenda. Prompted by this realization, they began the slow process of transitioning what had once been considered domestic and private concerns to federal and state entities. By the early twentieth century, this effort would ultimately create what Robyn Muncy has called a “female dominion” within the federal bureaucracy.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 641.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 641.

⁸⁷ For more information about the dominion of reform that women ultimately built within federal agencies, particularly the Children’s Bureau and the Women’s Bureau, see Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38.

The second consequence of enhanced contact between the reform and political worlds was that greater numbers of women became actively involved in partisan activities. The anti-slavery movement, for example, involved women in petition campaigns. Gerda Lerner argues that the movement against slavery “aroused” its supporters’ “interest in political action.” Next, Lerner maintains, “political candidates” were questioned “on their views regarding slavery, an innovation which soon became a standard method for exerting pressure on candidates and officeholders.”⁸⁸ This is not to suggest that all women were comfortable venturing out into the domain of the masculine, partisan world. However, the confluence of partisan and reform politics that occurred throughout the nineteenth century made the transition a necessary one. Ginzberg notes that women “lived with the contradictions of exerting their influence in decidedly political ways toward clearly political ends.”⁸⁹

These activities were often cast in terms that disguised their political nature. Suzanne Lebsock observes that during this period “most men would not have used the word ‘politics’ to describe what women were doing. Instead they called it ‘philanthropy’ or ‘service’ or, in a few cases, ‘disorderly conduct.’ Politics was by definition something men did.”⁹⁰ Despite the use of labels designed to discourage this activity or couch it in less threatening terms, women’s endeavors were increasingly political. In pursuit of their reform agendas, they hit the campaign trail in the mid-

⁸⁸ Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina* (Oxford University Press: Boston, 1998), 205-206.

⁸⁹ Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 69.

⁹⁰ Lebsock, “Women and American Politics,” 35.

nineteenth century and stumped for candidates, joined partisan auxiliary groups, and wrote campaign tracts.

In the 1850s and 1860s, female partisan activities were the most sophisticated and visible within the growing numbers of independent third parties, including the Farmer's Alliance, the Greenbacks, the Populists, and the Socialists. For example, Lucy Stone hit the campaign trail in bloomers and endorsed the Liberty ticket in 1852 and the Free Soil ticket in 1856.⁹¹ In the 1880s and 1890s, the Populists and the Progressives offered women further electoral opportunities. According to Robert J. Dinkin, female members could be more active in these organizations because "the lines between party and social movement had not yet been fully drawn" and these "fledgling political groups seemed most in need of membership support."⁹² Women were often involved in the reform work that led to these organizations, which enabled them to be present at the inception of several third-party movements. Having been there from the beginning, they had the opportunity to contribute in a more substantive way and carve out a greater role than previously possible.

A handful of women were active in the major parties as well. In 1856, Clarina Nichols embarked upon what is believed to be the first partisan speaking tour conducted by a woman; she delivered more than fifty speeches on behalf of the Republicans.⁹³ Anna Dickinson was a highly valued Republican stump speaker who actively campaigned in 1863 and 1864. Her powerful speeches were credited with

⁹¹ Young, "Women's Place in American Politics," 320.

⁹² Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 4.

⁹³ Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 29.

helping the Republicans carry New York and Connecticut, and in recognition of this achievement, she was asked to address Congress, President Abraham Lincoln, and his Cabinet.⁹⁴ In 1868, Susan B. Anthony served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.⁹⁵ And Elizabeth Cady Stanton actively supported Republican Ulysses Grant in 1872, Democrat Samuel Tilden in 1876, the Prohibitionists in 1888, and Democrat William Jennings Bryan in 1896.⁹⁶

As might be expected, all of this partisan activity was cast in familiar gendered terms. The process of establishing the ideological conditions that would define women's political participation began in earnest during the election of 1840, which served as an important milestone in terms of female partisanship. For the first time, large numbers of women began to attend lectures and participate in events sponsored by the Whig Party.⁹⁷ Initially, the Democrats condemned these efforts as an assault on female purity, but eventually even they came around when it became clear that female support could provide an electoral advantage.⁹⁸ Even though women were not yet able to vote, their presence was a powerful campaign tool. Female participation allowed a party to claim the mantles of piety and purity, and the endorsement of virtuous women enabled it to cast itself as the protector of the home. While female partisans existed on the outskirts of the major party structures, Melanie

⁹⁴ Young, "Women's Place in American Politics," 320.

⁹⁵ Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 62.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁹⁷ For more information about women's involvement in the watershed campaign of 1840, see Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 17; and Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 31.

⁹⁸ Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 18.

Gustafson notes that even this limited participation “added shine to a party” by allowing the organization to count “principled women” among their ranks. The “disinterested political woman . . . gave her party a positive image to assert for its benefit. Parties looked more moral with moral women supporting them.”⁹⁹

The new Republican Party seized upon this strategy in the post-Civil War period. The Republicans embraced female members and drew upon their femininity to attract voters. According to Rebecca Edwards, the

Republicans stylized themselves “the party of the home”; they celebrated women’s moral influence and praised men who recognized the Christian example set by mothers and wives. . . . During Reconstruction and beyond, party leaders defended their innovative policies in gendered terms that became familiar to every American.¹⁰⁰

The wisdom of this strategy became evident in 1896, when Republicans took control of the White House and both houses of Congress.

The parties drew on female purity to win elections, and women used their newfound partisan clout to advance their own position. Suffragists, in particular, found that embracing the parties’ strategy of exploiting feminine morality was politically expedient. According to J. Stanley Lemons, they “continually maintained that woman suffrage would help the reformation process and purify politics.”¹⁰¹

Women embraced the argument that their presence would help cleanse politics in order to carve out a greater public role for themselves. During the election of 1888,

⁹⁹ Melanie Gustafson, “Florence Collins Porter and the Concept of the Principled Partisan Woman,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 18 (1997): 66.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 6.

¹⁰¹ J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 85.

the major parties began to recruit women in greater numbers and involve them in a wider array of electoral activities.¹⁰² In 1912, for the first time in history, formally-recognized women's groups worked on behalf of both major parties.¹⁰³ By 1916, it was accepted and expected that women would stake out a partisan political identity; a biographical index published in 1914 that identified women's party affiliations offers proof of this trend.¹⁰⁴ At the 1916 presidential nominating conventions held by both major parties, women made up about one percent of the delegates, and in 1924, that figure rose to more than ten percent.¹⁰⁵ Women were slowly infiltrating the parties.

However, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, female partisans tended to remain on the edges of the party organizations. While there were some exceptions, most women during this period saw party politics as a means to an end. They lingered at the edges, pursuing partisanship only insofar as it could be useful, always careful not to incite men to hurl the invective "politician" in their direction. Muncy notes that, as a result, they derived most of their political experience primarily

¹⁰² Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 93.

¹⁰³ See Kristie Miller, "'Eager and Anxious to Work': Daisy Harriman and the Presidential Election of 1912," in *We Have Come to Stay*, ed. Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israels Perry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 65; Jo Freeman, *We Will Be Heard: Woman's Struggles for Political Power in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 53-59. Freeman notes that the Republican Party formally organized and recognized female supporters as early as 1888, when the party put Judith Ellen Foster in charge of the Woman's National Republican Association. The election of 1912 marked the first time the Democratic National Committee engaged in similar efforts. Prior to 1912, female clubs existed on the local level, but they were not part of the national party apparatus.

¹⁰⁴ Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ M. Kent Jennings, "Women in Party Politics," in *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 223.

from “participation in the political processes that occurred outside of elections – massive publicity campaigns, rallies, lobbying.”¹⁰⁶

Some women proved the exception to the rule and sought out leadership opportunities within the parties. Changes to party rules and arrangements in the late nineteenth century hastened their efforts, but women were still limited by male partisans who, threatened by their advancement, sought to keep women at the volunteer or auxiliary level. These lower-rung positions served women well when their focus was benevolence and reform, but they placed the few who wanted to run for office at a serious disadvantage. Would-be candidates were thus confronted with several challenges, including unrelenting gender ideologies that limited the public perception of their abilities, political parties that wanted their help but sought to limit their opportunities, and women who either disavowed the partisan approach altogether or disapproved of office holding in particular.

Women in Elective Office

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was nearly impossible for a woman to be elected to public office. Gender ideologies, legal statutes, and the material facts of their existence all served as seemingly insurmountable barriers to elective office. However, a handful of women persevered, and against all odds, managed to gain access to local and state offices. In the process, they became important exceptions to the rule. Collectively, they carved a path that allowed later generations to follow in their footsteps in greater numbers and with less resistance.

¹⁰⁶ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 127.

Due to a dearth of public records on the subject, it is difficult to piece together a comprehensive history of public office holding among women. While we know that some propertied and widowed white women were able to cast ballots in colonial America, scholars have been unable to find any evidence that a colonial woman held public office.¹⁰⁷ Early electoral success for women came later, usually in places where they were granted partial suffrage, which gave them the ability to vote in school elections.

The issue of education served as the impetus for broadening woman's involvement in the political arena. It complemented the ideological construct of the republican mother, which gave women the responsibility for the training of the next generation of citizens. According to Dinkin, support for "school suffrage," which gave women the right to vote in elections for educational positions, was widespread and came early "since the education of children was increasingly seen as a woman's responsibility."¹⁰⁸ By 1838, Kansas had given widows with school-aged children the right to vote in school elections. In the 1870s, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Massachusetts followed suit.¹⁰⁹

Since education was imbued with great political significance in the 1800s, the subject also served as woman's initial entree into electoral office. Women in Illinois were granted the right to hold school offices in 1873.¹¹⁰ By the 1880s and 1890s,

¹⁰⁷ R. Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet Clark, *Women, Elections, and Representation*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 2.

¹⁰⁸ Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 102.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party*, 101.

women across the country began to seek and win election to the position of school superintendent. In some places, this important development was caused or hastened by partial suffrage. However, there were many states where women actually acquired school-related offices before being awarded partial suffrage; in some states, this achievement preceded partial suffrage by more than a decade. Edwards notes that, by 1896,

women held at least a few school offices in almost every state outside the South, regardless of whether they had school suffrage or not. In Wyoming and Montana, most county school superintendents were women. In a score of other states women held between 5 and 50 percent of such jobs.¹¹¹

The governance of schools became a site where the gendered roles of caretaker and mother were transformed into a codified right of citizenship.

A major milestone with respect to local office occurred in 1887, when Kansas expanded partial female suffrage to include not solely school positions, but all local elective offices. The same law allowed women to vote and run for office at the municipal level, facilitating the election of several female mayors and city council members across the state. That year, Susan Madera Salter became the first female mayor in Argonia, Kansas; Syracuse in Hamilton County also voted in an all-female town council. Dinkin notes that the female town council was so successful it ultimately won over even its harshest critics, one of whom was forced to admit that under their leadership, “Syracuse had become ‘renowned as a city of good government, good morals, [and] fine streets.’”¹¹² The Kansas tradition continued in 1888, when both a female mayor and an all-female town council were elected in

¹¹¹ Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 133-135.

¹¹² Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 103-105.

Oskaloosa. According to Dinkin, that group of six women “proceeded to clean up the town, enforce the blue laws against alcohol abuse, widen some of the main streets, and restore funds to the treasury.”¹¹³

However, while these women were effective executives and legislators and important role models for the women of their state, their careers were short-lived. None of the women in Kansas sought a second term, and their tenure was a reminder that, for women, politics and government remained a limited form of service, not a career to be pursued or a ladder to be climbed. According to Robyn Muncy, the message of their single term in office echoed the central theme of the cult of true womanhood: “In all she did, woman was to sacrifice individual ambition to serve.”¹¹⁴ For women, political service was a sacrifice, and it should not be pursued one minute longer than required. To do so would be a violation of cultural dictates that they eschew personal ambition.

It is difficult to discern how often women answered the call to sacrifice and serve at the local level in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. R. Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet Clark note that the sheer number of local government offices across the nation, coupled with the absence of a centralized set of historic records regarding local office holding, make it nearly impossible to characterize the state of women’s political participation at the local level.¹¹⁵ What we can conclude is that these limited forays into public life gave women both important experience and vital

¹¹³ Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 3.

¹¹⁵ Darcy, Welch, and Clark, *Women, Elections, and Representation*, 2.

role models for public participation. Women were also seemingly inspired enough by this success to begin pursuing offices that lay one rung further up on the electoral ladder by campaigning for seats in their state legislatures.

In 1893, Colorado became a woman's suffrage state, and soon after, its citizens began electing women to the state legislature. In 1894, Clara Cresingham, Frances S. Klock, and Carrie C. Holly became the first female state legislators in the United States. Idaho and Utah soon followed suit; in 1896, both states elected three women to their legislative bodies. In Utah, Martha Hughes Cannon secured a seat in the legislature's upper chamber.¹¹⁶

Several factors contributed to these early "firsts" in local offices and state legislatures. For starters, women benefited from a perception that local, municipal, or village government was essentially an extension of the private sphere, not part of the more public, and therefore masculine, realm of affairs. Hence, the ideological view that women were more naturally suited to the private, domestic sphere actually became a powerful rationale for partial suffrage. According to Darcy, Welch, and Clark, when "exercising the right at the local level, a woman was exercising a private right, not a public one."¹¹⁷ The same rationale supported women's involvement in local politics and election to offices that addressed local concerns.

If the notion of the community as an extension of the private sphere made local politics suitable for women, the issues traditionally handled by local government reinforced that perception. Darcy, Welch, and Clark observe that education,

¹¹⁶ Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 107.

¹¹⁷ Darcy, Welch, and Clark, *Women, Elections, and Representation*, 11.

management of communal assets, and health and human services “could easily be fit within the traditional role and concerns of women.”¹¹⁸ Reformers had spent decades making the case for women’s greater involvement in these issues and causes, and they now belonged to the expanded sphere of influence that women had carved out for themselves. Election to the offices that actually handled those issues was a logical extension of earlier arguments.

The very nature of local politics and government was also advantageous to women seeking office. According to Darcy, Welch, and Clark, the style of leadership “was voluntary, and decisions were typically reached through consensus rather than conflict.” Such a political environment set up a “style of village politics” that served as “a simple extension of personal relationships,” which women could practice “without being ‘politicians.’”¹¹⁹ The voluntary form of politics practiced on the local level was a natural extension of the voluntarist political culture women had created in the reform organizations of the nineteenth century. Again, historical precedent smoothed the path for female participation.

The private dimension of local government, the list of issues that fell under local jurisdiction, and the voluntary style associated with local governance made it much easier for women to enter public life and elective office at the local level. Those same factors assisted women in their quest for offices in the state legislatures. State offices required representation of local interests within a statewide body. It is easy to

¹¹⁸ Darcy, Welch, and Clark, *Women, Elections, and Representation*, 11.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

envision how success on the local level opened the door to opportunities at the state level.

In short, women turned what should have been barriers into opportunities, fashioning domestic femininity and maternal duty into a powerful rationale for participation at the local and state levels. However, the same factors that made it possible for women to transition into local and state elective offices also made it difficult to enter office at the federal level. There were key differences between these offices in terms of the subject matter addressed, the leadership style required, and the official duties discharged. Because of these differences, the gains that women made in local offices and state legislatures did not easily translate into congressional or gubernatorial wins. Female advancement seemed, instead, to stall at lower offices until the 1920s, when women would once again use the roles of wife, mother, and widow to secure the federal and statewide opportunities that had long eluded them.

CIRCUMSTANCES CONVEYING STATUS: DEPUTY HUSBANDS AND WIDOWS

As we have seen in this chapter, colonial and nineteenth-century prescriptions for feminine behavior articulated ideals that women should strive to live up to, but personal circumstances often provided an opportunity to subvert them. From its earliest days, American society acknowledged that certain conditions made it unrealistic to conform to prescribed roles. In fact, specific life events could permit a woman to behave in ways that prevailing ideology would have otherwise deemed “unfeminine.” Among those personal circumstances warranting flexibility was the incapacity or death of a husband.

From the colonial period through the 1920s, American society acknowledged these anomalous situations by sanctioning formal roles to accompany them: the deputy husband and the widow. Each of these roles conferred a special status that gave a handful of women freedom from prevailing gender norms, a limited voice in public life, and, ultimately, greater political and professional opportunities.

Earliest Surrogates: The Role of Deputy Husband

As a rule, daily life for white, middle-class and elite women in colonial America was dominated by domestic concerns.¹²⁰ A wife supervised the family's day-to-day activities, watched over her children, and directed the household's servants.¹²¹ Yet, Norton explains that, when circumstances warranted, a wife could also serve as "her husband's agent in his absence."¹²² Such circumstances included a husband's illness or prolonged absence from the home. While men in colonial and early America were expected to represent their family in all public matters, it was generally understood that "should fate or circumstance prevent the husband from fulfilling his role, the wife could appropriately stand in his place."¹²³ This fail-safe measure addressed any breakdown in typical family governance, ensuring that the family would be adequately represented and cared for in the patriarch's absence.

¹²⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 36.

¹²¹ Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 140.

¹²² Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 140; Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 147.

¹²³ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 36.

The name for the role that a wife assumed under such circumstances was “deputy husband.”¹²⁴ It was a position centered primarily around traditionally masculine tasks and responsibilities related to the family’s economic well-being and the management of its external affairs.¹²⁵ A wife acting in this capacity was responsible for taking her husband’s place and completing daily activities related to his work, like planting on the family farm, purchasing goods for a family business using her husband’s credit, or managing hands who worked the family’s fields.¹²⁶ Deputy husbands could also take on more substantive public responsibilities, such as “handling economic affairs, appearing as attorneys in court, and in general representing the household in civil and financial matters.”¹²⁷ Some wives even negotiated with local Native American tribes.¹²⁸ While their *femme covert* status would have normally precluded wives from engaging in such activities, enacting the deputy husband persona enabled married women to engage in traditionally masculine tasks without claiming a separate, public female identity.¹²⁹ As a deputy husband, a wife was at once acting in public and ensconced in the private. In this way, married women were provided with a special role that allowed them to slip out from underneath the cloak of coverture and participate in public life in limited ways.

¹²⁴ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 36. This term has been used by historians who study the colonial and early American periods, but it was also used by those living during the time period as well.

¹²⁵ Terri L. Snyder, *Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early Virginia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 119; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9.

¹²⁶ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9, 238; Hartog, *Man and Wife in America*, 147.

¹²⁷ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 119.

¹²⁸ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 238.

¹²⁹ Hartog, *Man and Wife in America*, 115.

Historians have noted that when performing these tasks a wife acted as “a surrogate” for her husband in the public sphere.¹³⁰ As the earliest examples of women enacting the surrogate role, these colonial wives made an important contribution to its development by casting its fulfillment in terms of domestic and familial obligation. The deputy husband was not only a persona available to a wife, it was also a role that society and her gendered identity as a spouse told her she had a duty to enact.¹³¹ According to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, this duty was often cast as a task pursued in devotion to one’s family since the associated responsibilities “sustained and supported the family economy and demonstrated [a woman’s] loyalty to her husband.”¹³² This gendered identity paid homage to traditional domestic femininity while imbuing it with new meaning. It gave certain women greater freedom to engage in the masculine world of public affairs while simultaneously aligning this progressive activity with more conservative prescriptions for feminine behavior that valued domesticity. According to Ulrich, by stretching instead of shedding traditional characteristics, the deputy husband role allowed wives to cross “gender boundaries without challenging the patriarchal order of society.” In doing so they were “act[ing] within rather than against traditional definitions of female responsibility.”¹³³ Enacting this role made deputy husbands an important and instructive example of how women could benefit from work coded as masculine, like economic activity, while retaining a

¹³⁰ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 119; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9.

¹³¹ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 38.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 238.

traditionally feminine identity through declarations of spousal loyalty. It was a rhetorical justification that would set an important precedent and prove useful as women gained the right to vote and attempted to secure public office.

America's Earliest Widows

Among white, middle-class and elite women, the only group that more freely traversed the amorphous line between public and private were widows. From the earliest days of the country's settlement and founding, the death of a husband offered women greater freedoms. In her study of early America, Mary Beth Norton found that legal writings of the time made special note of the freedom that widows could expect to achieve upon the death of their spouse. Unruled by their parents or their husband, widows could expect to "be truly free 'at their own law.'" ¹³⁴ However, despite this greater freedom, the widow's position was circumscribed by limitations. On the one hand, a widow was legally "*femme sole* and assumed many responsibilities typically exercised by free white men." In this capacity, a widow "had authority over her children, servants, and slaves and ... could make contracts, sue and be sued, collect or engender indebtedness, and distribute her property through deeds or a will." ¹³⁵ On the other hand, the widow "distinctly lacked male privileges: she could not vote or serve on juries, hold public office, or serve in militias." ¹³⁶ While the space that widows carved out differed slightly across regions, there was remarkable consistency in how the role was conceived. Norton notes that many factors, including "transatlantic print

¹³⁴ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 140.

¹³⁵ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 119.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

culture, laws, and economic systems created an understanding of widowhood that was consistent over time and across colonies.”¹³⁷ From the very earliest days of American society, it was generally understood that the widow occupied a unique position and her role encompassed both private and public dimensions.

As many women would find out, widowhood involved more than just the fact of having been predeceased by one’s husband and taking up certain family-maintenance responsibilities. It was a social role meant to be enacted and performed in public. However, for the colonial and founding periods, widows had very little advice or guidance to draw from in their enactment. Few writers in the colonial period even attempted to define what such female freedom actually entailed.¹³⁸ Hence, according to Terri Snyder, early American widows “occupied an ambiguous and liminal position.”¹³⁹ In 1861, this began to change as the widow persona took on certain moral dimensions. That year, Queen Victoria became one of the most notable widows of the era when her husband, Prince Albert, died. According to Snyder, Queen Victoria served as an important example for both American and English widows in that she “further sanctioned the moral authority of widowhood” in both countries and helped popularize the widow’s mourning garb, known as the “widow’s weeds.”¹⁴⁰ Queen Victoria’s enactment of her new role associated widowhood with “a measure of family-centered respectability and an independence of action, otherwise

¹³⁷ Vivian Bruce Conger, *The Widow’s Might: Widowhood and Gender in Early British America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 11.

¹³⁸ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 140.

¹³⁹ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 119.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

unattainable to nineteenth-century women.”¹⁴¹ In part because of this example, donning the widow’s weeds became a more widely practiced tradition in mid-nineteenth century America.¹⁴² By the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, widows could be expected to dress in their mourning garb for a period as long as two years. New widows wore black and often appeared with a veil over their face. Over the course of their public mourning, the color of their clothing would transform into shades of violet.¹⁴³

The tradition of a prolonged public enactment of widowhood continued well into the 1920s and even deepened in some ways. Thomas McGinn reports that etiquette books of the time began prescribing a mourning period of no less than one year and encouraged a widow to continue using her husband’s name, so that “the long cloak of her husband’s place, his respectability and social position, was cast over the widow from the date of her husband’s passing until her own life ended or her status was changed by a new marriage.”¹⁴⁴ Lisa Wilson notes that widows “announced their bereavement wherever they went” and all of the ceremonial and performative traditions associated with their new status provided them with “a heightened

¹⁴¹ Cornel J. Reinhart, Margaret Tacardon, and Philip Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood: The Virgin Rebirth in the Social Construction of Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century Feminine Reality,” *Journal of Family History* 23 (January 1998): 28.

¹⁴² Lisa Wilson, *Life After Death: Widows in Pennsylvania, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 11-12.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas A.J. McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy: Ancient and Modern* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2008), 150; Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 32.

awareness of their social condition.”¹⁴⁵ In this way, widows began to establish traditions that mapped the boundaries of what constituted an appropriate performance of their role.

By donning their mourning garb, retaining their husband’s name, and announcing their widowhood status, widows were not only honoring their husbands’ memories, they were also claiming for themselves a persona that offered greater freedom to act in public and conferred a certain level of moral authority and respect. The widow’s black and deep violet clothing and veil communicated not only that a woman was grieving and had suffered loss, but also that she was of special status and not subject to the prevailing prescriptions or expectations that defined feminine behavior. A woman in mourning garb was generally understood to be different, having already lived a feminine life. She had married, had a husband, perhaps had children, and then through no fault of her own, had been forced into a situation that required greater autonomy and public action. In short, the widow was seen as having earned a certain amount of freedom to circumvent gendered traditions and expectations. Her veil, black clothing, name, and pronouncements communicated all of this and became an important part of the public performance of the persona. Cornel Reinhart, Margaret Tacardon, and Philip Hardy note that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “the widow’s weeds provided the same symbolic sanctity as the nun’s habit, the nurses’ cap, and the teacher’s contract.”¹⁴⁶ Such symbolism could be transformed into greater public opportunities for those widows positioned

¹⁴⁵ Wilson, *Life After Death*, 11-12.

¹⁴⁶ Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 31.

economically to pursue them.¹⁴⁷ It is useful to contrast this situation with that of the deputy husband who lacked garb or other outside signifiers to indicate her special circumstance. The widow's weeds avoided any such ambiguity.

Culturally, the widow's role was so respected that many women eagerly invoked it without technically fitting the description of having been predeceased by their husband.¹⁴⁸ For example, Norton has discussed the colonial phenomenon of "fictive widows," which she defines as "married women whose husbands, for one reason or another, were unwilling or unable to govern them."¹⁴⁹ Snyder notes that, in New England, fictive widows primarily included mostly high-ranking wives, including Ann Hibbens and Anne Hutchison.¹⁵⁰ However, in other places, like Virginia, poor white and free black women could enjoy this status as well.¹⁵¹ From the 1850s well into the 1920s, there are also accounts of women who were treated as "constructive widows" by legal authorities in cases of abandonment or self-divorce.¹⁵² Both fictive and constructive widows could have easily been considered deputy husbands. The choice to label them widows speaks to the society's difficulty in addressing circumstances that fell outside of the traditional male-headed household. The fact that so many women seemingly embraced the persona without

¹⁴⁷ Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, "The Sexual Politics of Widowhood," 31.

¹⁴⁸ McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy*, 150.

¹⁴⁹ Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 142.

¹⁵⁰ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 133.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵² McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy*, 135.

protest, despite having spouses who were still alive, speaks to the heightened authority, greater freedom, and expanded opportunities women enjoyed when they invoked it.

However, while widowhood offered certain advantages, it was not without its pitfalls. Snyder notes that “actual and fictive widows, because of the ambiguous nature of their status, were compelled to negotiate their dominion carefully or risk violent retaliation.”¹⁵³ Engaging in such negotiation, “widows, fictive widows, and deputy husbands often found it expedient as well as safe to treat authorities, neighbors, and dependents as cautiously as possible.”¹⁵⁴ Their tenuous grasp on greater freedom and authority was rooted in prevailing gender ideology. Therefore, as a means of negotiating their dominion, all types of widows often appealed to conservative notions of femininity rooted in family and domesticity when enacting the public, progressive aspects of their role.

Re-Envisioning Gendered Boundaries and Identities

The special status conferred upon wives whose husbands were unable to fulfill their obligations due to illness, absence, or death was widely acknowledged but poorly defined. In terms of gender ideology, deputy husbands and widows, both fictive and authentic, entered a liberating but murky space. While able to engage in public activities more freely than their contemporaries, their ability to circumvent prevailing prescriptions and expectations for feminine behavior was not limitless. According to Vivian Bruce Conger, deputy husbands operated in “a carefully

¹⁵³ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 138.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

delimited realm, and wives who overstepped their boundaries were charged with being ‘masculine women’ or ‘man-women,’” for allegedly “acting more a husband than a wife,” and “unmanning their mates.”¹⁵⁵ Even the widow persona did not entirely shelter wives from gendered critique. Fictive widows were strongly admonished when their activities crept past invisible boundaries and upset the gendered order of their communities.¹⁵⁶ The situation was just as tenuous for authentic widows whose spouses were actually deceased. According to Conger, they often fell outside of “clearly defined gender roles within the household” while still managing to fall “within several contested sites of socially constructed gender roles.”¹⁵⁷ As a result, they operated with greater freedom and wielded considerably more power than their married counterparts, but “cultural, legal, communal, and economic ideals ensured” that the power they wielded was not equal to that of men.¹⁵⁸ Hence, their performance of the role was very context dependent. Circumstances and audiences determined whether their behavior was appropriate or not. Publicly performing their role in this ill-defined space often put them at the center of conflicts within their communities.¹⁵⁹

To cope with this precarious situation and avoid running afoul of the ambiguous gendered limitations imposed upon them, widows carefully shaped their

¹⁵⁵ Vivian Bruce Conger, *The Widow's Might: Widowhood and Gender in Early British America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 84.

¹⁵⁶ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 133.

¹⁵⁷ Conger, *The Widow's Might*, 2.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 119.

personas by rhetorically negotiating and adopting certain gendered norms.¹⁶⁰ Conger notes that “prescriptive literature advised widows to select—and widows indeed selected—aspects of masculine and feminine, paternal and maternal roles.”¹⁶¹ Their complex performances traversed “gendered boundaries” and allowed them “to take advantage of the ambiguity inherent in those roles.”¹⁶² In this way, widows, in particular, helped shape and transform prevailing gender ideology.¹⁶³

Ultimately, the greatest freedom granted to women whose husbands were unable or unwilling to fulfill their public obligations was the freedom to craft and negotiate their own public persona. Conger notes that due to “the confused or ambiguous discourse of the advice literature,” these women were able to “pick and choose, to a certain extent, how they wanted to be viewed and how they wanted to live their lives.”¹⁶⁴ By constructing their own identity, these women provided the means by which other widows could rhetorically seize upon the opportunities and overcome the challenges associated with the widow role.¹⁶⁵ At times, the identities they constructed were quite progressive, demonstrating greater independence and engaging in a wider array of public activities. At other times, widows hewed much more closely to conservative notions of femininity as a way of justifying their

¹⁶⁰ Conger, *The Widow's Might*, 80. About efforts at negotiation, see also Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 122.

¹⁶¹ Conger, *The Widow's Might*, 80.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

behavior.¹⁶⁶ Wilson observes that by the mid-nineteenth century, widows were engaging in a complex “and sometimes seemingly contradictory layering of gender roles and family needs.”¹⁶⁷ Yet, they consistently exhibited a tendency to define their role in domestic and familial terms.¹⁶⁸ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, widows continued to enjoy greater freedom to engage in public activities while still maintaining a persona that drew upon domesticity, spousal duty, and maternal authority.¹⁶⁹ In this way, widows’ public performance reflected that of their female counterparts who pursued public activities like benevolent and philanthropic work or various reform causes and justified their activities through expediency arguments that emphasized the domestic and maternal, relying upon ideals like republican motherhood and the cult of domesticity.

It is important to note that class and race certainly had an impact on a woman’s ability to capitalize on these special roles. There is little evidence to suggest that the deputy husband role extended across race and class lines. It appears to have been accessible only to white women of means whose husbands had financial and business concerns that required oversight and management in their absence. In contrast, there is some evidence that poor white women and free black women could join their well-off white sisters in assuming the fictive widow persona.¹⁷⁰ Yet, only

¹⁶⁶ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 127.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson, *Life After Death*, 5.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 31.

¹⁷⁰ Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 119.

white middle-class and elite women were truly fully able to explore the range of activities available to widows. Given the challenges such behavior could invite, any woman exploring the freedom that their status conferred would need financial means and resources to combat any challenges to their newfound authority.¹⁷¹ In fact, McGinn notes that from 1850 through 1920, “more than any other factor, a woman’s economic status has defined her experience of widowhood.”¹⁷² In this way, white women of higher economic status were better equipped to use the roles of deputy husband and widow to expand the sphere of opportunities and activities available to women.

Widowhood and Surrogacy Advance Female Public Activity

Widows and deputy husbands capitalized on the ambiguity of their new roles and responsibilities. As noted above, deputy husbands often engaged in tasks that were coded masculine in order to keep their businesses, farms, and families running. Widows engaged in this type of work to an even greater extent, and their activities not only included the world of business and commerce but also occasionally brought them into contact with politics and civic governance.

Widows often inherited not only some or all of their spouses’ material possessions, but their professions as well. According to Norton, a widow’s ambiguous status in terms of gender roles left unresolved the question over “whether she should be treated more like other adult women (who happened to be married), or more like

¹⁷¹ For colonial America, see Snyder, *Brabbling Women*, 130-131. For the period spanning 1850 through 1920, see Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 29.

¹⁷² McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy*, 160.

property holders (who happened to be men).”¹⁷³ Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many widows capitalized upon this ambiguity and used it to their advantage. Some took over and headed up their husbands’ shops and farms rather than live off of their inheritance.¹⁷⁴ Many managed to eclipse their husband’s professional success, improving their standard of living and dying with greater economic and financial resources than those that had been bequeathed to them.¹⁷⁵ Other widows even managed to successfully pursue new professions outside of their husband’s chosen field.¹⁷⁶ Conger notes their work included a wide range of economic activities. Widows paid taxes, “opened shops, they borrowed and loaned money, and they rented, bought, sold, and bequeathed goods or property. In the process, they created new identities as influential, even powerful, businesswomen, and shaped the world of money and commerce in ambiguously gendered ways.”¹⁷⁷ According to McGinn, by the early 1900s, “[a] widow, no less than her deceased husband, might be described as a ‘man of business.’”¹⁷⁸

On occasion, widows might find a reason or an opportunity to engage in politics and civic governance as well. In colonial and early America, such opportunities were much more limited than the widows’ opportunities in business and

¹⁷³ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 141-142.

¹⁷⁴ Wilson, *Life After Death*, 101.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Conger, *The Widow’s Might*, 127, 141.

¹⁷⁸ McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy*, 142.

commerce. A widow did not automatically assume many of her husband's political responsibilities upon his death. While now the head of a household, she was still prohibited from voting, engaging in military and jury service, or holding elective or appointive office.¹⁷⁹ However, according to Conger, there is evidence that even before the country's founding, widows occasionally entered "the world of 'small politics,' to present petitions to magistrates, to dispense charity, to create female support networks, to adjudicate community disputes, and to be active in the civil polity."¹⁸⁰ And there is some evidence that widows in New England were present and spoke at town meetings when matters related to their property were being considered.¹⁸¹ While their opportunities to enter the world of public affairs were sharply limited, colonial widows set an important precedent by adding female voices to debates over community matters in formal and informal ways.¹⁸² Even these limited civic interactions expanded female opportunity and helped blur the boundary between the feminine private and masculine public spheres.¹⁸³

Taking up a deceased husband's work and role in the community was not only a pragmatic activity, but in many cases a symbolic fulfillment of marriage vows that transcended death. According to Conger, in colonial and early America, prescriptive literature universally "emphasized the importance of widows behaving as their

¹⁷⁹ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 141.

¹⁸⁰ Conger, *The Widow's Might*, 109.

¹⁸¹ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 164.

¹⁸² Conger, *The Widow's Might*, 127.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

husbands would have.”¹⁸⁴ For example, widows in the colonial and post-revolutionary periods were encouraged to emulate Artemisia, who ruled Caria, a small and ancient kingdom in Asia Minor, following the death of her husband Mausolous. Artemisia’s performance in widowhood was extraordinary. She mixed her husband’s ashes with her drinking water and perfume, hoping to become a living tomb for his spirit.¹⁸⁵ She also built the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus to honor him and serve as his final resting place. The structure was so phenomenal that it became one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Artemisia was praised for her efforts to become “the living sepulcher of her dead husband.”¹⁸⁶ In keeping with this example, one popular advice book widely read during the mid- to late eighteenth century encouraged widows to live in ways that reflected their husband’s legacy, “to ‘represent him ... to her own thoughts, that his life may still be repeated to her.’”¹⁸⁷ McGinn notes that this advice prompted some widows to engage in “memorialization, or even idealization, of their dead husband’s memory as a means of coping with their loss.”¹⁸⁸ In this way, a widow’s work and public activities came to be viewed as a continuation of her husband’s work, a way for him to live on in public life, and an important contribution to his legacy. Ultimately, this duty to sustain a husband’s legacy served as an entry point into the world of campaigning, politicking, and office holding. Two widows,

¹⁸⁴ Conger, *The Widow’s Might*, 83.

¹⁸⁵ Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 191.

¹⁸⁶ Conger, *The Widow’s Might*, 83.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy*, 150.

Florence Collins Porter and Luella North, illustrate the way in which spousal duty and a widow's authority could be transformed into a powerful justification for elective activity.

In 1873, Florence Collins married Charles William Porter, a minister and a Republican representative in the Maine state legislature.¹⁸⁹ A clergyman and politician's wife, Collins Porter was active in the suffrage and temperance movements and the National Woman's Republican Association. When her husband died in 1894, widowhood expanded her sphere of activity. She entered the world of work and became a school teacher, and according to Melanie Gustafson, Porter's "widowhood status, especially her high status as a clergyman's widow, allowed [her] to transform the purpose of her work. She connected work and politics by advancing from schoolteacher to school trustee to the elected position of school superintendent."¹⁹⁰

As a widow, Florence Collins Porter had the moral authority and social standing to pursue a broader set of public opportunities, including local elective office. As a candidate and officeholder, her public discourse and partisan persona reflected the widow's tendency to push the boundaries of gender ideology not by directly challenging it, but by stretching it to embrace new characteristics and comport with new contexts. These efforts often included appeals to conservative ideas about women and political power. For example, according to Gustafson, Collins Porter subscribed to and advocated a version of partisan womanhood that was "principled, disinterested, moral, and virtuous." This brand of politicized femininity

¹⁸⁹ Melanie Gustafson, "Florence Collins Porter and the Concept of the Principled Partisan Woman," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 18, no. 1 (1997): 63.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

gave women a place in politics, but “did not invert the political order, upset the sexual order, or challenge constructions of gender identity.”¹⁹¹ While widowhood provided an entry point into the world of public affairs, Collins Porter’s rhetoric and principled partisan persona demonstrates how widows carefully negotiated that opportunity, pioneering new paths without directly confronting traditional notions about women’s appropriate use of partisan power and authority.

Twenty-three years after Porter became a widow, Luella North joined her. Married in 1905 to Dr. Charles North, Luella North went on to have three children with him and was suddenly and tragically widowed after twelve years of marriage.¹⁹² Like Collins Porter, North was active in the suffrage movement. In 1921, just a few years after her husband’s death, the Republican Party approached her about running for office. The New York legislature had passed a bill that gave every county a children’s court, and seeing her deceased husband’s legacy and the public’s sympathy for his widow as distinct advantages, the party made North their nominee for children’s court judge.¹⁹³ In response, the Democratic Party made “Woman in the Home” their central campaign theme. Ultimately North was able to overcome gender-based objections to female office holding because of her special status. Cornel Reinhart, Margaret Tacardon, and Philip Hardy note that as “a widow, her social role provided precisely sufficient ambiguity to reduce voter objections to the candidacy of a woman, whose very virtues, wife and mother, would otherwise have relegated her to

¹⁹¹ Gustafson, “Florence Collins Porter,” 66.

¹⁹² Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 38-39.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

a purely domestic sphere.”¹⁹⁴ North became the first woman to hold elective office in New York. In contrast, the two other women who ran for children’s court judge in New York counties that year were soundly defeated.

Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy note that Luella North was “a perfect social and political icon. As a mother, she understood children and fulfilled the highest expression of ‘womanhood’; as a widow, she was uniquely suited to play a public role.”¹⁹⁵ They observe that both Collins Porter and North demonstrate how widowhood, “an unsought personal tragedy, ... became a pivotal liberating experience.”¹⁹⁶ Their familial position opened up public opportunities that were otherwise unavailable to women in their era. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the way they embraced their status and crafted their personas as widows had broad implications for their peers and the women that followed.

CONCLUSION

The absence or death of a husband was not something every woman experienced in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. And, of course, not all women who found themselves a widow or deputy husband enacted their public role in the same way. However, the women who chose to use these roles to expand their public activities—both professional and political—are useful starting points for considering the post-suffrage phenomena of congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy.

¹⁹⁴ Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 38-40.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 31.

From the colonial period through the early twentieth century, women transformed the conservative constructs that framed traditional femininity into a rationale for greater female public activity. Drawing upon ideals like the republican mother, the true woman, and benevolent femininity, women expanded their presence in public life through reform, philanthropy, and even partisan politics. Likewise, women whose marital relationships fell outside conventional experience used the era's gendered constructs to craft their identities in ways that justified economic and political activities. Through these discursive performances, widows and women acting as surrogates for their husbands were often able to elude the most restrictive aspects of traditional femininity and create a rationale for expanded opportunities. As deputy husbands, white middle-class and elite women established a role that would be taken up during the next century and enacted by wives who stood in for their husbands in electoral contests. As widows, many women helped advance a broader view of a wife's duty to maintain and contribute to her husband's legacy—even if that included some form of electoral activity.

According to Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy these performances “provided the final, perhaps essential, element of credibility necessary to enable women to cross the rather great divide separating nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century feminine domesticity from shared opportunities of public careers and political office with men.”¹⁹⁷ This study explores efforts to further cross that divide through congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy during the period known as the doldrums.

¹⁹⁷ Reinhart, Tacardon, and Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood,” 41.

CHAPTER 2: FOUR “FIRSTS”: THE CAMPAIGNS OF SURROGATES AND WIDOWS IN THE 1920s

At the exact moment that it became possible to elect greater numbers of women to public office, forces aligned to keep them out. In early 1920, women had secured the vote, but were still struggling with competing notions of femininity, political parties that limited their advancement, and a conflicted and increasingly divided women’s movement.¹ In the midst of this turmoil, the roles of wife, widow, and mother—the same roles that had been responsible for expanding and restricting female opportunity over several centuries—gave women a means through which to achieve elective office.

As surrogates and widows, a handful of white, middle- and upper-class women transcended the decade’s confusion over gender roles and partisanship just long enough to cross the coveted thresholds of congressional and gubernatorial office. Their candidacies were predicated upon their roles as wives and mothers, and they achieved public office by stretching the boundaries of these gendered identities. In the colonial period and nineteenth century, U.S. women had engaged in a process of casuistic stretching, layering onto the roles of wife and mother greater civic significance and using ideals like the republican mother to justify their work in the public sphere. Their efforts helped transform our public vocabulary by broadening the

¹ Regarding limits on female partisan activity, see Jayne Morris-Crowther, “Municipal Housekeeping: The Political Activities of the Detroit Federation of Women’s Clubs in the 1920’s,” *Michigan Historical Review* 30 (Spring 2004): 31-57. A discussion of the divisions within the women’s movement post-ratification can be found in J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973), 234-235; and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her* Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 1:181.

meaning of the terms “mother” and “wife.” In the twentieth century, congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates would further stretch these identities, characterizing campaigning and office holding as an extension of wifely and maternal duty that aimed to serve the family as well as their community. The current chapter explores the origins of these matrimonial paths to office. It reveals how spousal ties became powerful mechanisms for achieving elective office by looking at the candidacies and campaigns of the earliest surrogates and widows.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first section describes the social, political, and ideological terrain of post-suffrage America, an era that found women engaged in a rigorous debate about how to appropriately exercise their new citizenship rights amidst competing and conflicting ideas about gender and public life. This section details the wide array of activity that women pursued in the post-suffrage period, the justificatory rhetoric they employed in support of their work, and the period’s salient models and prescriptions for feminine political activity. This broad analysis of context is in keeping with the positionalist perspective and reveals that female civic and political activity in the 1920s was often justified through appeals that leveraged the special status afforded to wives and mothers and the continued use of expediency-style arguments.

In keeping with this context, two unique paths to office, congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy, emerged as promising new avenues for female office holding. The second section of this chapter examines these paths by analyzing the campaigns of four of the earliest women to travel them: Mae Ella Nolan, Nellie Tayloe Ross, Edith Nourse Rogers, and Miriam Ferguson. Specifically,

this section examines how these women stretched existing gender ideals to craft a rationale for female office holding that both drew upon and expanded the boundaries of spousal and maternal roles.

Taken together, the two sections of this chapter analyze the discourses that these candidates used to justify female office holding and provide an account of the contextual forces that made such rationales persuasive. The chapter closes with an examination of how the rhetorical performances of these four female candidates contributed to our “public vocabulary” regarding women and elective leadership.

THE 1920s: POST-SUFFRAGE CIVIC ACTIVITY AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

In the years following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women struggled with their place in public life. The vote was just one in a long list of changes that had a profound impact on their material existence and threw gender ideologies into a state of flux. World War I opened up new opportunities in the workforce, and by 1920, more than eight million women were working in 437 occupations.² American consumer culture took root, propagating and quickly disseminating different feminine constructs to a national audience.³ And, of course, the vote itself opened up a wide-ranging debate among women about their public roles. Unable to square the range of political activities now available to them with the traditional ideals that governed feminine public behavior, many women struggled

² William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 49-50.

³ E. Michele Ramsey, “Addressing Issues of Context in Historical Women’s Public Address,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 27 (Fall 2004): 356.

with how to best exercise their “full citizenship” rights.⁴ These complex forces presented tremendous challenges for the women’s movement.

The First Days of the “Doldrums”

Women were forced to confront the decade’s challenges and changes without the relative unity that suffrage had provided. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the women’s movement had served as a crucible for debate, bringing disparate groups of women together and providing them with physical and literary spaces to discuss the meaning and implications of societal changes and events.⁵ Following ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the movement was no longer well equipped to serve this function since it lacked a transcendent and unifying issue that could hold women of diverse backgrounds, opinions, and experiences together.⁶ As a result, the movement entered a period that has been referred to as “the

⁴ Elisabeth Israels Perry discusses this internal struggle, noting that in 1920 some women “assumed that a clear path would lead women toward political empowerment. In reality women were unsure how to proceed. Should they join political parties? No, some women said; women should first learn how parties worked, meanwhile continuing to pursue nonpartisan agendas through their powerful voluntary associations. In response to such arguments, others warned that as long as women held aloof from partisanship, they would remain politically inconsequential.” Elisabeth Israels Perry, “Defying the Party Whip: Mary Garrett Hay and the Republican Party, 1917-1920,” in *We Have Come to Stay*, ed. Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israels Perry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 97.

⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell notes that women’s rights conventions served as “forums for the debate of movement ideas.” For example, the national woman’s rights convention in 1860 was the site of the now famous “divorce debates,” where women came together and discussed the implications of legislation that aimed to change New York’s divorce laws as well as the meaning of broader changes in the traditional family structure brought on by the industrial revolution. See Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her*, 1:50, 71. In addition to conventions and meetings, the woman’s movement also provided literary spaces for the discussion of issues that affected women. For detailed accounts about these literary endeavors, see Mari Boor Tonn, “The *Una*, 1853-1855: The Premiere of the Woman’s Rights Press,” in *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1870*, ed. Martha Solomon (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 48-70; and Bonnie J. Dow, “The *Revolution*: Expanding the Woman Suffrage Agenda,” in *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1870*, ed. Martha Solomon (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 71-86.

⁶ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 234-235.

doldrums,” which was marked by declining participation, deep ideological divisions, and thorny questions about tactics and goals.⁷

Many factors contributed to the confused nature of this period, among them the lack of a central, unifying policy issue for the women’s movement; the on-going tension between personhood and womanhood; changes brought on by World War I; the new lifestyle made possible by the automobile; and unanswered questions about what constituted “appropriate” civic behavior as women attempted to exercise their new “full citizenship” rights.⁸ Also contributing to the movement’s decline in popularity and prominence was a cultural trend toward individualism, which encouraged women to see themselves as distinguished from, not part of, a group. According to historian Sara Evans, many women believed that with the vote, the battle had been won, the fight was over, and “all they had to do was go ahead and live out their equality.” Women came to view the term “feminist” as a label that impeded these efforts.⁹ In the period following suffrage, they were increasingly focused on self-expression, not mass agitation.

⁷ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 204; Danelle Moon, “A Pocket of Quiet Persistence—In the Age of the Feminist Doldrums?: Florence Kitchelt and the Connecticut Committee for the Equal Rights Amendment, 1943-1961,” *Connecticut History* 45 (2007), 202. See also Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of American Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Chafe, *The American Woman*; and Lelia J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸ Jennifer Burek Pierce, “Portrait of a ‘Governor Lady’: An Examination of Nellie Tayloe Ross’s Autobiographical Political Advocacy,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors*, ed. Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 35.

⁹ Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 5-6.

According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, the trend toward individuality coupled with the lack of unity among various coalitions created the deepest divisions within the movement since its split into two factions in 1869.¹⁰ Among those who remained active, there was widespread disagreement about which goals and tactics best represented the next step in their fight for equality. Evans notes that post-suffrage activists fell into two categories: the “social reformers,” who would eventually help shape the New Deal and the welfare state, and members of the National Woman’s Party, who poured their energy into passing the Equal Rights Amendment. The struggle between these two groups continued for decades, and Evans argues that because of it, “‘women’s rights’ and ‘feminism’ took on increasingly narrow and distant connotations” and failed to connect with young women. By 1950, feminism would become a marginalized force in public life.¹¹

Yet, Cott has noted that despite falling into a period of “decentralization and diversification, competition and even sectarianism,” the movement was sustained by women working individually and in smaller groups.¹² Women may have declined to identify as feminists, disagreed about objectives and tactics, and failed to unite into a cohesive whole, but the accomplishments of prominent individuals and smaller collectives advanced women’s progress. Therefore, as scholars, the challenge is not to lament the decline of a unified movement, but to uncover the diverse set of achievements that constituted women’s progress from the early 1920s until the early

¹⁰ Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her*, 1:181.

¹¹ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 5-6.

¹² Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 282.

1960s. As J. Stanley Lemons has observed, the success of the women's movement in the post-suffrage period must "be measured by hundreds and thousands of little items from 1920 onward."¹³

Among these "little items" were continued work in benevolent and philanthropic reform organizations, sophisticated lobbying efforts, policy-making in federal agencies, and, to a limited degree, partisan activities and office holding. One of the common threads that ran through these efforts was the rationale many used to justify their public pursuits. Linked by a common past, many women drew from similar rhetorical traditions. Evidence of their common history could be found in the ways they stretched the roles of wife and mother. They consequently paid homage to these ideals' old characteristics while simultaneously giving them new public significance, bringing them into new public contexts, and imbuing them with new characteristics.

The 1920s: The New Woman, the Old Mother, and the Municipal Housekeeper

The 1920s, according to Jennifer Burek Pierce, "were times of conflicting and often contradictory public attitudes" regarding gender.¹⁴ Progressive ideas about feminine roles and behavior emerged, but they did not replace traditional, conservative constructs.¹⁵ Instead, the progressive and conservative were woven together into a complex, contradictory tapestry of gender ideology. New opportunities in professional employment demanded public action, confidence, and self-assertion.

¹³ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 235.

¹⁴ Pierce, "Portrait of a 'Governor Lady,'" 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Yet lingering nineteenth-century feminine ideals urged women toward passivity, humility, and self-sacrifice. According to E. Michele Ramsey, “the lives of women, and thus the roles they were expected to play in U.S. society, were in flux.”¹⁶ Further complicating matters was the emergence of a new ideal for a post-suffrage world: the “new woman.”

The new woman paradigm can be traced back to 1894, when the term was introduced during a debate between feminist writers Sarah Grand and Ouida in the *North American Review*.¹⁷ Others argue that its origins date back even earlier; specifically, to the White House tenure of Lucy Hayes, the first college graduate to become First Lady of the United States.¹⁸ Betty Boyd Caroli notes that, “in references to Lucy Hayes and other presidents’ wives of the late nineteenth century, ‘new woman’ meant a serious woman concerned with substantive matters such as reform rather than with empty party-giving. It meant having opinions and an identity of one’s own.”¹⁹ By the time the label appeared in the *North American Review*, it inspired dramatic responses, both positive and negative. It soon became shorthand for a broad range of attributes; Martha Patterson notes that the “new woman” was “at once a character type, a set of distinct goals, and a cultural phenomenon” that “defined

¹⁶ Ramsey, “Addressing Issues,” 356.

¹⁷ Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 2. For the text of the debate, see Sarah Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question, March 1894” in *Moths*, ed. Natalie Schroeder (Petersborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2005), 601-604; and Ouida, “The New Woman, May 1894,” in *Moths*, ed. Natalie Schroeder (Petersborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2005), 605-611.

¹⁸ Betty Boyd Caroli notes that Hayes has been “heralded as introducing the era of a ‘New Woman.’” Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 86.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

women more broadly than the suffragette or settlement worker while connoting ... a distinctly modern ideal of self-refashioning.”²⁰ During the late nineteenth century, the ideal came to represent a woman with progressive views on a diverse set of issues, from gender roles and sexual mores to consumer culture and racial “uplift.”²¹

In 1895, a piece published in the *New York World* further defined the term, using a composite picture made from photographs of twelve women, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Belva Lockwood, and Mary Lease, as a visual representation of the archetype. These women, the essay explained, represented

the most advanced ideas of the present progressive movement of womankind. These women believe that nature fully intended the female sex to be equal in all respects with the male, and they have devoted lifetimes in the effort to make others, especially men, believe so, too. These women believe that, as they constitute quite an essential element in a world [...] they should have just as much to say about governing themselves, just as many opportunities for mental advancement and for earning a living, as men. They do not totally disapprove of the “old” woman. [...] They] stand ready to mete out to that woman due approval, but they believe that women as a class have a higher, a more noble duty in life than the mere bearing and nursing of children and the comforting and encouraging of men. They believe that after the incidental business of the household has been performed women should go out into the world, work side by side with the men, fight when they are oppressed, vote, insist upon their rights, and make themselves generally agreeable.²²

Such nineteenth-century attempts to define the new woman drew from the most progressive role models available, but they also revered “old,” more traditional notions of femininity as well. This version of the new woman offered women a greater public role, one marked by independence from men and greater freedom to

²⁰ Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “Here is the New Woman (1895),” in *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*, ed. Martha H. Patterson (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 48.

participate in the public sphere, without requiring that they completely reject the more conservative ideals that came before it.

In contrast, during the 1920s, the “new woman” ideal shed much of its association with conventional femininity. The ideal was embodied by the flapper, a woman who “refused to recognize the traditional moral code of American civilization.”²³ Popular culture helped disseminate the flapper construct. Mary Ryan notes that during this decade, a young woman between the ages of eight and nineteen could be expected to go to the movies approximately forty-six times a year, where she would see Clara Bow, Joan Crawford, and Gloria Swanson enact this new female social role. These actresses became “vivid embodiments of the new womanhood” and the characters they portrayed “gave precise details on how to become *correctly* modern,” teaching women how to reflect the ideal’s values in real life.²⁴ One film, DeMille’s *Why Change Your Wife*, explicitly encouraged women to trade in Victorian womanhood for new womanhood in the style of the flapper.²⁵

As an archetype, the flapper challenged “traditional morality, [and] made an assault on the modesty-chastity-morality-masculinity equation.”²⁶ The 1920s version of the new woman was distinctly modern in dress, thought, and behavior. She cut her hair into a bob; wore clothing that revealed her legs, neck, and arms; and used

²³ Kenneth A. Yellis, “Prosperity’s Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper,” *American Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1969): 45.

²⁴ Mary P. Ryan, “The Projection of a New Womanhood: The Movie Moderns in the 1920s,” in *Decades of Discontent: The Women’s Movement, 1920-1940*, ed. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 114-117.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Yellis, “Prosperity’s Child,” 46.

cosmetics. While she delayed marriage, she either engaged in sexual behavior or was willing to leave the impression that she did. The flapper competed in the workplace, used contraception, swore, smoked, drank, and, in the process, upset the traditional gendered order of American public and private life. According to Kenneth Yellis, the ideal promoted a version of womanhood that was “self-sufficient, intelligent, capable, and active,” and Martha Patterson notes that it brought forth rhetorics that “served to proscribe as well as liberate.”²⁷ Ultimately, the term would become synonymous with a wide array of behaviors, but at its most basic level, the ideal offered greater independence and a broader public role, particularly for white women of means.

However, prescriptions for feminine behavior in the post-suffrage era were not uniformly liberating. Ramsey observes that “two different representations of woman as she related to the public/political sphere” emerged and stood in dialectical opposition to one another.²⁸ One emphasized the ways in which woman’s status as citizen had been “essentially altered”; the other characterized her status as “practically unchanged.”²⁹ Ramsey’s findings suggest that even within popular culture the social roles prescribed for women were not uniformly progressive. The era may have popularized liberating concepts like the new woman, but remnants of traditional, more conservative feminine ideals simultaneously remained and some even found new life. One example from popular culture was the Gibson Girl, a late nineteenth-century image defined by maternal, domestic, and wifely qualities as well

²⁷ Yellis, “Prosperity’s Child,” 51; Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 10.

²⁸ Ramsey, “Addressing Issues,” 361.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

as conservative dress, old-fashioned morality, and chastity. The Gibson Girl remained in circulation well into the twentieth century and provided a stark contrast to the new woman. If the flapper brazenly rejected traditional, conservative femininity rooted in the cult of true womanhood, the Gibson Girl embraced it.³⁰

The new woman that popular culture promulgated was not the preferred model for women engaging in civic activity. Conservative ideals like true womanhood and republican motherhood continued to retain a powerful place within the culture and connected women to the private, the domestic, and the maternal. It was these ideals and characteristics that frequently found their way into the discourse both by and about female leaders. In particular, the roles of wife and mother, often embodied by the public “housekeeper,” continued to serve as the primary justification for female leadership and public activity.

Female Reform and Municipal Housekeeping

Nowhere was this trend more apparent than in the area of social and reform work, one of the many activities that produced real gains for women during the doldrums. Perhaps the best example of this work was the settlement house movement, which took as its purview broader social concerns. In places like Chicago’s Hull House, middle-class, white women moved into working-class neighborhoods and began offering social and educational programs to the community’s underserved

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of the flapper ideal and how this image contrasted with the nineteenth-century Gibson Girl, see Yellis, “Prosperity’s Child,” 44-50.

residents. The settlement house movement gave women vital training in social work, which in turn opened doors to professional pursuits.³¹

Female leaders within the settlement movement often justified their activities by invoking the idea of “municipal housekeeping.”³² This concept was first introduced by Hull House co-founder Jane Addams in 1906 at the NAWSA Convention in Baltimore, Maryland. She told the crowd assembled that city improvement efforts

failed partly because women, the traditional housekeepers, have not been consulted as to its multiform activities. The men have been carelessly indifferent to much of this civic housekeeping, as they have always been indifferent to the details of the household. [...] The very multifariousness and complexity of a city government demand the help of minds accustomed to detail and a variety of work, to a sense of obligation for the health and welfare of young children and to a responsibility for the cleanliness and comfort of other people. Because all these things have traditionally been in the hands of women, if they take no part in them now they are not only missing the education which the natural participation in civic life would bring to them but they are losing what they have always had.³³

According to Ramsey, by predicating female civic reform efforts on the domestic roles of wife and mother, “Addams (re)defined Woman as a competent protector of society, rationalizing her perspective with arguments that referred back to the cult of

³¹ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32.

³² Agnes Hooper Gottlieb has noted that women’s studies scholars have used several terms to describe the work of women “who tried to solve the problems associated with city life,” including “social housekeepers,” “civic housekeepers,” and “municipal housekeepers.” While the term “municipal housekeeping” will be used here for the sake of consistency, it is important to note that all of the labels associated with this work drew upon domestic metaphors. See Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, *Women Journalists and the Municipal Housekeeping Movement, 1868-1914* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2001), 6.

³³ Jane Addams, “The Modern City and the Municipal Franchise for Women,” in *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections from History of Woman Suffrage*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 371.

true womanhood.”³⁴ In the nineteenth century, several female leaders employed a similar rhetorical strategy, invoking the wife and mother roles as part of their social change advocacy. Such expediency-based arguments could be found in the speeches of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ernestine Potowski Rose, and Clarina Howard Nichols.³⁵ In the years leading up to and following ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, female reformers, including Jane Addams and Mary McDowell, put this old strategy to new use. The wife and mother personas became justifications for social work activities that put women in direct contact with their communities and involved them in local governance and administration.³⁶

As noted in Chapter One, the use of woman’s domestic roles in the private sphere to justify greater participation in the public sphere stretched all the way back to the Revolutionary War period. In the eighteenth century, the republican mother elevated the civic importance of motherhood and served as a rationale for bringing the feminine private into contact with the masculine public.³⁷ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, female reformers built upon this rationale, further stretching the mother/wife ideals to encompass an even greater terrain of public spaces and

³⁴ Michele Ramsey, “Selling Social Status: Woman and Automobile Advertisements from 1910-1920,” *Women and Language* 28, no. 1 (2005): 28.

³⁵ Shannon Skarphol Kaml, “The Fusion of Populist and Feminine Styles in the Rhetoric of Ann Richards,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors*, ed. Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 62.

³⁶ Karen M. Mason, “Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping: Women’s Political Activism in Chicago, 1890-1920,” in *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads*, ed. Lucy Eldersveld and Wendy Hamand Venet (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), 68.

³⁷ Sylvia R. Frey and Martin J. Morton, *New World, New Roles: A Documentary History of Women in Pre-Industrial America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 122; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 283.

activities. In the early twentieth century, much of women's work aimed at civic improvements and local governance continued to employ expediency arguments, which "presumed that women and men were fundamentally different, so that it would be beneficial, that is desirable and prudent, to give women rights because of the effect on society."³⁸ These arguments drew upon woman's unique status as domestic, pious, and moral and leveraged traditional ideas about the roles of wife and mother.

According to Anne Firor Scott, the use of this rationale was widespread and pervasive during the twentieth century among female reformers. While the types of civic reforms women pursued differed depending on their geographic location, they ascribed to a common belief: "The idea that women as the center of home life were responsible for the moral tone of a community."³⁹ Scott notes that in the 1920s, "it was said that such responsibility did not end with the four walls of a home, but extended to the neighborhood, the town, the city."⁴⁰ In keeping with this notion, female reformers tried to improve the lot of their communities by embarking on a wide range of public initiatives related to, among other things, public education, sanitation, air and water pollution, and the juvenile justice system.⁴¹

Female reformers linked these efforts to their roles as wives and mothers in complex ways. For example, in her study of the Chicago Woman's City Club, Maureen Flanagan explained that the club's female members "were not just

³⁸ Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her*, 1:14.

³⁹ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 141.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 142-144.

attempting to keep the city clean, as they did their homes.” Rather, they were sharing ideas “about how a good city should be run for the benefit of all its members.”⁴²

Morris-Crowther notes that, in doing so, they linked their approach to “their recognition of what it took to keep a home running,” and expanded woman’s sphere by emphasizing the “connection between the private and the public, the home and the city.”⁴³ For them, the community became a natural extension of the private home and activities associated with local governance became part of their wifely and maternal duties.

One example of this justification can be found in a piece published by Mrs. T.J. Bowlker in 1912, which was entitled “Woman’s Home-Making Function Applied to the Municipality.” Mrs. Bowlker, the president of the Women’s Municipal League of Boston, described the league’s work this way:

Our work is founded on the belief that woman has a special function in developing the welfare of humanity which man cannot perform. This function consists in her power to make, of any place in which she may happen to live, a home for all who come there. Women must now learn to make of their cities great community homes for all the people.⁴⁴

Mary McDowell, a leader of the municipal housekeeping movement, echoed this domestic justification, arguing that there was “an intimate connection between the home and the community, and perhaps even a natural progression for women from

⁴² Maureen A. Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman’s City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era,” *The American Historical Review* 95 (October 1990): 1048.

⁴³ Morris-Crowther, “Municipal Housekeeping,” 55.

⁴⁴ T.J. Bowlker, “Woman’s Home-Making Function Applied to the Municipality,” *American City* VI (June 1912), 863.

private to public life.”⁴⁵ The Woman’s City Club even gave this argument visual expression in an illustration depicting its work. Under the headline “Madam, Who Keeps Your House?” the club issued a poster urging women to “Help in The Municipal Housekeeping.” The poster featured fourteen squares representing municipal offices, including the Marriage License Bureau and the Health Department’s Milk Inspection Bureau, with illustrations that depicted each office’s impact on domestic life. Each of the fourteen squares were linked to an upper-case “C” in the center, which represented City Hall.⁴⁶ In the view of the Woman’s City Club, the home and municipal government were inseparable.⁴⁷ Following that logic, it only made sense that mothers and wives, who oversaw all that went on in the private, domestic sphere, would have a stake and a say in public sphere governance that affected the home.

While Chicago, with its active social work community and settlement houses, was at the center of this civic activity, municipal housekeeping was not limited to that city in particular or the Midwest in general. During the 1920s, one could find women engaged in civic activities masquerading as municipal housekeeping in towns and cities in every region of the country.⁴⁸ These reform and improvement initiatives went

⁴⁵ Mason, “Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping,” 66.

⁴⁶ Anna E. Nichols, “How Women Can Help in the Administration of a City,” in *The Woman’s Citizen Library: A Systematic Course of Reading in Preparation for the Larger Citizenship*, ed. Shailer Matthews, D.D. (Chicago: The Civics Society, 1913), 9:2144. Nichols included a copy of the poster in a book chapter about the connection between the city and the home.

⁴⁷ Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform,” 1048.

⁴⁸ Mason, “Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping,” 70-71. For more information on municipal/social housekeeping efforts outside of the Midwest region, see Scott, *Natural Allies*; and Sandra Schackel, *Social Housekeepers: Women Shaping Public Policy in New Mexico, 1920-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1992).

far beyond simple clean-up efforts. Municipal housekeepers found themselves involved in issues and causes that went to the heart of what local administration and governance was all about.

Like the expediency arguments used to justify suffrage, the power of the municipal housekeeping rationale was its ability to obscure its progressive ends by appealing to domestic, traditional, and conservative feminine ideals. As Maurine Hoffman Beasley explains, in “defining civic activity as akin to housework, a traditionally devalued pursuit, the municipal housekeeping movement downplayed the nature of its social and political activity.”⁴⁹ In this way, it “conferred an air of respectability upon what might otherwise have been considered unseemly public or political activity.”⁵⁰ Municipal housekeeping enabled women to become intimately involved in their local government without directly challenging conservative notions of femininity. In fact, by expanding the boundaries of the wife/mother role while simultaneously celebrating it, the housekeeping rationale allowed them to claim a right to be involved in every aspect of city government, even if such activity involved reforms aimed at altering the fundamental structure of the government itself.⁵¹

One of the most useful aspects of municipal housekeeping as a rhetorical strategy is that one did not actually need to be a wife or mother to invoke it. Karen M. Mason contends that “biological motherhood” was not as important as “social

⁴⁹ Maurine Hoffman Beasley, preface to *Women Journalists and the Municipal Housekeeping Movement, 1868-1914*, by Agnes Hooper Gottlieb (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2001), xi.

⁵⁰ Scott, *Natural Allies*, 142.

⁵¹ Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform,” 1048.

motherhood.” In this context, the mother persona became a valued “political role for women that had motherhood as its foundation and yet was accessible to unmarried women.”⁵² The social settlement movement was predicated upon this idea. Embedded within the settlement concept was the notion that single women could “mother ... without actually being mothers.”⁵³ According to Allen F. Davis, Jane Addams was the embodiment of this paradox; while she “personally had rejected the life of wife and mother,” she “did not challenge the conventional concept of wife and mother.”⁵⁴ Addams’ unorthodox persona demonstrates the cultural salience of maternal and spousal activities during the 1920s and woman’s ability to invoke these personas publicly regardless of her personal circumstance.

By drawing upon traditional wife/mother ideals and employing an expedient rationale to justify female civic reform efforts, municipal housekeeping obscured the importance of these activities even as it facilitated their existence. Beasley explains that the term became a “code phrase” that served “to mask the importance of a movement that widened the sphere of women’s activities.” Reflecting the underlying strategy that had once made many of suffragists’ arguments and justifications effective, municipal housekeeping drew upon conservative feminine ideals and provided women with “a shield behind which they could move from the narrow walls

⁵² Mason, “Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping,” 66.

⁵³ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview* (Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1981), 117.

⁵⁴ Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 207.

of the home into the public arena” without “offend[ing] the existing power structure.”⁵⁵ Explaining further, Beasley notes:

Just as whatever women did in the name of religion was socially acceptable, whatever they did in the name of domestic duty met with a similar response. Because of its inoffensiveness, the term served to legitimize a new role for women, making it acceptable for them to take part in activities designed to “clean up,” ... their communities. ... [W]omen used the concept of municipal housekeeping as a rhetorical device that permitted them to enter the realm of public discourse without being criticized as aggressive or unfeminine.⁵⁶

Not only did the role of wife/mother as defined by the municipal housekeeping rationale open up opportunities in local government, it also enabled many reformers to secure positions within the federal government. According to historian Robyn Muncy, women who had been trained in social work at settlement houses moved into key positions in the Children’s and Women’s Bureau, where they built “a female dominion in policymaking.”⁵⁷ Using social work techniques perfected in settlement houses, they transformed these new agencies into powerful bureaucracies that hired large numbers of women. From these positions, these women then took on a wide range of issues, including “infant mortality, the birth rate, orphanage[s], juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children.”⁵⁸ In many cases, the areas they pursued could be directly linked back to the private, domestic domain of the wife and mother. Taken together, they placed a sizeable portfolio of social issues under the control of female federal bureaucrats. This work

⁵⁵ Beasley, preface to *Women Journalists*, xi-xii.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁸ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 47.

gave female policy-makers direct influence and brought social issues affecting women and children into the public sphere.

Female reformers exerted pressure and influence on the federal government from outside of the bureaucracy as well. The work of the Children's and Women's Bureau was supplemented by the efforts of the Women's Joint Congressional Congress (WJCC), established by Maud Park in 1920 as "a Capitol Hill clearinghouse" for the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Consumers' League, the National League of Women Voters, the National Women's Trade Union League, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, the American Association of University Women, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the American Home Economics Association.⁵⁹ Using the pressure tactics that women had perfected during the fight for suffrage, the WJCC provided its member organizations with "a common conduit for information on federal legislation, and it organized lobbies on their behalf."⁶⁰ Among its most significant successes was the passage and implementation of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act. Ultimately, the WJCC became so effective that "one observer in Washington called it 'the most widespread and popular lobby that probably has ever visited this city.'"⁶¹ The WJCC's sophisticated lobbying campaigns aimed to persuade members of Congress,

⁵⁹ Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 97.

⁶⁰ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 103-104.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

administration officials, and heads of executive agencies to support the organization's causes. In the process, these efforts not only expanded women's contact with government officials and federal institutions, but also their involvement with the country's political parties.

The efforts of local reformers and settlement workers, the policy-making of female appointees in the Children's and Women's Bureau, and the lobbying work of the WJCC were among the many activities that helped sustain female progress in the post-suffrage period. These activities—and the rhetoric used to justify them—promoted a broader interpretation of the roles of wife and mother and helped make traditional notions of domestic femininity compatible with new public opportunities. Yet, despite these advances, one area consistently remained closed to women: the world of campaigning, politicking, and elective office holding. Here, the roles of wife, widow, and mother—which had been broadened and sustained by the decade's female reformers, settlement workers, and policy-makers—would also help pave the path to greater opportunity.

The Pitfalls of Partisanship

As discussed in Chapter One, the benevolent activities of the colonial, revolutionary, and industrial eras had given women limited entrée into the political parties. This trend continued in the early twentieth century as political parties tried to improve their images and bolster their good government credentials by attracting women who were involved with ventures like Hull House.⁶² However, while ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment made fuller participation in the major

⁶² Melanie Susan Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party, 1854-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 130.

political parties possible, the transition was rough and women found that their opportunities remained limited.

For starters, there was a great deal of disagreement among women themselves about whether active partisan engagement was the best way to exercise their new “full citizenship” rights. This rift became apparent in 1919, when the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) founded the National League of Women Voters (LWV). Formation of the league led to questions about its goals, which in turn exposed disagreements about what constituted “appropriate” feminine political behavior. Carrie Chapman Catt urged women to work within the parties, not as powerless “auxiliaries” but out “in the lead” of the partisan procession.⁶³ In 1920, she told a meeting of the LWV that, with suffrage secured, leadership within the parties was the most pressing challenge before them. “I cannot lead or follow in the next lap,” Catt told the attendees, “I only point to the fact that the battle is there, and I hope you are not going to be such quitters as to stay on the outside.”⁶⁴ Catt warned that women would face obstacles in their quest for partisan power, but she urged them

⁶³ Carrie Chapman Catt, “Political Parties and Women Voters,” (address to the Congress of the League of Women Voters, Chicago, IL, February 14, 1920), Woman's Rights Collection, 1853-1958, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. Text of the address is also available on microfilm: Catt, “Political Parties and Women Voters,” *History of Women* (New Haven: Research Publications, 1977), microfilm, p. 8, 9181.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5, 9181.

to advance the women's movement by engaging in partisan activity. She told the members of the LWV,

Probably when you enter the party of your choice you will find yourself in a sort of political penumbra where most of the men are. These men will be glad to see you and you will be flattered by their warm welcome and will think how nice it is to be free at last. [...] But if you stay still longer and move around enough, keeping your eyes wide open, you will discover a little denser group, which we might call the numbra of the political party. [...] You won't be so welcome there, but that is the place to be. And if you stay there long enough and are active enough, you will see something else—the real thing in the center with the door locked tight and you will have a hard, long fight before you get behind that door, for there is the engine that moves the wheels of your party machinery. Nevertheless, it will be an interesting and thrilling struggle and well worth while. If you really want women's vote to count, make your way there.⁶⁵

Catt's desire to pursue partisan politics was not universal, however, and many women were skeptical of the major parties. Activist Anne Martin encouraged women to engage in political activity but eschew partisan institutions. Why, Martin wondered, should the movement train women only to hand them over to the parties “exactly where men political leaders wanted them, bound, gagged, divided, and delivered?”⁶⁶ For Martin and her allies, it was better to maintain solidarity on the basis of sex than to risk losing pre-suffrage unity by adopting a more institutionally partisan approach. Other leaders, like Jane Addams, focused on community revitalization. This strategy encouraged newly-enfranchised female voters in general, and the LWV in particular, to pursue non-partisan, benevolent work in lieu of party membership.⁶⁷ In this way, women could retain the advantages of traditional femininity, which placed them

⁶⁵ Catt, "Political Parties and Women Voters," p. 5-6, 9181.

⁶⁶ Anne Martin, "Feminists and Future Political Action," *The Nation*, February 18, 1925, 185.

⁶⁷ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 50-51.

above the immoral, corrupt world of partisan politics and gave them valuable authority that they could use to pursue social reforms and policy initiatives.

Having finally gotten the vote, one group of women stood ready to jump headfirst into the world of partisan affairs and claim their fair share of party posts and elective offices. The other group stood on the sidelines, pursuing policy-making ends through non-partisan means. The LWV failed to successfully resolve these competing perspectives. It made an initial foray into electoral politics in 1920, actively campaigning against the re-election of officials who had opposed suffrage; in each of these races, the league was utterly defeated and it never opposed or supported a specific candidate again.⁶⁸ The partisan approach, as far as the LWV was concerned, was a dead issue. Soon after the 1920 elections, it adopted a course more in keeping with non-partisan aims, “evolving into a ‘good government’ rather than a feminist organization.”⁶⁹

The league’s approach was consistent with the posture women had historically adopted. Despite widespread acceptance of a female partisan identity throughout most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, progressive women and suffragists had operated largely outside of formal party institutions. In fact, their “outsider” position became a powerful argument for granting them the right to vote. According to Muncy, these women “argued that it was precisely because they operated outside the corrupt arena of political parties that they should be granted authority in public life; they could claim the high moral ground of disinterestedness specifically because

⁶⁸ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 100.

⁶⁹ Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 86.

of their exclusion from the smoke-filled backrooms where party bosses purportedly exchanged public influence for private gain.”⁷⁰ In keeping with this rationale, women carved out a role for themselves as separate from the “the low-down, dirty deals inevitable in partisan politics,” and once they achieved the vote, many were uneasy about trading in their perceived morality by engaging in “ward-level vote hustling.”⁷¹

Despite these deep concerns, there were women like Catt who were willing to give up their “outsider” status. Jo Freeman notes, “the political parties recruited, organized, absorbed, and co-opted large numbers of politically inclined women.”⁷² Their national and state committees created women’s divisions and clubs that recruited, educated, and mobilized female supporters, and they reserved seats on party committees for women. However, the women who joined found their welcome from both parties was far from warm. As Jayne Morris-Crowther observed, the male-dominated parties “wanted women’s votes but not usually women’s input into how the parties should be run,” so they “were treated more like apprentices than full members.”⁷³ Male partisans didn’t want to share patronage benefits and they were unwilling to promote politically-savvy women for fear they would become a threat to the status quo. Those women that did manage to rise to senior positions either served as a “rubber stamp” for decisions made by the men or risked being ousted by them.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 127.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷² Freeman, *A Room at a Time*, 5.

⁷³ Morris-Crowther, “Municipal Housekeeping,” 38.

⁷⁴ Anne Firor Scott, “After Suffrage: Southern Women in the Twenties,” *The Journal of Southern History* 30 (August 1964): 315.

Furthermore, the parties were not receptive to women's issues or concerns. According to Freeman, they "publicly denounced the idea of 'sex solidarity' and insisted that party women do the same. Above all, they demanded party loyalty."⁷⁵ As a result, unity among partisan women slowly eroded. Loyalty to woman's rights was replaced with loyalty to party, and women were divided by partisan allegiances, geography, and competition for the spoils of the committee system.

Restrictions on sex solidarity were not the only limitations that the parties placed on female members. While they absorbed women into their state and national apparatuses, they discouraged them from pursuing elective offices. In this way, the major parties employed what leadership scholar James McGregor Burns has called the "steam kettle effect," a strategy that redirects "political pressure into safe channels."⁷⁶ According to Burns, in institutions "the structure of openings is also a structure of closures," and the experiences of new women voters who joined the political parties are a good example of that system at work.⁷⁷ The parties offered women who participated in grassroots activities certain incentives, but they ultimately discouraged any interest in elective office. In this way, male leaders and elected officials were able to "manipulate the channels of opportunity in order to minimize threats to their own position."⁷⁸ This strategy reveals one of the great ironies of women's position in the post-suffrage period: while the right to vote made them

⁷⁵ Freeman, *A Room at a Time*, 5.

⁷⁶ James McGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1982), 125.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

attractive to the political parties, it also channeled them into partisan structures that denied them valuable opportunities to advance their own positions, particularly with respect to elective office.

The resistance of partisan men was not the only challenge facing female candidacies; other women also served as barriers to elective pursuits. If partisanship was controversial, many women found campaigning and office holding unthinkable. Elisabeth Israels Perry's account of the work performed by Mary Garrett Hay in the Republican Party illustrates this dilemma. A prominent GOP partisan, Hay continually rebuffed suggestions that she run for office and advised her fellow women to remain non-partisan until they had trained themselves for their new responsibilities as citizens.⁷⁹ "Don't let us have our heads turned," she warned. Perry concluded that for Hay, "politics," defined as running for office, was neither 'constructive' nor 'worthwhile.'⁸⁰ Like Hay, many women felt conflicted about the appropriate use of political power and that kept them from either running themselves or supporting women who chose to do so.

All of these factors meant that would-be female candidates faced a daunting array of organizational, logistical, and ideological challenges. Since many politically-minded women pursued opportunities for public engagement outside of the partisan structure and female partisans were often marginalized, female candidates lacked the

⁷⁹ Elisabeth Israels Perry, "Defying the Party Whip: Mary Garrett Hay and the Republican Party, 1917-1920," in *We Have Come to Stay*, ed. Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israels Perry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 100. Hay served as president of the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs from 1910-1912, headed the New York City Woman Suffrage Party, and was a member and the 1919 chair of the Republican Women's National Executive Committee.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

kind of institutional support that might otherwise have been available to them.⁸¹ Furthermore, they could not count on the support of a strong woman's bloc to support their efforts since women did not vote as a cohesive group. Would-be female candidates also lacked sufficient role models who could serve as examples of how to successfully operate within the complex post-suffrage context and secure elective office. Complicating matters further was a women's movement unsure of what it now considered appropriate female political behavior. On this last point, women found that their foremothers had done them few favors. Historically, suffragists had been strategically vague in their arguments, making "either very general or rather modest claims and did not touch the subject of women in political office."⁸² As a result, the women's movement was ill-prepared to capitalize on the Nineteenth Amendment and elect women to office in greater numbers. Despite this discouraging scene, would-be female candidates could find inspiration in the personas and rhetorics adopted by female partisans. Much like the municipal housekeepers, partisan women further stretched the mother/wife persona, expanding the activities and environments open to women.

Discourses of Partisan Mothering

In the 1920s, the roles of wife and mother not only justified female civic reform efforts under the rubric of municipal housekeeping, they also served as a means for navigating the pitfalls of partisanship. Given the decade's confusing web of prescriptions for feminine behavior and the debate over partisan activity, partisan

⁸¹ Scott, "After Suffrage," 313.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 100.

women were forced to navigate an onerous web of expectations. When women failed to hew very closely to these expectations, they often fell out of favor and became the object of ridicule. For example, when the WJCC and its allies successfully pushed through their legislative agenda, Julia Lathrop, head of the Children's Bureau, was accused "of having built up 'a political machine.'"⁸³ This criticism reveals just how complex the world of politics was for newly-enfranchised women. Even though she took as her legislative purview traditional "women's issues" related to families and children, Lathrop attracted criticism and opposition by wielding real political power. Her experience reflects the conundrum facing the woman who sought a role in partisan affairs: she could be a partisan, but she could not be a politician. That label, and all of the back-room, low-down, unladylike behaviors it implied, was flung like an epithet at women who stepped outside the bounds of appropriate feminine partisan behavior.

Women who acted politically found they had to walk a careful line between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" behavior. Their success often hinged their ability to connect their appeals and personas with the culturally valued roles of wife and mother. For example, Jane Addams became one of the earliest women to successfully navigate partisan politics as a member of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party. According to Melanie Gustafson, Addams was able to achieve this success, at least in part, because she "symbolized the legacy of the virtuous Republican mother, the nonpartisan temperance reformer, and the disenfranchised woman looking to vote but

⁸³ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, 105.

not to hold office.”⁸⁴ Addams exemplifies the complex political persona that women needed to construct immediately following suffrage if they wanted to accomplish their goals by operating within a party structure.

The case of Belle Moskowitz is particularly instructive in this regard. Moskowitz was a key political advisor to Al Smith, a New York state assemblyman and governor who ultimately became the Democratic Party’s nominee for president in 1928. Glenna Matthews notes that by the time women got the vote, Moskowitz was one of only a handful of women who had “hands-on experience” in electoral politics.⁸⁵ However, Moskowitz’s public persona—whether subconsciously or by design—completely eschewed personal political ambition and played up the persona of the mother/wife. Kristi Andersen notes that Moskowitz would attend meetings of Smith’s kitchen cabinet, but sat quietly on the periphery, knitting while she listened. She would wait until asked for her opinion and mostly advised Smith in private. Perry explains that in her advisory role, Moskowitz treated Smith both “as a mother would a son” and as a candidate’s wife would her husband.⁸⁶ Moskowitz’s approach is evidence of what historian Teva Scheer concluded after studying the politics of the decade: many women found that in order to be effective in partisan affairs, they had

⁸⁴ Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party*, 130.

⁸⁵ Glenna Matthews, “‘There Is No Sex in Citizenship’: The Career of Congresswoman Florence Prag Kahn” in *We Have Come to Stay*, ed. Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israels Perry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1999), 134-135.

⁸⁶ Elisabeth Israels Perry, *Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 153.

to act in ways consistent with “the clearly defined female categories with which [male partisans] were familiar—mother, wife, or sister.”⁸⁷

Molly Dewson’s approach to her political work further confirms Scheer’s observation. Dewson, who would eventually become the head of the Democratic National Committee’s Women’s Division, “decided early on that the best way for a woman to function in politics was to get men to think of her as an aunt or a mother.”⁸⁸

In yet another example, Frances Perkins described her professional persona in maternal terms as well. During an oral history, she told an interviewer about a meeting she had with a state senator who emotionally confided in her during an impeachment proceeding. Perkins recalled,

I never forgot that. That was the beginning of a great deal of wisdom on my part. [...] I learned out of that that the way men take women in political life is to associate them with motherhood. They know and respect their mothers—ninety-nine percent of them do. It’s a primitive and primary attitude. I said to myself, “That’s the way to get things done, I’m sure. So behave, so dress and so comport yourself that you remind them subconsciously of their mothers.” It made a great difference in my whole approach. It was not long afterwards that I adopted the black dress with the bow of white at the throat as a kind of official uniform. It has always worked. [...] When I became a judge in workmen’s compensation, which was a new idea, I realized that some of the old lawyers and insurance company representatives, as well as the injured men, took it pretty hard. I tried to remind them of their mothers and it worked. They could take justice at the hands of a woman who reminded them of their mothers.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Teva J. Scheer, *Governor Lady: The Life and Times of Nellie Tayloe Ross* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 93.

⁸⁸ Susan Ware, *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1987), 224.

⁸⁹ Frances Perkins, interview by Dean Albertson, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University Libraries, New York, NY.

Perkins' comments suggest that she consciously appealed to the maternal and the domestic to achieve her goals. However, without interviews like hers or private correspondence confirming intentions and beliefs, it is impossible to know for sure if her peers viewed such an approach as a matter of rhetorical strategy or a true reflection of their self-concepts. For Perkins, it was clearly the former. For others, the reflection of such ideological tenets in their discourse may have been a more unconscious cultural performance. Karen Mason has also explored this question of intent, noting that

it is impossible to know whether women had internalized traditional beliefs about women's roles, thus explaining the use of gendered language to describe their activities, or whether they used phrases like municipal housekeeping as strategies—to head off opposition to their actions. [But] the reason they were able to behave politically was because they described their activities as municipal housekeeping, a phrase that evoked women's traditional role in the home, and as such did not threaten those in power.⁹⁰

In this way, municipal housekeeping and partisan mothering discourses reflected what Karrin Vasby Anderson and Kristina Horn Sheeler have identified as “social style,” a form of rhetoric that conforms “to norms of femininity while [simultaneously] employ[ing] femininity in order to achieve political agency.”⁹¹

Anderson and Sheeler note that this rhetorical strategy has often been used by first ladies who “disguise their political power by professing apoliticism.”⁹² In much the same way, by drawing upon the historical constructs of the wife and mother,

⁹⁰ Mason, “Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping,” 66.

⁹¹ Karrin Vasby Anderson and Kristina Horn Sheeler, *Governing Codes: Gender, Metaphor, and Political Identity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005): 25.

⁹² *Ibid.*

municipal housekeepers and partisan elites were able to “enact political power while disguising its nature as political.”⁹³

For women who aspired to hold elective office, the partisan minefield was particularly difficult to navigate. For the most part, they were pioneers entering uncharted territory, particularly at the statewide and federal levels. There were few women they could emulate as they tried to win the support of male partisans and potential voters. One group of women from whom they may have drawn instruction and inspiration is the decade’s small cadre of powerful female reformers, partisans, and aides. In the prior century, women had stretched roles of wife and mother through republican motherhood and expediency arguments, broadening these old ideals to include new activities like pursuing higher education and voting. In the early twentieth century, female reformers and partisans further stretched the boundaries of these roles through their discourse, fashioning municipal housekeeping and partisan mothering rhetorics that justified greater involvement in local governance and explicitly political activities. It is within this rhetorical context—where expediency-based arguments still held great sway and the roles of wife and mother continued to be celebrated and imbued with greater and greater civic importance—that women first attempted to campaign for public office in the post-suffrage era.

ORIGINS OF CONGRESSIONAL WIDOWHOOD AND GUBERNATORIAL SURROGACY

Although pioneering achievements, the “female firsts” in party leadership and local/municipal office holding discussed in Chapter One did not usher in an era of

⁹³ Anderson and Sheeler, *Governing Codes*, 25.

greater electoral opportunities for women at the statewide and federal levels. By 1937, each of the country's 48 state legislatures averaged only three female members apiece, a figure on par with the average number of female members in the four female suffrage states in the 1890s.⁹⁴ While women made modest gains at the local level, they faced significant challenges as they tried to move up the electoral ladder.

The factors that made it possible for women to transition into local and district offices did not translate into compelling rationales for female office holding at the statewide and federal levels. The governor's office, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the U.S. Senate in particular were seen as falling outside of the limited sphere of appropriately feminine public activity. The fulfillment of congressional and gubernatorial responsibilities actually required women to be physically removed from the "private" community for months at a time, and the style was not based on the voluntarist model discussed in Chapter One. In the final analysis, the doors that a handful of women opened on the state and local levels did not lead to Congress or the governor's mansion, and the lessons women learned on the local level did not teach them how to pry these new doors open. Furthermore, the lack of a unified woman's voting bloc and the opposition of male partisans served as powerful institutional obstacles for would-be female candidates. As a result, few women ran for office in the 1920s, and those who did were usually defeated.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ R. Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet Clark, *Women, Elections, and Representation*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 30.

⁹⁵ Morris-Crowther, "Municipal Housekeeping," 39. For more information about failed female candidacies and challenges that female candidates faced in the 1920s, see Allen Morris's discussion of female candidacies in Florida's 1922 election in Allen Morris, "Florida's First Women Candidates," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63 (April 1985): 410-414. Also instructive on this point is Vinton M. Prince's account of Belle Kearney's 1922 failed bid for the U.S. Senate. See Vinton M.

According to Lemons, each year throughout the 1920s, the number of women running for federal office across the country totaled less than 50. Of this handful of candidates, many ran from minor parties with scant resources and small bases of support, conditions that often doomed their campaigns. Unfortunately, those who ran for office with major party backing did not fare much better. Throughout the 1920s, the number of female candidates who lost dwarfed the number of those who succeeded.⁹⁶

It is within this context that two promising avenues for female office holding emerged: widowhood and surrogacy. Based on matrimonial ties, these paths to office were clearly linked with salient gendered themes operating within the 1920s culture; they dovetailed well with the ideas embodied by municipal housekeeping and partisan mothering and they contributed to the continued celebration of the roles of wife and mother. As Kristina Horn Sheeler has observed, female leaders “do not simply appear on the scene but appear among a complex set of images and expectations.”⁹⁷ Widowhood and surrogacy put female candidates in the center of one set of particularly powerful images and expectations.

Political Widowhood: Nolan, Tayloe Ross, and Nourse Rogers Pioneer a Path

By the time the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, only one woman, Jeannette Rankin of Montana, had been elected to the U.S. Congress, and no woman

Prince, “The *Woman Voter* and Mississippi Elections in the Early Twenties,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 49 (May 1987): 105-108.

⁹⁶ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 103.

⁹⁷ Kristina Horn Sheeler, “Marginalizing Metaphors of the Feminine,” in *Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors*, ed. Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 17.

had ever served as a state's chief executive. In the election of 1920, Alice Mary Robertson of Oklahoma won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Robertson's election was a mixed blessing for progressive womanhood, however; an anti-suffragist and critic of women's groups, she had "once remarked that exchanging the privileges associated with Victorian-era womanhood for the political rights enjoyed by men was like, 'bartering the birthright for a mess of pottage.'" ⁹⁸ A year after Robertson's election, Winnifred Huck won a special election to complete her deceased father's term in office. ⁹⁹ A year after Huck's election, Mae Ella Nolan won her campaign to fill out the unfinished term of her deceased husband. And so, the official roster for the 67th Congress included three women: one independent candidate, one congressman's daughter, and one congressional widow. By the dawn of the 68th Congress, only the widow would remain, the other two congresswomen having been defeated in their bids for re-election. Mae Ella Nolan's brief tenure would mark the beginning of an electoral phenomenon that would ultimately become a well-trod path to office traveled by dozens of women.

Mae Ella Nolan married her husband, John, in 1913. By the time they wed, John, a Bull Moose Republican, was already a member of Congress, having recently been elected to represent the California congressional district that included the city of San Francisco. In 1922, John ran unopposed for a sixth term, but he died shortly after the election. Mae Ella Nolan was quickly put forward by the Union Labor Party as

⁹⁸ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., 2006, H. Con. Res. 66, 44. Kristi Andersen notes Robertson was an "anti-suffragist." Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 113.

⁹⁹ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 49.

their candidate for the special election to fill his unexpired term and the full term that would follow. She defeated six men who sought the seat, besting her closest competitor by 4,000 votes.¹⁰⁰

As the first congressional widow, Nolan was the subject of great interest. Ironically, that intense scrutiny yielded a sparse record of public texts. Due to Nolan's feeling that the press often misrepresented her in its coverage, she retreated from public view, giving very few floor speeches and even fewer interviews. By 1924, the *Washington Post* reported that she had "retired into her shell" and the newspaper announced her retirement in 1925 under the (erroneous) headline: "In Congress 2 Years, She Did No 'Talking.'" ¹⁰¹ Fortunately for the purposes of this study, Nolan's self-imposed silence began after she defined what she viewed as the meaning of her candidacy. In the weeks leading up to the 1923 special election, she unveiled a platform that promised to continue her husband's legislative agenda and described her desire to serve as his successor in the following way: "I owe it to the memory of my husband to carry on his work. [...] His minimum-wage bill, child labor laws and national education bills all need to be in the hands of someone who knew him and his plans intimately. No one better knows than I do his legislative agenda."¹⁰² Nolan's explanation of her candidacy positioned her run for office as a wifely task pursued in

¹⁰⁰ Karen Foerstel, *Biographical Dictionary of Congressional Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 203.

¹⁰¹ Constance Drexel, "Mrs. Nolan No 'Crusader'; Mrs. Barrett Gains Note," *Washington Post*, February 24, 1924; "In Congress 2 Years, She Did No 'Talking,'" *Washington Post*, March 5, 1925.

¹⁰² Suzanne Pullen, "First Female California Representatives From the City," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 10, 2000.

duty to her deceased husband. It was an expediency-based rationale that fit well within the public vocabulary of the era.

Once elected, Nolan's public persona continued to reflect appeals to the wifely and domestic on the limited number of occasions when she participated in media opportunities. For example, in December of 1925, she was featured in a short profile about the women serving in Congress. While the text of the article did not reference her by name, the piece included a photograph of Nolan in an apron cooking in her kitchen. The caption read, "Mrs. John I. Nolan: The only woman member of the sixty-eighth Congress proves that official duties need not interfere with the rites of home."¹⁰³ Both the use of her married name and the visual/verbal referents to the domestic sphere reflected a traditional notion of womanhood more in keeping with the subservient and domestic aspects of the nineteenth-century's true woman than the liberating behaviors of the twentieth-century's new woman.

Nolan retired after serving just two years in office. In explaining her decision not to run for re-election, she declared, "Politics is entirely too masculine to have any attraction for feminine responsibilities."¹⁰⁴ Mae Ella Nolan's critique notwithstanding, more women were on their way into Congress, and they were following the route she pioneered to get there. Nearly three-quarters of "first generation" congresswomen (1917-1934) achieved their positions by virtue of their ties to their husbands or fathers.¹⁰⁵ In the session of Congress following Nolan's

¹⁰³ "Woman Shows Her Hand in Politics," *The Independent*, December 26, 1925.

¹⁰⁴ Susan Tolchin, *Women in Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 57.

¹⁰⁵ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 24.

retirement, two of the three women in the U.S. House were congressional widows: Florence Prag Kahn and Edith Nourse Rogers.¹⁰⁶

Edith Nourse Rogers was no stranger to politics or public policy. During World War I, she served as a volunteer nurse and inspected field hospitals as part of the Women's Overseas Service League. Her work with the league and the Red Cross did not go unnoticed; after the war, three presidents (Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover) asked her to serve as their liaison to the disabled veteran community.¹⁰⁷ In addition, Nourse Rogers served as her husband's top legislative and political advisor during his six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives as a congressman from Massachusetts.¹⁰⁸ By the time her husband passed away in 1925, Nourse Rogers had amassed a resume distinguished by impressive achievements and racked up several high-profile endorsements. However, rather than lead with these credentials, she chose to run for her deceased husband's seat by highlighting her status as a congressional widow.

A review of Nourse Rogers' campaign materials reveals how compelling the widowhood rationale had become in the two short years since Nolan's election. Despite her impressive credentials, Nourse Rogers' status as wife/widow became the dominant justification for her candidacy. In a speech dated June 26, 1925 for delivery

¹⁰⁶ The third woman elected to the sixty-ninth session of the U.S House of Representatives was Mary Teresa Norton, a Democrat from New Jersey.

¹⁰⁷ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 70

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

in Lowell, Massachusetts, Nourse Rogers told voters:

I know that nothing would give my husband—your Congressman John Jacob Rogers—so much pleasure as the knowledge that you desire to have me continue the work he laid down. [...] If you send me to Congress as your representative I shall serve you with all my heart, with all my mind, and with all my strength. No task will be too great or too small to have my unfailing interest. It will be service in memory of my husband, and a service of affection and interest for the district that he so loved and that, I believe, loved him.¹⁰⁹

In a two-sided campaign pamphlet, the front page prominently featured a photo of Nourse Rogers dressed in mourning garb and announced her candidacy with a headline that reduced her identity to a parenthetical notation. The headline read, “Mrs. John Jacob Rogers (Edith Nourse Rogers) for Congress.”¹¹⁰ Beneath the headline and photo, a statement of support from Secretary of Labor James Davis made reference to her service as a representative for two presidents, but the note also gave equal weight to her widowhood status. The selected quote by Secretary Davis read, “You will be a worthy successor to your beloved husband, who was a patriot and very friendly to the working class. I hope you will be elected because you, too, will see the humanity in all legislation.”¹¹¹ Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the campaign document is that so much space was devoted to visually and verbally linking Nourse Rogers with her deceased husband, the material outlining her own impressive credentials barely made it into the pamphlet at all. Endorsements from

¹⁰⁹ “Speech of Mrs. Edith Nourse Rogers,” June 26, 1925, Edith Nourse Rogers Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

¹¹⁰ Nourse Rogers Campaign Pamphlet, June 30, 1925, Edith Nourse Rogers Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

President Calvin Coolidge and President Warren G. Harding, which hailed her work for their administrations, were relegated to the back page.

Nurse Rogers would eventually go on to become the longest-serving congresswoman in history. Over the course of her 35-year career, she would amass an impressive legislative record, particularly in the areas of military issues and foreign affairs. She continued her work on behalf of veterans, and in 1941, introduced the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps Act, which allowed women to volunteer for the U.S. Army.¹¹² However, in 1925, all of those accomplishments lay ahead of her. The primary persona she projected for voters was that of a grieving wife.

Nurse Rogers was elected with 72 percent of the vote, a margin that gave her opponent, a former Massachusetts governor, the worst defeat of his entire career.¹¹³ Once elected, she told the *Christian Science Monitor*, "I hope that everyone will forget that I am a woman as soon as possible."¹¹⁴ And it's possible that eventually they did. But on Election Day in 1925, it's also likely that, having gone to such great lengths to emphasize her womanhood and her widowhood status, those attributes represented a significant aspect of her political appeal.

By 1925, the widowhood rationale was also being used to justify gubernatorial campaigns. While Nurse Rogers was courting Massachusetts voters, Nellie Tayloe Ross was hoping to persuade voters in Wyoming that she should complete her husband's unexpired term as well. Ross had moved with her husband, William, to

¹¹² Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 72.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "Election of Mrs. Rogers Wins Praise of State Dry League," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 26, 1925.

Wyoming, the “Equality State,” in 1901. William, an attorney with an avid interest in political affairs, was elected governor of the state in 1922, but died suddenly in the middle of his four-year term. Of her campaign to replace him, Nellie Tayloe Ross would later say, “Really, I dropped accidentally into politics.”¹¹⁵ A few days following her husband’s funeral, she was asked to run as the party’s nominee in the special election to replace her husband. Ross agreed, but she refused to campaign. She had always been keenly aware of feminine prescriptions for public behavior and wanted to put forth an example that political activity need not “unsex” women.¹¹⁶

While the scope of extant materials from Ross’s campaign is limited, a three-part autobiography she penned for *Good Housekeeping* in 1927 provides a telling look at how she framed her candidacy and public role.¹¹⁷ The first part of the series is devoted to her marriage and home life before her husband’s death. In it, Ross details her efforts to make a home for her family and raise young twin boys:

It may be well asked what sort of training was this for future official service to Wyoming. Simply this: the demands of that day, which could not be ignored, evaded, or postponed, challenged and strengthened every resource of which I possessed, and made ultimately of the weak and inefficient young girl that I

¹¹⁵ *Riverton Chronicle*, November 29, 1976.

¹¹⁶ Virginia Scharff, “Feminism, Femininity, and Power: Nellie Tayloe Ross and the Woman Politician’s Dilemma,” *Frontiers* 15 (1995): 87.

¹¹⁷ While it is impossible to confirm that Ross personally drafted all parts of her autobiography, her life-long approach to writing major speeches and other texts indicate that the *Good Housekeeping* series was likely drafted with minimal outside input. Although Ross maintained relationships with a close circle of advisors throughout her career, she tended to draft written works on her own, starting with her inaugural address when she was sworn in as governor. For an account of the drafting of that speech, see Scheer, *Governor Lady*, 72-74. Furthermore, upon leaving the governor’s mansion, Ross was hired as a speaker for the Chautauqua circuit and penned her own speeches for the circuit’s ten-week tours. A national columnist later questioned whether Ross had used a ghostwriter, and according to Ross’s personal assistant Ruth Harrington Loomis, the accusation had deeply offended Ross since she had always written her own public texts. See Scheer, *Governor Lady*, 109; and Ruth Harrington Loomis, interview with David Cookson, May 22, 1979, Cheyenne, Wyoming, University of Wyoming American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.

had been, a self-reliant and useful woman—useful, at least, to my own family.¹¹⁸

Ross not only described her preparation for office in domestic and maternal terms, she cast the decision to run this way as well. In the second part of her autobiography, she details the few public appeals she issued to voters on behalf of her candidacy. According to this account, Ross's only campaign materials consisted of two open letters distributed to the public. While no copies of the letters in their entirety are known to have survived, Ross summarizes their content:

In this first campaign, I made practically no effort on my behalf. My only utterances were contained in two letters to the public: the first, pledging that I would do everything in my power to complete my husband's program; and the second, a declaration to women voters that, if elected, I would devote myself, heart and soul, to public service so that never, through failure of mine, could it be truthfully said that women should not be entrusted with high executive office. No appeal was made to the sympathy of the people.¹¹⁹

Hence, in the first letter, Ross pledged that she would carry on her husband's work and legislative agenda, positioning her run as a wife's fulfillment of her obligations to her deceased husband. Casting her campaign this way hews closely to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prescriptions for feminine behavior. Like the true woman, Ross's persona was identified closely with the domestic private sphere, defined by her relationship to her husband and her status as wife. But, much like the republican mother, Ross's reasoning for her candidacy imbued the relationships and tasks of the domestic private with political and civic significance. Her justification for her candidacy dovetails well with what Karen List has described as the central message of republican womanhood: "to love others – spouse, children, and through service to

¹¹⁸ Nellie Tayloe Ross, "The Governor Lady," *Good Housekeeping* 85 (August 1927), 118.

¹¹⁹ Nellie Tayloe Ross, "The Governor Lady," *Good Housekeeping* 85 (September 1927), 208.

them, country.”¹²⁰ According to Ross, it was her love of her spouse and her responsibilities as his widow that guided her subsequent public political activities.

The second installment of the *Good Housekeeping* autobiography also shares Ross’s recollection of the day that the State Democratic Party Chairman came to her home and asked her to succeed her husband. “I have something to say to you which you need now make no reply,” he said. “You are the one who must become the candidate of our party to fill the place left vacant by your husband. [...] This unfinished work of his you must think of as a child he has left to be nourished, and you are the one who must assume the task.”¹²¹ Ross explains that she sought the advice and counsel of countless friends and family as she mulled over the opportunity, but the rationale offered by the party chairman is the only one she relays in such detail, leaving the reader with the impression that it was his argument that she found most compelling. Ross reluctantly decided to accept the party’s nomination. Reflecting upon her decision, she said, “I was influenced by the desire to carry on my husband’s unfinished work, and to find for myself a compelling interest that would absorb me completely. Moreover, I believed that I, better than anyone else, understood his ideals and program.”¹²² Upon her election, Ross told a reporter, “Perhaps the world will never understand that I desired this honor which has come to me, not for myself, but that I might carry on throughout the remainder of my husband’s term the work which he had hoped to accomplish as Governor. That is all I

¹²⁰ Karen K. List, “The Post-Revolutionary Woman Idealized: Philadelphia Media’s ‘Republican Mother,’ *Journalism Quarterly* 32 (1988): 72.

¹²¹ Nellie Tayloe Ross, “The Governor Lady,” *Good Housekeeping* 85 (September 1927), 37.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 206.

desire. [...] When I complete his work, the work which meant so much to him, I will have no further political ambition.”¹²³ Her nomination was portrayed as an honor she did not seek for personal enrichment and accepted only as a matter of wifely duty.

The common themes and wording expressed in Ross and Nolan’s statements are uncanny and too consistent to be dismissed. In keeping with the salient themes present in the 1920s, both women cast their candidacies as the extension of their domestic, wifely roles. Ross, however, introduced to this an element of the maternal, which echoed the republican motherhood discourses of the revolutionary period. Using the “child” as a metaphor for her husband’s legacy, Ross argues she had a maternal responsibility to care for and fulfill William Ross’s work. Like the republican mother who raises her children to serve and sacrifice for the *polis*, Ross’s campaign for office is cast as an effort to bring her husband’s legislative agenda to maturity, a task pursued in fulfillment of her wifely responsibilities and in service to her husband and her state.

The press also played an active role in the creation and dissemination of Ross’s wife/mother persona. During the campaign, media accounts often foregrounded her widowhood status and positioned her candidacy in the domestic terms she had defined. In her *Good Housekeeping* autobiography, Ross explains that on the day she received word of her nomination, there were no media outlets present to record her reaction. Yet, several news outlets ran with a story that she had turned to her three sons during the ceremony and said, “With my three boys back of me, I have nothing to fear!” To which one of them was said to have replied: ‘That’s all right,

¹²³ “Wyoming’s Woman Governor to Carry on Husband’s Aims,” *Public Ledger*, November 8, 1924.

mother. We're all with you!" According to Ross, the scene never took place, but the press constructed and propagated the motherhood narrative anyway.¹²⁴ In a piece entitled, "Wyoming's Woman Governor Accepts Her Election As a Tribute to Her Dead Husband," the reporter closed his article by saying, "Death left its heritage of sorrow. But Nellie Tayloe Ross is carrying on for her 'sweetheart' where he lay down his task."¹²⁵ Even after her election, the press portrayed Ross as a devoted and grieving widow. In a piece about her victory, the newspaper reported that, "At any mention of her husband's name, Mrs. Ross' eyes fill with tears, her voice chokes."¹²⁶

Supported by a willing press, Ross positioned her experience for office as derived from the maternal and domestic, and she characterized her decision to run as a continuation of her wifely duties following her husband's death. According to Virginia Scharff, the discourse about and by Ross led to the public perception that she was "the bearer of a peculiarly feminine reforming and civilizing influence."¹²⁷ Such a persona built upon the municipal housekeeping rhetoric and extended it. And the introduction of widowhood addressed one of municipal housekeeping's shortcomings, namely it expanded the sphere of appropriate activity in a way that included running for and holding statewide office.

¹²⁴ Nellie Tayloe Ross, "The Governor Lady," *Good Housekeeping* 85 (September 1927), 207.

¹²⁵ "Wyoming's Woman Governor Accepts Her Election As a Tribute to Her Dead Husband," *Kansas City Star*, November 9, 1924.

¹²⁶ "Wyoming's Woman Governor to Carry on Husband's Aims," *Public Ledger*, November 8, 1924.

¹²⁷ Scharff, "Feminism, Femininity, and Power," 92.

In 1925, Ross became the first female governor in the United States. During her tenure in office, she reduced taxes and became a recognized leader on water rights issues.¹²⁸ While she lost her campaign for re-election in 1926, she was appointed Vice Chair of the 1928 Democratic National Convention and later became the first female director of the U.S. Mint.¹²⁹ Despite her impressive resume, her most lasting legacy is the way in which she built upon the rationale pioneered by Mae Ella Nolan and Edith Nourse Rogers.

Underlying the discourses developed and personas adopted by each of these women was the process of casuistic stretching. Through their discourse they embraced traditional aspects of the mother/wife identity even as they layered new meanings upon them. Much like the republican motherhood ideal, the expediency arguments that appealed to true womanhood, the discourses of municipal housekeeping, and the practice of partisan mothering, political widowhood used traditional ideas about maternal and spousal duty to open up new opportunities and make acceptable new activities. Specifically, the political widow took the mother/wife persona out of the home and put it out on the hustings. In doing so, it facilitated women's progress into electoral politics, one part of public life that had been extremely resistant to change. Through the persona of the political widow, women found a potent rationale for engaging in politicking, campaigning, and statewide and federal office holding. By enacting that persona and using it to justify

¹²⁸ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 108.

¹²⁹ Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead, "The Changing Face of the Governorship" in *Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors*, ed. Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 5-6.

their political work, dozens of women helped maintain women's progress during the doldrums.

Miriam Ferguson and Gubernatorial Surrogacy

Until the election of 1925, no woman had ever served as the chief executive of a state. The campaigns of that year would bring about the election of not one female governor, but two—and both of their candidacies were premised on matrimonial ties. While Nellie Tayloe Ross campaigned in Wyoming to *replace* her husband, Miriam Amanda Ferguson campaigned in Texas *in place* of her husband. Ferguson's candidacy would pioneer a second matrimonial path to office: surrogacy.

Jim Ferguson, Miriam's spouse, served as governor of Texas from 1915 to 1917. An entertaining speaker who campaigned in his signature black alpaca suit, Jim was a force in Texas politics, drawing overwhelming support from rural communities in the western part of the state. However, his administration was tumultuous; in part, because of his tendency to use his office to wage war on political enemies, and in part, because of rumors about corrupt dealings and abuses of power. Jim's underhanded ways finally caught up with him in August 1917, when he was impeached and barred from holding state office.¹³⁰ Following impeachment, Jim Ferguson began a life-long campaign to vindicate himself. He challenged his ban from public office in court and tried to have friends in the legislature re-instate his

¹³⁰ Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 216.

office holding privileges. In the meantime, he ran for federal office, believing the impeachment ban only barred him from statewide positions.¹³¹

While Jim Ferguson felt confident that the law was on his side, he didn't want to tempt fate. So, during his 1922 campaign for the U.S. Senate, he hedged his bets by asking his wife, Miriam, to put her name on the ballot as well. In an interview, Jim would later claim that he first got the idea to run Miriam in his place while sitting on the back of a wagon with a friend waiting for a train. He was fighting his office ban in court and worried that he might campaign successfully only to be thrown off the ballot. "What do you think about running my wife if that happens?" he reportedly asked his friend. "Well," replied his friend, "if a man can run a grocery store in his wife's name I don't see why he couldn't run the state that way."¹³² Miriam filed an application stating her intention to run for the U.S. Senate in 1922, but removed her name from the ballot when it was declared that Jim could lawfully hold federal office and two Ferguson candidacies became unnecessary.¹³³

Jim lost the Senate campaign, but placing Miriam's name on the ballot had given the couple an idea. In 1924, they set their sights back on the governor's mansion, an office that Jim was explicitly forbidden from holding. Miriam filed papers in May of 1924, stating her intention to have her name placed on the ballot.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ouida Wallace Ferguson Nalle, *The Fergusons of Texas* (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1946), 161.

¹³² Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 216.

¹³³ "Mrs. Ferguson Files for Place on Ticket," *Dallas Morning News*, May 31, 1922; "Ferguson's Wife Wants Off Ticket," *Dallas Morning News*, June 24, 1922.

¹³⁴ "Ferguson's Wife Files for Governor," *Dallas Morning News*, May 30, 1924.

Whether because of Jim's checkered past, his eccentric personality, or the novelty of a female gubernatorial candidate, Miriam's campaign quickly generated interest.

In announcing her intention to run for governor, the Fergusons emphasized Miriam's role as a wife and mother as justifications for her campaign. In their public discourse, both positioned it as a "vindication campaign" that Miriam was pursuing as part of her duty to her husband and children. Miriam appealed to voters by asking, "Mother, father, son or brother, won't you help me? Jim and I are not seeking revenge; we are asking for the name of our children to be cleared of this awful judgment [the impeachment]."¹³⁵ Miriam told voters that she hoped "God will answer my prayer for vindication of my family name, which my good husband and I are seeking, not for revenge, but for the good of our children and their children who shall live after us." She used this rationale to directly appeal to her fellow mothers: "For two years I want to give the people of Texas devoted service. Mothers, won't you help me?"¹³⁶

In keeping with these maternal and domestic appeals, Miriam cast her qualifications in religious tones reminiscent of nineteenth-century true womanhood, which associated morality and piety with femininity. She said, "I know I can't talk about the Constitution and the making of laws and the science of government like some other candidates, [...] but I have a trusting and abiding faith 'that my Redeemer liveth' and I am trusting him to guide my footsteps in the path of righteousness for the

¹³⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, June 18, 1924.

¹³⁶ "Would Not Offer for Re-Election," *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1924.

good of our people and the good of our State.”¹³⁷ According to Miriam, it was by listening to God that she recognized the hand of the divine in her pursuit of public office.

News reports echoed these themes, emphasizing Miriam’s mother/wife persona and prominently featuring her domestic life. A *Dallas Morning News* profile, for which Miriam was interviewed, described her as a “true home-loving woman.” The reporter praised Miriam for seeing “to it that all the requirements of her family are not left to the solution of modern industries. She was engrossed in peeling peaches for preserves when her interviewer arrived and from the spotless kitchen came the splash of the churn.”¹³⁸ In keeping with this domestic/maternal theme, the press gave Miriam the nickname “Ma” because “M” and “A” were her first two initials.¹³⁹ The nickname became the moniker employed by campaign staffers and the press when referring to her. One reporter even expanded upon the various meanings of the nickname, writing: “Mrs. Ferguson is very chummy with her children. They call her ‘mother.’ Her husband calls her ‘mamma.’ In her campaign her supporters called her ‘Ma’ because her initials are ‘M.A.’”¹⁴⁰ According to Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly Mayhead, Miriam found this nickname to be “‘distasteful’ but was ‘smart enough to see that it was politically effective in causing voters to identify

¹³⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, June 18, 1924.

¹³⁸ “If Elected, I Am Going to Be Texas’ Governor; Not Jim,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1924.

¹³⁹ Frederic D. Schwarz, “1924,” *American Heritage* 50 (November 1999), 104.

¹⁴⁰ “Victory for People ‘Ma’ Ferguson Says,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 24, 1924.

with her.”¹⁴¹ This account is corroborated by the Fergusons’s daughter, Ouida, who refrained from using the nickname “Ma” in her memoirs since the nickname did “not fit her [mother’s] dignity.” Ouida explained that while the “slogan ‘Me for Ma’ helped elect her governor twice,” her mother “always took a firm stand against its private use.”¹⁴² Yet, in public, it was a different story. Miriam Ferguson built a public persona around her nickname, one that highlighted her role as a wife and mother. Her campaign used this public persona and expediency-based appeals to create a powerful rationale for her candidacy.

Even the issues of the campaign readily lent themselves to expedient justifications. One central concern was the Ku Klux Klan’s presence in the state. Miriam’s candidacy was cast in terms that echoed true womanhood appeals to piety and morality, presenting her candidacy as an alternative to the Klan’s lawlessness and godlessness. Miriam maintained Jim Ferguson’s administration anti-Klan position, but her stance was soon elevated to symbolic heights. During an interview, a female supporter offered to let Miriam wear her sunbonnet, a clothing item associated with rural Texas femininity.¹⁴³ The photo of Miriam in the borrowed bonnet was featured in press reports and became an important symbol during the campaign. Supporters were soon using the unofficial slogan, “A Bonnet or a Hood,” casting Miriam’s candidacy as a choice between domesticity and feminine piety and the Klan’s

¹⁴¹ Marshall and Mayhead, “The Changing Face of the Governorship,” 6.

¹⁴² Nalle, *The Fergusons of Texas*, xv.

¹⁴³ Mary Nelson Paulissen and Carl McQueary, *Miriam: The Southern Belle Who Became the First Woman Governor of Texas* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1995), 99.

depravity and religious intolerance.¹⁴⁴ A judge in Houston even put together a campaign song highlighting this theme, which was subsequently handed out to voters and printed in newspapers. Entitled “A Call to the Women of Texas” and set to the tune of “Put on Your Old Gray Bonnet,” the first verse of the lyrics read:

Get out your old-time bonnet
And put Miriam Ferguson on it
And hitch your wagon to her star,
So on election day
We each can say
Hurrah! Governor Miriam, Hurrah!¹⁴⁵

The themes emphasized by the Ferguson campaign and found in the press coverage were eventually perpetuated by the voters themselves. Letters to the editor drafted and submitted by independent citizens echoed many of the campaign’s primary arguments. For example, in a letter to the *Dallas Morning News*, Texan Estelle Hudson echoed the campaign’s mother/wife rationale, explaining that women would rally to Miriam Ferguson’s side in order to support a wife’s effort to vindicate her husband:

Women over the State have already begun to talk, and they are saying that they will vote for Mrs. Ferguson for Governor of Texas. [...] When a wife, a mother suffers—then it is that women as a whole feel a kindred pang. Women know, and have known since the beginning of time, the mysteries of suffering—for they are the mothers of mankind.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3rd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 46.

¹⁴⁵ “Urge Bonnet Song for ‘Ma’ Ferguson,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 1924.

¹⁴⁶ Estelle Hudson, “Women Will Rally to Mrs. Ferguson’s Support,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 6, 1924.

The campaign's expediency-based appeals to feminine piety and morality were reflected in the discourse of male voters as well. In a letter in June of 1924, W.

Gregory Hatcher said:

All civilized men know and concede that women are their superiors morally, but it has heretofore been assumed that men, if not possessing greater wisdom, at least possessed greater familiarity with governmental affairs, and, therefore, were best suited to hold public office. [...] They [the men] have shown themselves to be mentally, as well as morally deficient. The ladies could do no worse[...]. Therefore, the voters, both men and women, should [...] elect a lady, Mrs. Miriam Ferguson, Governor. She is one of the most refined, high-minded and capable women in the State and would fill the office with great dignity and credit.¹⁴⁷

And as the primary approached, even Mrs. W.C. Martin, a prominent clubwoman from Dallas, wrote a letter endorsing Miriam Ferguson and encouraging other women to do the same, despite the fact that Ferguson had never been active in the state's club movement. Martin wrote:

Mrs. Ferguson represents the type of home-loving, home-keeping woman who has been content heretofore to let her husband be the politician of the family and to permit other women to run the clubs. She is an ardent church worker and a devoted wife and mother, as her husband and two lovely daughters can testify. [...] Fate has taken a hand in thus calling this woman, who has never dealt in politics, or political policies, whose only thought has been to make a happy home and to guide and counsel her children and her husband to this seat of prominence.¹⁴⁸

As discussed earlier in this chapter, women who entered politics in the 1920s, even solely as an extension of reform work, had to walk a careful line between "partisan" and "politician." A woman could be politically-active, but personal ambition for partisan rewards like public office was still viewed as unseemly and inappropriate.

¹⁴⁷ "Would Let Ladies Take Over Public Office," *Dallas Morning News*, June 18, 1924.

¹⁴⁸ "Mrs. Ferguson Knows Needs of Country Women," *Dallas Morning News*, August 8, 1924.

Mrs. W.C. Martin's letter effectively distanced Miriam Ferguson from these motives entirely; not only had Miriam refrained from political activity, she hadn't even been a member of a woman's club.

Miriam also maintained a careful distance from any signs that might indicate she was pursuing politics out of personal ambition or pursuit of a progressive agenda, an impressive feat considering she was running for elective office. She had opposed woman suffrage and it was clear she did not see her candidacy as a sign of female progress or equality. At one point, she was asked "if she had any advice for women, [and] she responded, 'Why certainly not! Why should I?' in plain surprise."¹⁴⁹ Rather than appealing to women on the basis of reform efforts or women's issues or progressive notions of femininity, Miriam established common ground with rural Texas women, who were traditional and conservative when it came to gender ideology.¹⁵⁰ According to Nancy Beck Young, throughout her 1924 campaign, Miriam "presented herself as a traditional woman and not a new woman."¹⁵¹

By late July, Miriam had won a spot in the Democratic primary's run-off election. She reiterated her non-political position by issuing a statement about her candidacy, reaffirming that she was "not in the race through 'any great desire to hold office,'" and reassuring voters that she would only seek one term "if our prayers for

¹⁴⁹ Sheeler, "Marginalizing Metaphors," 18.

¹⁵⁰ Nancy Beck Young, "'Me for Ma': Miriam Ferguson and Texas Politics in the 1920s and 1930s" in *We Have Come to Stay*, ed. Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israels Perry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1999), 121.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

vindication are answered.”¹⁵² By stretching the roles of wife and mother—and presenting a persona that eschewed personal ambition—Miriam was able to avoid many of the gender-based traps that threatened female candidacies in the 1920s.

The maternal/domestic themes found in the Ferguson campaign materials and news reports were echoed on the campaign trail as well. Press accounts frequently mentioned that Jim Ferguson spoke for the ticket, either by embarking on solo speaking tours or speaking for Miriam when they traveled together.¹⁵³ Lack of complete campaign records make it difficult to determine how many speeches he delivered in her place, but a July 1924 account put the number of speeches at more than sixty over the course of a “few weeks.”¹⁵⁴ When Miriam did join him on the stump, she usually gave brief remarks and then turned the podium over to Jim. This tactic was on display at a rally in Greenville, where Miriam took the stage and briefly relayed her domestic credentials. She told the audience:

I may not be a great statesman; I have not had time to learn how to be. I have been busy at my home raising children and tending to my housework. [...] I want you people to elect me Governor so that I can help you. I believe I can help you. And now, if you will permit me, I will introduce to you my husband, who is the real talker of the family.¹⁵⁵

Again, Miriam’s statement highlighted her domestic nature, her maternal experience, and wifely deference. Yet, even as she appealed to these aspects of the mother/wife

¹⁵² “Would Not Offer for Re-Election,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1924.

¹⁵³ “James E. Ferguson Speaks at Quitman,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 2, 1924; “Ferguson in Talk at Breckenridge,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 12, 1924; Ted Dealey, “Speaks for His Wife,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 18, 1924.

¹⁵⁴ Ted Dealey, “Speaks for His Wife,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 18, 1924.

¹⁵⁵ Ted Dealey, “Ferguson Speaks to 10,000 Persons,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 14, 1924.

role, she was altering them by advocating for her own campaign in a public setting, something few wives and mothers had ever done.

Miriam's candidacy was also promoted in the *Ferguson Forum*, a weekly newspaper that Jim sent to subscribers across rural Texas. In the *Forum*, Jim delivered the news of the day, but provided his own slant on events. Primarily, the publication served as a means for supporting his electoral efforts, and in 1924, Miriam's campaign was prominently featured. Predictably, stories were laced with the maternal/domestic appeals and expediency-based arguments on behalf of her candidacy. For example, in the August 21, 1924 issue of the *Ferguson Forum*, Miriam published a final appeal to the voters before they headed to the polls for the Democratic primary run-off election. In it, much like the feminine nonpartisan reformer, she (somewhat sarcastically) positioned herself above the masculine political fray:

I have not in this campaign referred to my opponent only in terms of respect and so far as I am informed he has pursued the same course toward me. While he and my husband have carried on more or less of a mutual admiration society, I have not thought it necessary for me to engage in personalities. As I am by the voice of the people to be the governor I deem it my duty to keep myself clear from personal strife. Men always have too much temper and they very often let their feelings rule them instead of their better judgment.¹⁵⁶

In this description of her own role in the contest, Miriam was adopting the old identity of the true woman and the municipal reformer, above the dirty dealings and mud-slinging commonly associated with politics. However, even as she invoked these old constructs, she was layering them with new meaning by using an apolitical identity to engage in the most partisan of activity.

¹⁵⁶ Miriam A. Ferguson, "Just a Word Before We Vote," *Ferguson Forum*, August 21, 1924.

After Miriam won a spot in the Democratic primary run-off election, the Fergusons not only reiterated the aspects of their campaign strategy that reflected domestic femininity, but also slightly altered them in ways that presented a more progressive view of womanhood. While expediency-based rationales helped Miriam reach the run-off, they also left the impression that she was merely a “stand-in” for Jim.¹⁵⁷ As the August 23 run-off grew closer, the Fergusons began to change their approach, giving Miriam more autonomy and providing an example of female equality, albeit with certain limitations. Instead of positioning her run as a proxy candidacy, they began to pitch a “two for one” message. For example, Miriam Ferguson participated in an in-depth profile in which she clarified Jim’s role: “If I am elected I am going to be the Governor. To Jim belongs only the honors that will go with being the husband of the Governor. He will be my right-hand man, that’s all just like I was when he was Governor.”¹⁵⁸ Jim’s approach, in keeping with his entertaining style on the stump, was a bit sarcastic. He told crowds: “Of course, I am going to help my wife if she is elected Governor. Every man helps his wife. While she is running the main show, I’m going to bring in the wood and water every day.”¹⁵⁹ Many voters seemed to be persuaded by this argument; they expressed their support by wearing campaign buttons with the slogans, “Two for the Price of One,”

¹⁵⁷ Marshall and Mayhead, “The Changing Face of the Governorship,” 6.

¹⁵⁸ “If Elected, I Am Going to Be Texas’ Governor; Not Jim,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1924.

¹⁵⁹ Ted Dealey, “Ferguson Speaks to 10,000 Persons,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 14, 1924.

and “Me for Ma, and I ain’t got a darn thing against Pa.”¹⁶⁰ Expanding Miriam’s role in the campaign positioned her not as a proxy, but as part of a political partnership. It was a much more substantial role for Miriam and a much more egalitarian model of partisan behavior. Miriam wasn’t merely supporting Jim as a mother and wife; she was working with him as a political equal.

Upon winning her party’s nomination, an achievement synonymous with victory in Democratic Texas, Miriam couched her win as the vindication that her family had long pursued. In a profile by the Associated Press, she was described as having “‘no great desire’ to hold office” before her husband was barred from the ballot. The story reported that “she says her heart is full of joy, not because the office will mean much to her personally, but because the expression of the confidence of the people in the Ferguson family means everything to her children and her children’s children. Also she is proud for Jim’s sake.”¹⁶¹ A few months later, Miriam achieved complete symbolic vindication at the polls when she won the general election. Even members of the state legislature who had voted to impeach Jim Ferguson supported Miriam on Election Day.¹⁶²

Ultimately, Miriam proved to be an effective governor. She worked on transportation infrastructure and passed legislation aimed at ending the Ku Klux Klan, and she took positions that put her at odds with her husband, including full-fledged support of Prohibition laws. However, with Jim as a senior advisor, the corruption

¹⁶⁰ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 46.

¹⁶¹ “Victory for People ‘Ma’ Ferguson Says,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 24, 1924.

¹⁶² “From Man Who Voted To Impeach Ferguson,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 10, 1924.

that plagued his administration re-emerged, threatening Miriam's persona as a moral, above-the-fray anti-politician. To make matters worse, his activities nearly got Miriam impeached as well.¹⁶³ As a result, the Democratic Party broke tradition and failed to nominate her to a second term in 1926.

Between 1924 and 1942, Miriam Ferguson would run in a total of eleven electoral contests, and she went on to serve one more term in public office when she was elected governor again in 1932.¹⁶⁴ Throughout, Ferguson remained a powerful force in Texas politics, even after her husband's death. She maintained a "good book" of loyal supporters and would use her organizational skills and the continued goodwill of voters to throw considerable support behind candidates she favored.¹⁶⁵ This kind of political patronage made her a close advisor to the state's next generation of leaders, including John Connally, Price Daniel, Allan Shivers, and Lyndon

¹⁶³ Among the activities that led to accusations of corruption was Jim Ferguson's appointment to several paid advisory positions. Critics viewed compensation for such positions as a conflict of interest since these roles involved work on policy matters that could come before Miriam's administration. In addition, Jim's impolitic involvement with the State Highway Commission led to questionable contracts for his friends and he was alleged to have personally profited from the awarding of contracts for state textbooks. It was also alleged that Jim sought payment for press interviews and used his wife's position to coerce companies to buy ads in the *Ferguson Forum*. For more information about these allegations, see Young, "'Me for Ma,'" 125-126; and Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 74-283. Miriam Ferguson's reputation was also tarnished by her administration's handling of pardons for prisoners. After only seventy days in office, she had released 239 convicts. Her lenient clemency policy, particularly for poorer inmates who had broken Prohibition laws, drew strong criticism and fueled speculation that the Fergusons may have accepted monetary payments in exchange for pardons. For more details about the Fergusons' clemency policies, see Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 270-273. While the legislature wanted to pursue several of these allegations and hold impeachment proceedings, Miriam was able to use her position as governor to halt that process. Having adjourned the regular session, the legislature needed Miriam to call a special session in order to investigate her, and she refused to do so. For the details of Miriam's battle against the impeachment proceedings, see Paulissen and McQueary, *Miriam*, 145-147.

¹⁶⁴ Jack Lynn Calbert, "James Edward and Miriam Amanda Ferguson: The 'Ma' and 'Pa' of Texas Politics" (PhD diss., Indiana University at Bloomington, 1968), 277.

¹⁶⁵ Paulissen and McQueary, *Miriam*, 267.

Johnson.¹⁶⁶ Her relationship with Johnson was a particularly close one and they kept in touch until her death in 1961.¹⁶⁷

Both through her initial campaign and her subsequent gubernatorial and political career, Miriam Ferguson advanced a complex and nuanced notion of womanhood. Through casuistic stretching, she demonstrated that women need not completely reject the traditional characteristics of their roles as wives as mothers in order to adopt a more public role as a candidate and officeholder. Her persona and campaign discourse layered new characteristics onto those old ideals, demonstrating how a woman could be maternal, domestic, and supportive of her husband while still being politically active, assertive, and competitive. Furthermore, during the run-off phase of the election, Miriam's "two for the price of one" strategy advanced women's equality by providing a more egalitarian view of political marriage, giving her contributions the same weight as her husband's. Adding to the significance of Miriam's performance was that she lived, campaigned, and worked in the rural South, a place with few examples of progressive, partisan womanhood.

CONCLUSION

By 1930, nine widows and surrogates had ascended to statewide and federal office via matrimonial ties. The experience would have a profound impact on female office holding, opening up new paths to power while drawing upon and expanding traditional feminine ideals. As evidenced by this study, many of these women stressed domestic, wifely, and maternal traits as justifications for their campaigns. Some, like

¹⁶⁶ Paulissen and McQueary, *Miriam*, 291.

¹⁶⁷ For more information about Miriam Ferguson's close relationship with Lyndon Johnson, see Paulissen and McQueary, *Miriam*, 262-282.

Mae Ella Nolan left office, believing politics to be incompatible with a “feminine” disposition. But many more demonstrated that a passion for politics and personal ambition could, indeed, reside within a woman, co-existing with many of the characteristics associated with traditional femininity. As Miriam Ferguson told the *New York Times* after having served two terms as Texas’ governor, “I love my politics. It’s just in me.”¹⁶⁸

The paths pioneered by early congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates provided a means by which women could continue to advance female equality and expand their public activity during the early decades of the doldrums. They helped women transcend certain contextual forces, including conflicting gender ideologies, that often served as barriers to women’s political ambitions. Would-be female candidates were particularly disadvantaged by the lack of unity among newly-enfranchised female voters, which left them without much-needed institutional, movement, and electoral support. Of this period, feminist writer Miriam Allen de Ford later said in an interview,

there were plenty of feminists and you knew who they were and they wrote individually, or spoke individually, but there was no organized movement outside of birth control. There was nothing for them, they had no organ, no avenue, to speak through. [...] There wasn’t anything, no movement, nothing to join.¹⁶⁹

Within this context, expediency-based discourses that appealed to and expanded the traditional characteristics of the wife and mother ideals became

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Squire Adler, “Then and Now,” *New York Times Magazine* (April 8, 1951), 75.

¹⁶⁹ Miriam Allen de Ford, “Miriam Allen de Ford: On the Soapbox,” in *From Parlor to Prison: Five American Suffragists Talk About Their Lives*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), 190-191.

powerful discursive forces that justified a wide range of female civic and political activities. These arguments, and the celebration of motherhood/wifehood that they engendered, could be found in the rhetorics of municipal housekeeping and partisan mothering. Such discourses set the stage for widows and spousal surrogates to emerge as powerful public leaders. In the 1920s, women who ascended to office via matrimonial ties justified their candidacies by appealing to conservative notions of femininity. They invoked their maternal authority, appealed to domestic femininity, and fulfilled their spousal duty to support and be subservient to their husbands. Since female officeholders at the statewide and federal levels numbered so few, these rhetorical performances had a profound impact on the culture's public vocabulary regarding femininity and political power. Through the process of casuistic stretching, widows and surrogates reinforced the traditional characteristics of the wife/mother roles even as they imbued them with new meaning. Their efforts altered the terms "wife" and "mother" in ways that allowed them to encompass a broader range of public, political activities, specifically campaigning and office holding.

It would be naïve to suggest that the impact of these efforts was uniformly liberating. Even as they used conservative notions of femininity to create new electoral opportunities, surrogates and widows reinscribed those same traditional ideals. Early surrogates and widows could have adopted the new woman persona, a move that would have imbued their candidacies with a more liberating significance. Instead, they consistently turned to traditional notions of womanhood made salient by the decade's reformers and female partisans to justify their campaigns. Some of these women went even further and explicitly rejected the notion of a more liberated and

egalitarian role for women. At one point, Ferguson told an interviewer “that the muchly condemned flapper era will run its course and will leave no scars except those suggested by the so-called reformers.”¹⁷⁰ Whether motivated by hostility, expediency, or ambivalence, by choosing traditional ideals of femininity upon which to base their campaigns, early widows and surrogates gave those characteristics enhanced importance and ultimately perpetuated them in the process.

Despite these limitations, the campaigns of surrogates and widows were able to expand the woman’s sphere in important ways. When one considers the 1920s context within which they were operating, it becomes evident that widows and surrogates contributed to the meaningful ways in which women advanced female political activity during this decade. The most obvious contribution to this forward momentum stemmed from their existence and example. By their mere presence, these women became powerful archetypes of the female exercise of institutional power in elective positions. Regardless of how they achieved office, once there they demonstrated woman’s capacity to amass a significant record of accomplishment and secure statewide and federal positions in their own right. For example, once in office, Miriam Ferguson pursued policies that directly conflicted with her husband’s stated positions. She differed with his anti-Prohibition stance and, while in office, supported enforcement of those laws.¹⁷¹ She also pursued a higher education platform that effectively ended her husband’s war with the state university.¹⁷² The record that

¹⁷⁰ “If Elected, I Am Going to Be Texas’ Governor; Not Jim,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1924.

¹⁷¹ “Would Not Offer for Re-Election,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1924.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Miriam Ferguson amassed while in office may have reflected Jim Ferguson's agenda but it also included accomplishments that were uniquely her own.

Similarly, while the initial campaigns of Nellie Tayloe Ross, Miriam Ferguson, and Edith Nourse Rogers may have been predicated upon their widowhood status and emphasized traditional notions of femininity, their subsequent elective and appointive successes highlighted their individual achievements instead of their status as wives or mothers. Tayloe Ross was appointed the first female director of the U.S. Mint, an honor bestowed because of her successful term as Wyoming's governor and her active support of Franklin Roosevelt.¹⁷³ The voters of Massachusetts re-elected Edith Nourse Rogers 17 times. A full review of her campaign papers and press coverage from subsequent elections failed to locate a single reference to her desire to fulfill her husband's legacy after her initial election in 1925.¹⁷⁴ And Miriam Ferguson was successfully re-elected to the Texas governorship in 1932; although Jim Ferguson played a role in that campaign, it more prominently highlighted Miriam's qualifications and her previous record in office.¹⁷⁵ Hence, once in office, the women

¹⁷³ Scheer, *Governor Lady*, 174.

¹⁷⁴ This assessment is based upon an exhaustive review of the Edith Nourse Rogers Papers, which are located at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

¹⁷⁵ In announcing her 1932 candidacy, Miriam Ferguson highlighted her record of accomplishment, telling voters to judge her candidacy by comparing her merits with those of her competitors: "In answer to those who may think a woman should not hold high station, permit me to call attention to my administration of only one term in comparison with the last four administrations of men. I repeat that 'Who can best serve Texas' should be the standard of the patriotic and intelligent voter." See "Mrs. Ferguson Will Run Again for Governor," *Dallas Morning News*, February 16, 1932. Ferguson also released a detailed, ten-plank platform under her own name. A summary of the platform is included in "Mrs. Ferguson Gives Platform," *Dallas Morning News*, March 17, 1932. In a speech during the 1932 campaign, Miriam Ferguson again urged Texans to base their vote on her record: "I want to give you another Ferguson administration. [...] I want my record weighed in the balance with that of other Governors. If found wanting, I do not deserve and shall not expect your support." See "Jim Ferguson In Great Trim In Last Speech," *Dallas Morning News*, July 23, 1932.

featured in this chapter amassed impressive achievements and leadership credentials. One cannot ignore the important impact of their examples as they emerged as role models for other women seeking to hold elective office and directly wield political power.

Furthermore, some of the women mentioned in this chapter encouraged their peers to exercise their full citizenship rights by pursuing a wide range of civic and political activities. Nellie Tayloe Ross encouraged mothers and housewives to become more knowledgeable about current events for the good of their family. Calling these jobs “the noblest and most satisfying career for women,” she argued that a wife and mother could accomplish much from the home and for her family if “she should try to broaden her interests to embrace all humanity.”¹⁷⁶ Edith Nourse Rogers promoted and celebrated female military service through the formation of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps.¹⁷⁷ Tayloe Ross and Ferguson even encouraged women to run for office. In 1927, Tayloe Ross used natural rights arguments, which highlight woman’s personhood and “sameness” in relation to men, to argue that women were well-qualified to hold elective positions. She said, a “woman will succeed or fail just as a man will succeed or fail, and it is difficult to understand why a generation brought up under the coeducational system of the American public schools should imagine that there is any real difference in the manner in which men and women approach intellectual or practical problems.”¹⁷⁸ In 1931, Miriam Ferguson

¹⁷⁶ “Presiding Over a Home Is Best Career, Gov. Ross Tells Women,” *Denver Post*, April 23, 1925.

¹⁷⁷ “Women’s Army Corps,” *Boston Herald*, February 1, 1942.

¹⁷⁸ Nellie Tayloe Ross, “The Governor Lady,” *Good Housekeeping* 85 (September 1927), 218.

agreed to participate in a speaking tour sponsored by the Democratic Party; in part, the tour aimed “to present her to the women voters as an example of the advantages offered women with political aspirations in the Democratic party.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, through their personas and their discourse, on both expediency and natural rights grounds, the widows and surrogate of the 1920s began to make the case for greater female office holding.

Of course, this study considers one of their greatest achievements to be the pioneering of new paths by which women could ascend to elective office. Through their campaign discourse, these candidates provided the rhetorical justifications for an electoral tradition that would continue to elevate women to statewide elective positions well into the twentieth century. By 1930, the precedent for a form of female office holding predicated upon spousal ties, domestic qualifications, and maternal and wifely duties had been firmly established.

The candidacies and campaigns studied in this chapter broadened what constituted acceptable experiences and qualifications for political office in ways that benefitted women. In the earliest days of the doldrums, Nolan, Nourse Rogers, Tayloe Ross, and Ferguson pioneered two paths predicated upon matrimonial ties. A little over a decade later, Margaret Chase Smith would travel one of them and reveal just how far women could go.

¹⁷⁹ “‘Ma’ May Speak in Other States,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 31, 1924.

CHAPTER 3: MARGARET CHASE SMITH: WIDOWHOOD, EQUALITY, AND POLITICAL EFFICACY, 1940 AND 1948

By the time Margaret Chase Smith secured her seat in the U.S. House in 1940, thirty women had served in Congress. Nearly half of them were congressional widows whose candidacies were predicated, at least in part, upon fulfilling their wifely duty to their deceased husband. As a widow, Chase Smith traveled a well-worn path to office. As a candidate and officeholder, she expanded that path, advancing it to previously inconceivable destinations and demonstrating widowhood's continued capacity to act as a space of political empowerment for women. Her career ultimately spanned more than three decades and included hard-won victories earned long after the shadow of sympathy and the specter of wifely obligation had passed. In 1948, she became the first woman elected to both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate in her own right. Her popularity and acclaim meant that she was frequently mentioned as a possible vice presidential pick. And, in 1964, she became the first woman to have her name placed in nomination for the U.S. presidency by one of the two major political parties. Yet, the importance of these milestones is matched only by the significance of her rhetorical leadership while achieving them. Margaret Chase Smith's contributions as a candidate and officeholder demonstrate the way in which individual women sustained the momentum of female progress during the decades of the doldrums.

Much has been written about the way that Chase Smith used public office to advocate for policies that advanced women's opportunities and rights, most notably

the Equal Rights Amendment and gender parity in the armed forces.¹ However, little attention has been paid to Chase Smith's rhetorical leadership during her various campaigns for office, particularly how she used those electoral opportunities to advance arguments and rationales that served to empower female candidates and voters. Although Chase Smith strenuously rejected any attempt to affix the "feminist" label to her policy work or political positions, she nonetheless used her campaigns to articulate a broader sense of candidate credentials and voter efficacy that uniquely benefitted women.²

¹ In 1945, Chase Smith joined Rep. Edith Nourse Rogers in introducing the Equal Rights Amendment, marking the first time women cosponsored the ERA. For background on Chase Smith's work on the ERA, see Janann Sherman, *No Place for a Woman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 65-66; and Patricia Ward Wallace, *Politics of Conscience* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 67-68. For background on Chase Smith's advocacy on behalf of women in the armed services, see Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 65-72; Sherman, "'They Either Need These Women or They Do Not': Margaret Chase Smith and the Fight for Regular Status for Women in the Military," *The Journal of Military History* 54 (1990): 47-78; Sherman, "'The Vice Admiral': Margaret Chase Smith and the Investigation of Congested Areas in Wartime," in *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society*, ed. Kenneth Paul O'Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1995), 119-138; Sherman, "Women are Very Essential Sometimes: Margaret Chase Smith and the Women's Armed Services' Integration Act of 1948," *The Military Order of the World Wars Officer Review* (January 1992): 3-4.; and Wallace, *Politics of Conscience*, 68-73.

² In her autobiography, Chase Smith expressed concern that her policy work on behalf of women in the armed forces would lead some to conclude she was a feminist. Writing in 1972, when the second wave of feminism was well underway, she remarked that her work in the U.S. House establishing the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) "left the impression, I'm afraid, that I was a feminist concentrating on legislation for women. And if there is any one thing I have attempted to avoid it is being a feminist. I definitely resent being called a feminist." Margaret Chase Smith, *Declaration of Conscience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 85. The rejection of the feminist label was likely, in part, the result of the politics and tactics associated with the movement in the decades that Chase Smith served in public life. Despite backing policy goals that many self-described feminists supported, such as the ERA and equal compensation and treatment for women in the armed forces, Chase Smith and other prominent political women like Eleanor Roosevelt eschewed the term because of its political implications and association with tactics they did not endorse. For more information, see Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 3-4; Jo Freeman, *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 175; Lelia J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 23, 136; Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 455; Maureen Boyd Vallin, *Margaret Chase Smith: Model Public Servant* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 10.

Using Chase Smith's 1940 and 1948 campaigns as inflection points for study, this chapter explores her rhetorical leadership when seeking election to both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate. The chapter is broken into three sections. The first section surveys Chase Smith's upbringing and early adulthood in Maine, where she was exposed to a broad spectrum of arguments by and about female partisan activity, professional work, and elective office holding. Chase Smith's involvement in Republican politics, the business world, and civic associations exposed her to a rhetorical culture marked by the tension between personhood and womanhood, an ideological struggle left unresolved by the first wave of feminism. Well-acquainted with the public vocabulary about women and political power that struggle generated, Chase Smith's early life familiarized her with rhetorical resources that she later drew upon in her campaign discourse.

While the first section describes the rhetorical culture that served as the context for Chase Smith's childhood and early adulthood, the second section of this chapter analyzes her public discourse during her 1940 campaign for the U.S. House. A congressional widow, Chase Smith pushed the boundaries of that electoral tradition, using the justifications associated with her path to office to articulate both a more egalitarian view of political marriage and a broader sense of what constituted acceptable qualifications for female candidates. Underlying these efforts was the process of casuistic stretching, whereby Chase Smith further expanded the wife persona by layering new characteristics onto an old identity. As part of this process, Chase Smith conflated appeals to conservative notions of femininity with arguments that based her fitness for office on experiences garnered as a political wife. This move

encouraged voters to see political marriages as cooperative endeavors wherein the female spouse acquired legitimate credentials for public office as her husband's political partner and could rightly lay claim their shared achievements. Such arguments advanced the widowhood rationale, transforming the widow from the keeper of an electoral legacy into an equal contributor to a two-person career that transcended death. They also reflected a broader sense of domestic femininity, offering a more expansive meaning for the terms "wife" and "widow."

The third section of this chapter analyzes Chase Smith's speeches during her 1948 campaign for the U.S. Senate, when she sought to expand electoral opportunities for women once again. At a time when most women continued to view formal, electoral politics as the sole domain of men, Chase Smith appealed to female voters directly, encouraging them to run for office and to view themselves as a voting bloc worthy of serious appeals in electoral proceedings. Reflecting both sides of the personhood-womanhood ideological divide, Chase Smith couched these appeals in both progressive and conservative terms. First, she appealed to traditional feminine norms, highlighting woman's supposedly more peaceful and domestic nature as a justification for female office holding. Second, she challenged traditional norms directly, arguing for gender parity and highlighting women's equality with men. Finally, she aligned her campaign with conservative feminine political traditions and causes like "good government" and municipal housekeeping, seeking to make her 1948 campaign a symbol of the purifying effect many had long argued would result from greater female involvement in electoral politics. Taken together, these strategies achieved a successful electoral outcome for Chase Smith and encouraged a greater

sense of political efficacy among would-be female candidates and eligible female voters. In the process, Chase Smith's discourse provided women with rhetorical resources that they could use to justify a larger presence in electoral politics.

CONTEXT FOR CANDIDACY: RURAL MAINE, 1920s AND 1930s

The oldest of six children, Margaret Chase Smith's early life did not reveal her promise as a political leader or the heights to which she would ascend. In high school, she was only a fair student; her greatest achievements were on the court as part of the women's championship basketball team. Yet, outside of school, she demonstrated a tremendous work ethic that allowed her to amass an industrious resume. At just twelve years of age, Chase sought a part-time job at the Green Brothers' five-and-ten-cent store.³ The manager told her she had to wait until she was old enough to reach the top shelf, so a year later and a bit taller she returned and was hired to work afternoons, nights, weekends, and school vacations.⁴ That job was the first of many. In high school, Chase waitressed at a hotel restaurant, worked as a domestic in local homes, assisted with the town tax assessment process, and became Skowhegan's evening telephone operator.⁵ After graduation, she found work as a teacher, but soon returned to Skowhegan to pursue a permanent position in the telephone company's business offices and part-time work as the coach of the

³ Two different terms are used in this chapter to refer to Margaret Chase Smith. When referencing activities and events that occurred before her marriage to Clyde Smith, her maiden name, Chase, is used. When referring to activities and events that occurred after her marriage, she is referred to as Chase Smith since that is the name that she herself preferred to use in public life throughout her career.

⁴ Patricia L. Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith: Beyond Convention* (Orno: University of Maine Press, 1996), 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25, 42.

women's high school basketball team.⁶ Eventually lured away by the local newspaper, the *Independent Reporter*, Chase was steadily promoted over eight years from stenographer and subscription clerk to reporter and editorial writer.⁷ In 1927, she left the paper to take a job as the office manager for a local woolen mill, where she remained until 1930, resigning six months after she married.⁸

Chase's professional pursuits coincided with important personal events. When she was sixteen years old and working as a phone operator, she met Clyde H. Smith, a town selectman twenty-one years her senior and the man who would eventually become her husband. Although it is unclear exactly when the relationship turned romantic, Clyde had an indelible impact on Chase's young adulthood. Well-connected and professionally established, his position at the center of the state's social and political circles greatly benefited Chase. Between her industrious nature, Clyde's thoughtful guidance, and the assistance of his friends and colleagues, Chase was able to capitalize upon the wide array of professional and civic opportunities available to a young woman in the 1920s. Her relationship with Clyde opened professional doors, like the one at the newspaper, and introduced her to society types who served as her entrée to new civic opportunities. The wives of Clyde's friends helped her join the Eunice Farnsworth Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the local Sorosis Club.⁹ Chase also helped establish the local chapter

⁶ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 50; Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 18.

⁷ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 59.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 60; Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 19.

of the Maine Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW), a non-partisan organization designed to assist the growing ranks of working women who toiled in offices and other professional settings.¹⁰ Chase threw herself into these organizations and, in 1923, was elected president of the Sorosis Club¹¹ and head of the Skowhegan chapter of the BPW.¹² She was also active in the BPW's state organization, chairing several committees and ultimately becoming its president.¹³

In addition to her involvement in women's organizations, Chase was politically active. Over the years, she served as a member of the Skowhegan Republican Committee, the recording secretary for the Somerset County Republican Committee, and a delegate to the Republican District Convention.¹⁴ In 1930, the year she married, she was elected Maine State Republican Committeewoman, a post that involved networking with local women and building an organization capable of carrying out basic tasks on behalf of the party. As part of her committeewoman responsibilities, she was active in the Women's Republican Club, organized political rallies across the state, and mobilized female voters for Herbert Hoover.¹⁵ In short, Chase fully immersed herself in what J. Stanley Lemons has called the "hundreds and

¹⁰ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 20.

¹¹ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 61.

¹² *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 68; Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 20-21.

¹⁴ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 69; Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 26.

¹⁵ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 26, 32. The work of partisan women's clubs in the 1920s and 1930s was a continuation of the partisan women's groups formed in 1912 and discussed in Chapter One.

thousands of little items” that constituted women’s progress during the post-suffrage decades of the doldrums.¹⁶

Gender Ideology and Rhetorical Resources

Having come of age in the era of the “new woman” and the vote, Chase’s activities reflected the newfound freedom that many women were experiencing across the country. She entered the workforce and moved up the professional ladder, earning greater pay and responsibility as she went. She was politically active and civically engaged and felt comfortable enough in her independence to delay marriage into her thirties. In short, Chase’s opportunities were not limitless, but they were greatly expanded from the options available to her foremothers, and she made great use of them. Biographer Janann Sherman notes that in these days Chase closely resembled the era’s new woman, “arising from a restricted past, throwing off the cult of true womanhood and impatient with feminist fuss, [she] strode into the public world with aplomb, determination, and self-confidence, demanding recognition of her individuality.”¹⁷

However, while it is true that Chase embraced the opportunities of the new era, she also showed a great affinity for more traditional feminine ideals. According to Sherman, during her time with the BPW, Chase’s “behavior suggested fidelity to the genteel standards of a generation older than her flapper contemporaries.”¹⁸ As noted in Chapter Two, the flapper ideal was appealing, but not universally effective

¹⁶ J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 235.

¹⁷ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 21.

¹⁸ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 71.

for women seeking a broader role in public affairs. Many found they had to develop complex gendered personas that combined new and old characteristics if they wanted to be more active participants in the public square. This was particularly true in Maine, where securing suffrage had been a formidable fight. Unlike other states that granted women partial suffrage on the state level, Maine remained stalwart in its opposition until the bitter end, voting down a referendum that would have added female suffrage to the state constitution as late as 1917.¹⁹ Opposition to suffrage reflected the state's conservative attitudes about gender and was attributed, at least in part, to the pervasive belief "that women's essential place was in the home."²⁰ The state's conservative and entrenched ideas about gender even attracted the attention of Carrie Chapman Catt, who was concerned about the lack of progress toward equality on the state level and grew frustrated with the state's congressional delegation.²¹ The best illustration of the uphill battle in Maine is the state's failure to offer women even limited suffrage, which would have allowed them to vote only in presidential contests, until nearly a month after full female suffrage was ratified on the federal

¹⁹ Edward Schriver, "'Deferred Victory': Woman Suffrage in Maine, 1873-1920," in *Maine: A History Through Selected Readings*, ed. Edward O. Schriver and David C. Smith (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1985), 265.

²⁰ Schriver, "'Deferred Victory,'" 266. Schriver points out that another key factor was the suffrage movement's close relationship with the temperance movement. Maine had long been a prohibition state and those seeking to overturn that policy worried that giving women the vote would be counterproductive to their efforts. The make-up of the state legislature during the period discussed produced a strong coalition of both anti-prohibition Democrats and "wet" Republicans, which likely delayed the suffrage cause.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

level. Opponents of woman suffrage refused to cede any ground until the debate became entirely moot.²²

Given this context, it's understandable that women in Maine benefitted by couching their advocacy for female equality in conservative terms. For example, at Colby College, a crucible for the state's debate over female higher education, pro-female education forces advanced the argument that each woman needed greater educational opportunities to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother.²³ Among these advocates was Louise Coburn, the college's second female graduate. Biographer Patricia Schmidt notes that Coburn became an important role model for Chase, particularly in the way that Coburn and her allies "embrace[d] ... tradition, even as they undermined and rejected it." It was a rhetorical move that "foreshadowed the path Margaret Chase Smith would follow throughout her career."²⁴

The tendency to embrace traditional femininity while simultaneously working to stretch its boundaries to include new activities could be found in Maine's political circles as well. While Maine voters had never elected a woman to serve as governor, U.S. senator, or congressman, by the time Chase sought her husband's seat, Maine boasted more female state legislators than almost any other state in the country.²⁵ In fact, between 1931 and 1941, twenty-two women served in the legislature, including

²² ²² Schriver, "Deferred Victory," 267. Maine's legislature approved a referendum for female suffrage in 1919 and the referendum vote was set for September 1920. However, events unfolded more quickly than anticipated on the federal level and the federal amendment was ratified nearly a month before Maine's referendum vote, making the Maine victory a largely symbolic one.

²³ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, xix.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

two widows.²⁶ The way these female pioneers crafted their public personas ran the gamut. For example, Dora Pinkham, the first woman elected to the Maine State House, took the oath in 1923. When a reporter asked why she decided to run, she cited not personal ambition or female political equality, but the need to alleviate men of the burden of public service since they were busy making a living and could not spare the time.²⁷ It was a rationale that relied upon traditional ideas about masculinity and proved an instructive justification for women like Chase who were active in their communities and involved in political work.²⁸ However, Maine's partisan circles were not uniformly conservative when it came to gender and politics. Among the female role models who successfully aligned themselves with a natural rights philosophy and new woman ideology was Gail Laughlin, a suffragist who was elected to the state legislature in 1927. Laughlin served three terms in the Maine state house and two in the senate.²⁹ A supporter of the ERA and vocal advocate for women's fair treatment in the workplace, she often framed her arguments by stressing women's natural rights as individuals and the need for political equality.³⁰

²⁶ Edward Schriver, "From Rule 25 to the ERA: Women in the Maine Legislature," in *Maine: A History Through Selected Readings*, ed. Edward O. Schriver and David C. Smith (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1985), 359.

²⁷ Patricia L. Schmidt, "Vibrating to an Iron String: Margaret Chase Smith and Her Construction of Gender at Century's Midpoint," in *Of Place and Gender: Women in Maine History*, ed. Marli F. Weiner (Orono: University of Maine Press, 2005), 384.

²⁸ For background about constructs of masculinity like the "breadwinner" that highlighted male economic responsibility, see Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

²⁹ Schriver, "From Rule 25 to the ERA," 359.

³⁰ For a survey of Gail Laughlin's advocacy on behalf of women's issues in which she employed natural rights arguments, see Ruth Sargent, "Gail Laughlin and Maine Politics," in *Maine: A History Through Selected Readings*, ed. Edward O. Schriver and David C. Smith (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1985), 353-354, 356.

Coburn, Pinkham, and Laughlin demonstrate the complex crossroads at which women who were active in their communities, involved in partisan politics, and engaged in the workforce found themselves in the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, they benefitted from greater professional and civic opportunities, more permissive attitudes about gender, and progressive ideals like the new woman. On the other hand, conservative notions of woman's proper place did not fully retreat from view. In fact, they regained cultural salience as the Great Depression reinscribed more traditional familial patterns and roles.³¹ Despite broader civic and professional opportunities for women, the classic division of labor within families remained more or less intact, with men representing the family in public life and women facing substantial pressures to limit their goals to domestic pursuits, particularly if they were married.³² Based upon her review of the cultural forces at play between the two world wars, Ruth Schwartz Cohen argues that "the trap [for the feminine mystique of the 1960s] was laid during the roaring 20s, not the quiet 50's."³³ According to Schwartz Cohen, women's magazines and advertisers continued to promote a conservative brand of

³¹ Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 13-14.

³² *Ibid.*, 14.

³³ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife Between the Wars," *Women's Studies* 3 (1976), 147.

domestic femininity:

[They suggested] that women were purely domestic creatures, that the goal of each normal woman's life was the acquisition of a husband, a family and a home, that women who worked outside their homes were 'odd' (for which read 'ugly,' 'frustrated,' 'compulsive', or 'single') and that this state of affairs was sanctioned by the tenets of religion, biology, psychology and patriotism.³⁴

In other words, while the conservative ideals of the previous century may have been challenged by competing and more progressive visions of womanhood, they nevertheless continued to find expression in various outlets and remain in broad circulation. Hence, women, like Chase, who came of age in the 1930s encountered a gendered landscape riddled with conflicting guidance about the proper exercise of their newfound freedoms.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the tension between traditional and progressive notions of womanhood was nothing new. It had long been a central feature in discourse regarding female public activity. Nineteenth-century activists employed what scholars have termed "arguments from expediency," discourses that subtly challenged traditional femininity even as it seemingly embraced it.³⁵ Emphasizing more conservative notions of womanhood, this argument form "presumed that women and men were fundamentally different, so that it would be beneficial, that is desirable and prudent, to give women rights because of the effect on society."³⁶ Yet, activists also employed discourse borne out of the concept of natural

³⁴ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Two Washes in the Morning," 148.

³⁵ Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 72.

³⁶ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 1:14.

rights, which emphasized a woman's essential personhood. Rather than calling attention to the ways in which men and women were different, such arguments focused on the ways that, as independent citizens, they were similar. If all men were created equal and had the inalienable right to consent to the laws by which they were governed, it followed that women should expect the same.³⁷ As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell notes, natural rights and expediency-based arguments are diametrically opposed, and yet continue to co-exist within our rhetorical culture. The tension between personhood, an individual and rights-based identity, and womanhood, a gendered identity rooted in feminine superiority, has long been the basis for an ongoing ideological struggle that the women's rights movement has never fully resolved.³⁸

As we saw in Chapter Two, this ideological tension was reflected in the complex personas and justificatory rhetorics that women used to advocate for a greater role in public life. Women like Mae Ella Nolan, Nellie Tayloe Ross, Edith Nourse Rogers, and Miriam Ferguson embraced the tension rather than resolving it. They layered traditional womanhood ideals with new meanings through casuistic stretching. By stretching the boundaries of old ideals to fit with new contexts and justify new activities, these women embraced the equalizing aspects of personhood/natural rights arguments without completely rejecting traditional notions of femininity embodied by womanhood/ expediency-based arguments. The stretching of conservative ideals to include progressive characteristics produced a powerful

³⁷ Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, 44.

³⁸ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Femininity and Feminism: To Be or Not to Be a Woman," *Communication Quarterly* 31 (1983), 102.

rationale that helped pioneer the paths of congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy.

According to Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, these two strands of discourse (and the ideological constructs of womanhood and personhood that spawned them) continued to circulate throughout the decades of the thirties, forties, and fifties. Women sought greater equality by “deny[ing] gender differences; since they wanted equal opportunity, they reasoned, they should assert the basic humanity of women.” They did so “by insisting that women be treated like men.”³⁹ However, they also continued to employ expediency arguments, “put[ting] women’s gender identity first” and “carr[ying] on the tradition of the nineteenth-century feminists who believed in the moral superiority of women, especially with regard to their peace-loving and life-giving nature.”⁴⁰ Much like their foremothers, these women continued to argue “that women were fundamentally different from and superior to men and that the movement of women into positions of power would transform society in basic and desirable ways.”⁴¹ Also much like nineteenth-century advocates, they “argued their case in terms of *both* women’s difference from and their equality to men” and “simultaneously maintained that women should be understood as equal to *and* different from men.”⁴² Rupp and Taylor suggest that this conflict and the argument forms it spawned framed the rhetorical culture from the 1930s through the 1950s.

³⁹ Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴² Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 35.

Such continuity is not surprising. As Campbell argues, “similar rhetorical problems make the appearance of recurrent rhetorical choices appropriate and predictable.”⁴³

Adopting a positionalist perspective further illuminates this continuity. The tension between personhood and womanhood gave rise to rhetorical formations, including language choices, argument forms, and rhetorical strategies that rested upon both conservative feminine ideals and progressive ideas about natural rights. These formations became part of the public vocabulary surrounding women and political power. Women seeking and speaking about female electoral power in the thirties and forties were not sealed off from the public vocabulary of an earlier era. Indeed, they were informed and influenced by it. The pre-suffrage public vocabulary provided a reservoir of rhetorical formations that they could, and did, draw upon.

As this chapter will demonstrate, although not part of a vibrant and organized women’s movement, those toiling for greater political equality and opportunity in the period known as the doldrums grappled with and reflected the on-going ideological struggle between personhood and womanhood in their discourse. Women like Margaret Chase Smith made use of the rhetorical resources available in the public vocabulary, drawing from and contributing to natural rights and expediency-based rationales that justified greater political and civic opportunities in a post-suffrage age. They also drew from and contributed to our understanding of the terms “mother,” “widow,” and “wife,” and expanded the activities available to the women who invoked them.

⁴³ Campbell, “Femininity and Feminism,” 101.

One place where this process visibly played out was in the political parties, particularly the Republican Party. In the doldrum decades, Republican women debated different notions of female partisanship and their proper role at length. Some emphasized personhood. Abandoning the expedient line of argument that women had different natures and political styles and could, therefore, offer the parties something uniquely feminine, they instead sought to assimilate into the party. They hoped to become equals with male partisans by emphasizing ideological solidarity over gender differences. Others felt it best to highlight the supposedly unique attributes of their womanhood, emphasizing differences between men and women and their political styles. They thereby continued to carve out a special space for women within the party based on feminine authority.⁴⁴

In short, the rhetorical culture of the twenties and thirties shifted between progressive and traditional ideas about gender, a somewhat predictable situation given the ideological struggle women inherited and the public vocabulary that framed it. Due to her wide range of civic and political activities, Chase was fully ensconced in this debate. Her work with the BPW, an organization that embraced ambition and eschewed the notion that professional and partisan pursuits were unfeminine, familiarized Chase with a worldview more in keeping with the personhood perspective and the natural rights-based discourse associated with it.⁴⁵ In contrast, civic clubs like Sorosis drew upon conservative notions of femininity as justification for their work. Sorosis, in particular, was associated with the “municipal

⁴⁴ Rymph, *Republican Women*, 4.

⁴⁵ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 20.

housekeeping” movement discussed in Chapter Two, a movement that enabled women to become involved in causes like good government and community betterment on the basis of their roles as wives and mothers and their more moral, more ethical, and uniquely domestic nature.⁴⁶ Occupying a perplexing middle ground were women’s organizations in the Republican Party, which vacillated between predicating female activity on the basis of political equality and feminine authority well into the 1960s. Active in business, politics, and civic life, Chase faced a broad range of choices in terms of how she chose to engage with this gendered world. In 1930, the significance of those choices was heightened when she married Clyde Smith and added “political wife” to her long list of public roles.

1930-1940: POLITICAL WIFE TURNED POLITICAL CANDIDATE

In 1930, Margaret Chase and Clyde Smith married in a simple ceremony in Maine, capping off a long-term on-again, off-again courtship. A new bride in a new decade, Chase Smith at first attempted to be the perfect traditional wife. She quit her job at the woolen mill and devoted herself to the task of maintaining the home that she and Clyde now shared. Chase Smith sought to be a successful homemaker, putting considerable pressure on herself to cook, entertain, and keep her home running smoothly. However, she found the endless household tasks associated with her new role overwhelming and tedious. Ultimately, Clyde encouraged her to trade in her domestic duties for more of an active role in his career.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 19.

⁴⁷ Schmidt recounts a pivotal conversation between Chase Smith and Clyde Smith, which occurred eighteen months into their marriage. Having spent half of a day preparing a homemade meal, Clyde told her, “Sis, you could spend your time to better advantage. I would suggest you not do that again.” According to Schmidt, after this conversation it was clear that Clyde was not looking for “a

Clyde had long been a figure in Maine politics. Over his lifetime, he won 48 elections, serving as a selectman, a sheriff, chairman of the state highway commission, and a member of both the Maine House of Representatives and State Senate.⁴⁸ During the Great Depression, while the nation shifted toward more liberal policies, Maine remained a Republican stronghold, a fact that greatly benefitted Clyde's political ambitions. In 1936, the Pine Tree State was one of only two states to vote against a second term for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.⁴⁹ Roosevelt's misfortune was Clyde's good luck, and that year he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

For the next three years, Chase Smith and Clyde divided their time between Skowhegan, Maine, and Washington, DC. While the Depression created nostalgia for conventional gender ideals and a deepening of traditional divisions of familial labor, Chase Smith's unique circumstances allowed her to explore greater professional opportunities as a partner in her husband's career.⁵⁰ Sherman notes that throughout their marriage, Chase Smith served as Clyde's "secretary, aid, confidant, campaign manager, and liaison."⁵¹ In this way, the Smiths' marriage was not unlike the political

housewife," but instead wanted a "political wife and junior partner." From that point forward, Chase Smith took a more active role in her husband's work and political affairs. Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 89-92.

⁴⁸ Janann Sherman, "Campaigning Without Cash: The Political Campaigns of Margaret Chase Smith" (paper presented at the Social Science History Association Meeting, Baltimore, MD, November 6, 1993).

⁴⁹ Ware, *Holding Their Own*, xv.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁵¹ Janann Sherman, "Margaret Chase Smith and Women's Clubs: A Political Education" (lecture, New England Historical Association Meeting, New London, CT, October 17, 1998).

partnerships forged by many of their predecessors and contemporaries. For example, scholars have noted similar divisions of labor among presidents and first ladies. In fact, the presidency is a predictable institution for such an arrangement since, as Betty Boyd Caroli notes, it embodies two sets of duties that are typically assigned to two separate individuals in other systems of government. In such systems, one head of state is responsible for ceremonial activities while the other addresses substantive matters, such as appointments and legislative action. The U.S. presidency concentrates all of those activities in one elective office, and to address the breadth of activity and lack of manpower encompassed by the role, first ladies as far back as Martha Washington have become vital participants in the enterprise.⁵²

In an effort to better understand this cooperative approach, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell encourages scholars to view the presidency as a “two-person career,” or a career that, by virtue of its “formal and informal institutional demands,” necessarily “precludes a traditional public-private spousal division of labor and requires their cooperative efforts if it is to be pursued successfully.”⁵³ Over time first ladies have fulfilled their role in this cooperative effort in various ways. While some emphasized the “status maintenance,” or ceremonial, functions associated with the office, almost all have influenced more substantial decisions regarding personnel, policy, and scheduling.⁵⁴ In 1922, Florence Harding observed that conventional wisdom held that a couple could not handle more than one career, and if the career they chose to invest

⁵² Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xviii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

in was the husband's, then the wife should find a way to "merge her own with it."⁵⁵ Harding's explanation is a perfect description of Chase Smith's evolution from independent career woman to political spouse. Smart, organized, politically savvy, and newly married, Chase Smith effectively merged her budding career with Clyde's, helping him secure a congressional seat and fulfill the duties of that office.

Chase Smith's evolution into an effective political partner occurred at a time when the contributions made by first ladies were becoming more visible. In 1933, just three years after Chase Smith married Clyde, Eleanor Roosevelt arrived in the White House and began, according to Campbell, "the most significant enlargement of the First Ladyship in modern times."⁵⁶ By 1937, when Clyde joined the U.S. House, the Roosevelts were embarking upon their second term in office. A true partner in public life, Eleanor Roosevelt went out into the country and reported back what she saw and heard. She gave speeches, wrote newspaper columns, and had a radio show, and she used these forums to talk about substantive policy matters.⁵⁷ Chase Smith no doubt identified with Eleanor Roosevelt. Both had been politically-active career women before marriage, both were active contributors to their husbands' careers, and both occasionally had to defend such contributions from critics by casting them as the wifely duties of a helpmate.⁵⁸ While Eleanor Roosevelt pushed the boundaries of what the two-person career model meant for first ladies, Chase Smith was engaged in

⁵⁵ Caroli, *First Ladies*, 167.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

her own version of a marital political partnership on the congressional level. Yet, even Chase Smith could not anticipate the professional opportunities that awaited her. As Clyde's third campaign for the U.S. House got underway, she would unexpectedly and abruptly move from her role behind the scenes to the top of the ticket.

1940 Election: Chase Smith Campaign Announcement

During the 1940 campaign cycle, Clyde became ill. While he had originally planned to run for governor of Maine that year, his health deteriorated and he abandoned the gubernatorial campaign, opting instead to pursue the less rigorous task of seeking re-election to his House seat. In the spring of 1940, Clyde felt too weak to attend the Republican State Convention, so in keeping with their cooperative approach to his career, Chase Smith traveled to Portland and appeared in his stead. However, her trip was cut short when she received word that Clyde's condition was deteriorating, prompting her to rush back to Washington, DC.

When it became apparent that Clyde Smith's condition was grave, preparations began to preserve his congressional seat in the event that he became temporarily unable to campaign or fulfill his duties. In an account contained within the archival files at her library, Chase Smith detailed the final days of Clyde's life and the decision to place her name before the voters of Maine.⁵⁹ The account is of interest not only as a matter of historical record, but also as a rhetorical artifact; it reveals how Chase Smith characterized these events for an outside audience.

⁵⁹ "MCS Story About CHS Last Days," 1940 Campaign Folder, Margaret Chase Smith Papers, Margaret Chase Smith Library, Skowhegan, ME. The account is a detailed description of the events as they unfolded. The exact date of authorship is unclear, but the account was written after 1949 since the material is typed on Margaret Chase Smith's Senate stationery. While it is possible that others were involved in the drafting of this account, there is ample evidence that Margaret was a primary contributor. The narrative vacillates between the use of the first and third person, and where third person pronouns appear, they are scratched out and are replaced with first-person pronouns.

In the narrative, Chase Smith went to great pains to make it clear that submitting her name for the 1940 campaign was not her idea. According to her, the first person to suggest the idea was Clyde's physician, Doctor Dickens, an interesting development since she described him as knowing "little about politics." Yet, in her account, it was Dickens who suggested that she could "quickly and quietly without publicity get a few names for myself and have them ready to file if Clyde continued to be in as serious condition as I thought and I become the candidate, Clyde serving me as I had him if he got around again."⁶⁰

According to the account in the archives, Chase Smith remained reluctant to have her name placed in nomination. It characterizes the Dickens' plan as bolstered by support from Maine's senior senator, Wallace White, as well as powerful Massachusetts congressman Joe Martin. Chase Smith's account also took great pains to emphasize that she was not responsible for approaching Clyde about the strategy or convincing him of its merits. According to Chase Smith, it was Doctor Dickens who pressed the idea, while she "still protested." When Doctor Dickens approached Clyde, Chase Smith recounted, he was reluctant, but he finally relented and called her in to dictate a statement to be released to the press.⁶¹ The statement urged support for "his wife and partner in public life," suggesting that Clyde "thought of her as his political successor."⁶² Within hours of the statement's release on April 8, 1940, Clyde Smith died. The woman who would be a surrogate was now faced with the decision of

⁶⁰ "MCS Story About CHS Last Days," 1940 Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Clyde Smith Statement, April 7, 1940, 1940 Campaign Folder, MCS Papers; Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 81.

whether to become a candidate. At the age of forty-two, Chase Smith had been thrust into the political spotlight.

Based on the archival account, it would appear that Chase Smith was aware of the need to emphasize that it was not personal ambition, but rather her wifely (and, later, her widow's) duty that prompted her run. The purpose of the narrative seems to be to remove all appearances that Chase Smith ever sought the seat on her own behalf or was an active participant in convincing Clyde to endorse her. In one version of the document, this focus is particularly clear. It states:

Margaret didn't want to do this but she felt she must in fairness to the people of Maine and in trying to protect her husband. As she has stated so often becoming a member of Congress or any other political office had never entered her mind, nor did she have any ambitions politically. She had lived from day to day doing all that she could to help her husband and the people he represented.⁶³

The veracity of the facts contained within this account is knowable only to the few people who consistently occupied the Smith home in the days leading up to Clyde's death: Margaret Chase Smith, Clyde Smith, Doctor Dickens, and Clyde's nurse. However, the account, whether entirely factual or not, is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is a detailed version of the standard narrative that Chase Smith consistently provided throughout her career to explain her initial run. For example, a briefer, but similar description of events also appeared in her autobiography,

⁶³ "MCS Story About CHS Last Days," 1940 Campaign Folder, MCS Papers. While authorship of archival materials can be difficult to determine, this account appears to have been penned by Chase Smith. The text appears on her congressional stationery and the particular portion of the account cited here, while written in the third person, has been heavily edited. The original text is filled with first person pronouns. These have been crossed out and replaced with "Margaret" and third person pronouns. It appears that this account was penned by Chase Smith and then edited so it would appear that an impartial observer wrote it.

Declaration of Conscience.⁶⁴ As late as 1987, she told a biographer that she was “just pushed along” in her candidacy by Clyde’s wishes.⁶⁵ She explained, “Sometimes I think these things were my destiny in the sense that I didn’t have anything to do with it. A life of public service was just thrust on me.”⁶⁶ Second, the narrative is developed in such a way that it goes to great lengths to fit with conservative notions of femininity. It depicts Chase Smith as eschewing ambition at every turn and positions her candidacy as a task pursued in loyalty and fidelity to her husband. Framed this way, her candidacy became an extension of her wifely duties as Clyde’s helpmate in public life and was consistent with age-old popular guidance that a widow should live in ways that honored and maintained her husband’s legacy.⁶⁷ Finally, the narrative was written some time after 1949, by which time Chase Smith had amassed an impressive record of her own, including election to the U.S. Senate. It speaks to the power of the congressional widowhood rationale that even after the successes of her own career and the significant passage of time, Chase Smith chose to emphasize and foreground details reflecting traditional notions of womanhood and widowhood in explaining her initial run.

Yet, the portrayal of Chase Smith as a reluctant candidate who eschewed unfeminine ambition and pursued office in order to fulfill the wishes of a dying

⁶⁴ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 169-160.

⁶⁵ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 4. Quotes and description of candidacy come from a 1987 interview Sherman conducted with Chase Smith, which is summarized in Sherman’s biography.

⁶⁶ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 4.

⁶⁷ Vivian Bruce Conger, *The Widow’s Might: Widowhood and Gender in Early British America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 83.

husband is complicated. A close examination of Clyde's deathbed statement and Chase Smith's subsequent campaign discourse tells a different story. Upon informing readers of the doctor's assessment of his health, Clyde urged voters to support Chase Smith since "even though I survive, I may be physically unable to take an active part in Congressional affairs for an indefinite time in the future." Clyde explained that "in loyalty" to his supporters and constituents, he asked Chase Smith "to also enter the primary." The closing paragraphs neatly summed up his justificatory basis for her candidacy:

All that I can ask of my friends and supporters is that in the coming primary and general election, if unable to enter campaign, they support the candidate of my choice, my wife and my partner in public life, Margaret Chase Smith. I know of no one else who has the full knowledge of my ideas and plans or is as well qualified as she is, to carry on these ideas and my unfinished work for my district.⁶⁸

When drafted, Clyde's statement was intended to serve as the justification for a surrogacy strategy. Much like "Pa" Ferguson in Texas who asked his supporters to vote for his wife more than a decade earlier, Clyde sought to mobilize his considerable network on Chase Smith's behalf. However, unlike Pa who initially viewed a surrogacy strategy as no different than a man running a business in his wife's name, the wording of Clyde's statement suggested that Chase Smith was to be viewed as more of a partner than a placeholder.⁶⁹ By taking the unusual step of describing Chase Smith as his "partner in public life," Clyde acknowledged that his

⁶⁸ Clyde Smith Statement, April 7, 1940, 1940 Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

⁶⁹ This description was much more in keeping with the Fergusons's "two for the price of one" strategy, which they adopted during the later stages of Miriam Ferguson's primary fight. See Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 216.

office was a two-person career and that Chase Smith's participation in the cooperative effort qualified her to not just hold his place, but also take it, if needed. The statement brought the cooperative approach between spouses on the congressional level out into the light. Such a perspective reflected a new way that the congressional widowhood rationale could be broadened and the meaning of the term "wife" could be expanded to take on greater political and civic significance. Clyde's statement positioned Chase Smith as a partner, not a proxy.

Clyde's statement took on greater importance when, just hours after it was released, he passed away. From that point forward, it would prove to be a guiding document in framing Chase Smith's candidacy.

1940 Special Election Campaign

By the time most voters read Clyde's plea, his death had transformed Chase Smith from a potential surrogate into a congressional widow. Ultimately she chose not only to run in the special election to complete Clyde's unexpired term, but also in the election for the full term that followed. As a result, she faced four contests in the five-month period following his death: a Republican primary for the special election on May 13, a special election for the unexpired term on June 3, a Republican primary for the full term on June 17, and the general election for the full term on September 9. Efforts to launch Chase Smith's candidacy for the special election quickly got underway. In addition to Clyde's deathbed endorsement, Chase Smith benefitted from the swift organizational efforts of county chairmen loyal to Clyde and women volunteers within her own social and professional network who mobilized and began

circulating her nomination papers.⁷⁰ Chase Smith took action immediately as well, framing her campaign in terms that reflected the era's on-going tension between personhood and womanhood. She would ultimately craft a complex rhetorical style that both highlighted her domestic duty as Clyde's wife to continue this work and, building upon the partnership framework, emphasized her qualifications for office as a candidate in her own right.

Throughout the campaign, Chase Smith's widowhood status was prominently featured. For starters, she frequently referenced her late husband in public remarks. She told one organization that her support for their cause had come "about through my association with my husband who has, as you know, made his life work, assisting those in need."⁷¹ On Memorial Day, rather than quoting Lincoln or a famous general, she quoted Clyde.⁷² The press release publicizing the remarks went out under the heading, "Statement of Margaret Chase Smith" with the subhead "Republican nominee for unexpired term and regular term as Representative to succeed the late Congressman Clyde H. Smith."⁷³ On another occasion, she revealed the last words Clyde's had uttered on his deathbed.⁷⁴ In subtle ways Chase Smith peppered her remarks with Clyde's favorite quotes and sayings, which served to remind audiences

⁷⁰ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 43.

⁷¹ Margret Chase Smith Speech at Clifton, Belgrade, May 2, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

⁷² Statement of Margaret Chase Smith, May 24, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ 1940 Statement to Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Binford, Brews, D.A. and Friends, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers. Also see Mercer Speech, August, 17, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

that she was not only a candidate, but also Clyde's grieving widow and partner in public life.

In keeping with the cultural expectations of widowhood, Chase Smith also positioned herself as the keeper of Clyde's legacy. In the towns of Clinton and Belgrade, she told voters that if elected she would be "keeping faith with her husband" by working to secure adequate pensions for senior citizens.⁷⁵ On a radio program, she spoke at length about labor policy and concluded her appearance by saying, "If I have the honor to succeed my husband in the coming election I shall hold 'the torch high' and continue the fight he always carried on for better labor conditions and for an adequate old age pension." She told voters she would "consider it my solemn obligation."⁷⁶ Her campaign literature echoed the widowhood rationale as well. Chase Smith released very little in the way of campaign materials, but one advertisement told the people of Maine, "Your Vote Will Be Appreciated" for "Margaret Chase Smith (Mrs. Clyde H. Smith)."⁷⁷

Press coverage echoed this emphasis on Chase Smith's widowhood status. For example, Elizabeth May Craig opened her April 11 column with a list of the current female members of Congress, noting the ways they arrived in office. A variation of the phrase "left vacant by her husband's death" appears five times in just the first two paragraphs. And then, as if to drive the point home, Craig notes that "Mrs. Norton is

⁷⁵ Margret Chase Smith Speech at Clifton, Belgrade, May 2, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers. Also see Waterville Republican Club, June 5, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

⁷⁶ Radio Interview Transcript, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

⁷⁷ Political Advertisement, *Lewiston Sun*, May 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers. Also ran in *Madison, Bulletin*, May 9, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

the only present member who was elected while her husband was alive; all the others were widows when elected.”⁷⁸ One story portrayed Chase Smith as a grieving widow, detailing a visit to the congressional office where Chase Smith’s “sad blue eyes belie her plucky smile.”⁷⁹ The author quoted Chase Smith as promising to follow in Clyde’s footsteps, stating, “I wouldn’t know anything else.”⁸⁰

However, unlike the candidates studied in Chapter Two, whose candidacies were predicated primarily upon their widowhood status, Chase Smith’s candidacy would foreground her qualifications for the office. In keeping with Clyde’s description of Chase Smith as his “partner in public life,” public discourse by and about Chase Smith portrayed her in terms befitting an incumbent and emphasized their cooperative approach to Clyde’s career. For example, in the statement that officially declared her entry into the race, Chase Smith couched her candidacy in terms more in keeping with an argument based on personhood than on womanhood. She argued that, “The women of Maine and the Nation in unusual degree have availed themselves of the privilege and have met the responsibilities of citizenship. It may not seem inappropriate that they should have an effective part in determining the policies of our government and the legislation under which our people shall live.”⁸¹

Edited drafts of the statement in Chase Smith’s handwriting reveal anxiety over this

⁷⁸ Elizabeth May Craig, *Inside Washington*, April 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁷⁹ Malvina Stephenson, “Widow Hopes to Carry on Maine Congressman’s Work,” *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ MCS Announcement Statement, April 13, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

paragraph. For example, the phrase “It may not seem inappropriate” was originally phrased “It is just,” a rhetorical framing that, if retained in the final draft, would have signaled a more natural rights-based approach to her candidacy. Furthermore, the earlier draft of the statement includes an extra paragraph that more explicitly justifies her candidacy on the basis of political equality: “Maine has five representatives in Congress. Are not the women of our state entitled to one of these five positions?” An alternative to the last line was also considered, appearing on the back of the page with an asterisk noting its possible insertion: “It may seem prudent and proper that one of these positions should be filled by a woman.” Most of the paragraph is crossed out, however, and the rest was dropped from the final text altogether.⁸² While Chase Smith struggled with the degree to which she should argue for the importance of having a female candidate in the race, these paragraphs make clear that she did not want to be seen as simply a placeholder or a figurehead, but as a candidate in her own right who was running on her unique qualifications. One paragraph aimed at achieving this objective frequently made its way into her public statements, echoing the two-person career rationale that Clyde articulated in his deathbed statement. On

⁸² Draft MCS Announcement Statement, April 10-11, 1940 Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

the campaign trail, Chase Smith often asked voters:

I ask you, is it not better in these trying days to vote for one who has had experience, whose contacts at the Capitol are already made and whose position concerning issues, vital to the welfare of us, the common people, has been proven, rather than to nominate one who cannot take office even if successful in September until the first of next year, which, at the moment looks like a critical time and who must take weeks and months for the average newcomer to become acquainted and useful to his constituents. Are not experience and understanding the needs of the citizens from the Second district, more essential in a candidate than the question of whether he is man or woman especially in these days [...].⁸³

In this way, Chase Smith sought to dismiss questions of gender, inviting voters to judge her using the same standards by which they would evaluate male candidates. Her work as Clyde's "partner in public life" had given her vast experience and connections. She sought to leverage these and emphasize that she was the most qualified candidate, regardless of gender.

The theme of political equality and emphasis on qualifications could also be found in the campaign's promotional materials. For example, Chase Smith's campaign produced a half-page political advertisement containing lengthy endorsements from seven prominent political and labor officials. As discussed in Chapter Two, early political widows like Edith Nourse Rogers downplayed similar endorsements, choosing to minimize their own qualifications so they could highlight their status as a wife and widow. In contrast, each of the testimonials in Chase Smith's materials noted her relationship to Clyde, but framed their relationship as a political partnership and highlighted their shared accomplishments. The president of the Carpenters Union asked voters to support her out "of gratitude toward the late

⁸³ Margret Chase Smith Speech at Clifton, Belgrade, May 2, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers; 1940 Election Stump Speech, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

Hon. Clyde H. Smith of Skowhegan and in appreciation of the work he and Mrs. Smith have done for labor.”⁸⁴ The endorsement suggested that Chase Smith and Clyde were a team that collectively worked on such matters together. No doubt recognizing the persuasive power of having a third party validate her spousal contributions and framing them as worthy experience in politics and governance, Chase Smith’s campaign published the ad on the day of the special primary election.

From the minute that she entered the race, Chase Smith pursued a complex rhetorical strategy that justified her candidacy both on the basis of wifely duty and on individual ability. The press coverage echoed these themes as well. Since Clyde Smith passed away within hours of the release of his surrogacy statement, coverage of his request that Chase Smith replace him ran alongside the news of his death. The close timing of his death and her entry into the race yielded coverage that paid tribute to the deceased congressman and simultaneously promoted his wife’s candidacy. In the days and weeks that followed, news stories conflated tributes to Clyde with the news of Chase Smith’s campaign.⁸⁵ The result was coverage that included three themes: tributes to Clyde’s reputation and record, reports of Chase Smith’s qualifications, and mention of her widowhood status.

First, press accounts eulogized Clyde, which in turn bolstered the goodwill that voters not only felt toward him, but also (by virtue of his deathbed wishes) Chase

⁸⁴ “Attention G.O.P. Voters” Political Advertisement, *Waterville Sentinel*, June 13, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁸⁵ In addition to those quoted below, see “May Enter Primary Race,” *Boston Herald*, April 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers; “Rep. Smith Ill, Wife May Seek Place in House,” *Kennebec Journal*, April 8, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers; and Malvina Stephenson, “Widow Hopes to Carry on Maine Congressman’s Work,” *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

Smith. Coverage positioned Clyde's death as a consequence of his tireless commitment to his constituents. His physician was quoted as saying that Clyde "died of 'the Congressional disease,'" meaning heart disease brought on by long hours and exhaustive legislative sessions.⁸⁶ Colleagues also noted that his work likely "speeded his death."⁸⁷ One newspaper declared "Smith's Zeal for Labor Duties Hastened Death."⁸⁸ Coverage that emphasized this theme portrayed Clyde as a tireless advocate for the people of Maine whose devotion to his work and his constituents literally killed him.

Alongside these eulogies ran press coverage that highlighted Chase Smith's resume. Reporters called attention to her work with organizations like the BPW and as Clyde's secretary in Washington. A piece in the *Boston Herald* described her as "prominent in women's organizations, having served as president of the Maine Business and Professional Women's Clubs."⁸⁹ An Associated Press account noted that Chase Smith "has acted as her husband's Congressional Secretary [and was] active in all his political affairs" while also highlighting her work with the BPW.⁹⁰ Another paper described her as "an experienced country newspaper and business executive who paired with her late husband in representing Republican Maine" and mentioned that she "was holding down a man-size executive job in a woolen mill

⁸⁶ Elizabeth May Craig, *Inside Washington*, April 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ "Smith's Zeal for Labor Duties Hastened Death," *Lewiston Sentinel*, April 8, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁸⁹ "May Enter Primary Race," *Boston Herald*, April 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁹⁰ "Rep. Clyde H. Smith Seriously Ill; His Wife May Seek Seat," Associated Press, April 7, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

when she married.”⁹¹ In her column, Craig noted that, if elected, Chase Smith’s unique qualifications would distinguish her from her female peers in Congress: “Mrs. Smith will be the only one who has been her husband’s secretary, among those now here, if she should be elected. [. . .] Having been his secretary, Mrs. Smith is perfectly familiar with the work of the district.”⁹² This coverage emphasized that Chase Smith was not simply a congressional widow, but also an estimable political figure in her own right.

Finally, many stories mentioned her widowhood status using the partnership framework found in Clyde’s deathbed statement and Chase Smith’s discourse. A story in the *Portland Press Herald* enumerated Clyde’s achievements, characterizing them as the shared accomplishments of both husband and wife.⁹³ The account acknowledged that Chase Smith was a congressional widow, but it also made it clear that her qualifications for Clyde’s seat went beyond tradition or sympathy. The piece highlighted her experiences as a political spouse and portrayed them as legitimate credentials that gave her a justifiable claim on the vacant seat.⁹⁴ An article in the *Boston Herald* summed up Chase Smith’s biography as “the story of a woman who worked for her husband before her marriage, at his side after marriage, and has decided to fulfill his publicly-expressed death-bed wish that she run for Congress.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Malvina Stephenson, “Widow Hopes to Carry on Maine Congressman’s Work,” *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁹² Elizabeth May Craig, *Inside Washington*, April 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

⁹³ “Congress Adjourns Out of Respect for Clyde H. Smith; Delegation Is Named to Attend Funeral,” *Portland Press Herald*, April 9, 1940, Scrapbook 6, MCS Papers.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ “Widow Is Out for Congress,” *Boston Herald*, April 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

Again, in keeping with the congressional widowhood justification established by earlier candidacies, the reporter made note that Chase Smith was fulfilling her wifely duty to a deceased husband. However, the account went further, suggesting a level of equalization by emphasizing her work by his side.

The press coverage reflected the themes found in Chase Smith's campaign discourse: a potent combination of wifely duty, public sympathy, spousal equality, and shared achievement. It was a remarkable rhetorical strategy not only for the type of candidacy, but also for the times. According to Nancy Cott, marriage "is the vehicle through which the apparatus of state can shape the gender order." The way in which we understand masculinity and femininity is, in large measure, defined by and related to the way we structure marriage. Cott notes that, "more emphatically than any other single institution or force," marriage has helped frame "the ways both sexes act in the world and the reciprocal relationship between them."⁹⁶ When women gained the right to vote in 1920, they took an important step civically and politically; they were finally able to assert their own individual citizenship despite having entered into marriage. Yet, while legal barriers fell in the ensuing years, economic factors replaced them. Cott notes "marital unity was rewritten economically in the provider/dependent model, a pairing in which the husband carried more weight."⁹⁷ New Deal policies unintentionally reinforced this model with programs that reinforced the breadwinner as male and linked "social and economic welfare to

⁹⁶ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

political citizenship.”⁹⁸ Such an arrangement “did not bode well for equality between husbands and wives.”⁹⁹ Understood in this context, Clyde’s deathbed statement and Chase Smith’s campaign discourse are even more remarkable. More than simply a justification for Chase Smith’s candidacy, these statements served as a challenge to the provider (male)/dependent (female) economic model that characterized the 1930s. This is not to say that such a challenge was intentional; Clyde Smith’s primary motivation was certainly to preserve his seat, Chase Smith’s to win an election. However, Clyde Smith’s statement empowered Chase Smith, acknowledging her as more than just a silent, behind-the-scenes contributor to his career. The statement characterized her as a more equal partner in his career and allowed her to seamlessly step into the position of candidate given her role as a political wife. For her part, Chase Smith echoed and expanded this rationale, turning her experiences as a spouse into powerful qualifications for a candidate. The combination of this progressive perspective was blended with appeals to more conservative notions of femininity, allowing Chase Smith to further expand the political aspects of the wife/widow role.

Ultimately, Chase Smith was able to ward off potential opponents.

Republicans decided to honor Clyde’s wishes and support Chase Smith in the special election.¹⁰⁰ The *Boston Globe* reported that all of the “stronger contenders announced ‘hands off’ for the unexpired term after the publication of [Clyde] Smith’s death-bed

⁹⁸ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows*, 172.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158, 172.

¹⁰⁰ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 43.

appeal.”¹⁰¹ The Republican primary field was effectively cleared of all opponents, and the Democratic Party could not find a challenger for the special election. At first, not all Democratic leaders were ready to accept the idea of giving up the seat without a fight, regardless of how short-lived the concession might be. In fact, the Democratic camp “appeared split between those who favored gestures of gallantry toward Smith’s widow and those who argued that it was not ‘good party politics to lie down and let the opposition party have things its own way, even if its leading candidate was a woman.’”¹⁰² However, Edward J. Beauchamps, the Democrat who was running unopposed in the general election for the full term, had the final say in the matter for his side of the aisle and he opted not to run against Chase Smith in the special election for the unexpired term. The reason he cited in declining was telling. Echoing the qualification justification Chase Smith had articulated, Beauchamps told reporters that his decision was not based upon sympathy for a grieving widow, but out of respect for Chase Smith’s work as Clyde’s partner in public life. The opportunity to complete the unexpired term, he said, “should be granted to Mrs. Smith in tribute for her work as an assistant to her husband.”¹⁰³ That widowhood played a role in Beauchamps’ decision certainly seems defensible. For example, it would be hard to imagine an opponent declining to run against a male staff member with no familial ties to the congressman. However, Beauchamps’ emphasis on Chase Smith’s

¹⁰¹ Malvina Stephenson, “Widow Hopes to Carry on Maine Congressman’s Work,” *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹⁰² Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 44.

¹⁰³ “Three to Seek GOP Post,” *Waterville Morning Sentinel*, April 8, 1940, Scrapbook 6, MCS Papers.

qualifications illustrates her greatest contribution to the congressional widowhood path. Whereas the female candidates in Chapter Two used the role of wife to secure office by citing spousal duty and maternal authority, Chase Smith expanded this rationale so that it encompassed spousal partnership. Her campaign rhetoric drew upon a widow's duty, but it also encouraged voters to see the role of a wife not just as a culturally valued vocation with certain obligations (that could be stretched to include office holding), but as conferring certain credentials for public office. Advancing a more egalitarian view of marriage, Chase Smith helped push the boundaries of the wife role and the congressional widowhood rationale by legitimizing spousal work in a two-person career as a qualification for elective office. Thus, Chase Smith layered new characteristics onto an old identity.

With Beauchamps out of the race, Chase Smith's path to Congress was cleared of any viable opponents. The only politician who opted to challenge her was Frederick Bonney, a "perennial candidate" that the *Globe* observed, "usually trails the ticket" and "was criticized for his 'questionable taste'" in entering the race.¹⁰⁴ On the day of the Republican primary, Chase Smith prevailed, garnering over 90 percent of the vote and clearing the way for an unopposed victory in the June 3 general election to complete the unexpired term. In a fitting close to that phase of the 1940 campaign, she made a solitary pilgrimage to her husband's grave on what would have been their tenth wedding anniversary.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Malvina Stephenson, "Widow Hopes to Carry on Maine Congressman's Work," *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers; Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ "Mrs. Smith Maine's First Congresswoman," *Lewiston Journal*, June 4, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers. Also noted in Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 43.

1940: Campaign for the Full Term

Chase Smith didn't have long to savor her victory in the special election. For all intents and purposes, the campaign for the full term began on May 14, the day after she locked up the Republican nomination for the unexpired term. Her opponents wasted no time in challenging the new incumbent. In the Republican primary for the full term on June 17, Chase Smith faced four challengers: Republicans Hogdon Buzzell, Arthur Lancaster, John Marshall, and Frederick Bonney, the challenger from the special election. If she won the primary, Chase Smith would face Edward Beauchamps, the Democratic candidate who declined to challenge her in the special election. However, in conservative Maine, the general election was merely a formality; a win in the state's Republican primary would be tantamount to victory.

In the campaign for the full term, Chase Smith faced more of a fight and responded by waging a rigorous campaign. While Clyde's "deathbed imprimatur was a powerful epistle to his loyal supporters," Chase Smith did not rely solely upon that justification.¹⁰⁶ Even more than during the special election, in the full term campaign she sought to make the race about her qualifications. However, she could not avoid questions of gender. In fact, her gender played even more of a role in the race for the full term. By then, the justificatory rhetoric of congressional widowhood, while still a viable strategy, had lost some of its persuasive force. According to biographer Patricia Schmidt, there was a sense "that the district had met its obligation to [Clyde] when they elected his widow to fill his seat for the interim term."¹⁰⁷ Now, many

¹⁰⁶ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 44.

¹⁰⁷ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 109.

expressed open opposition to Chase Smith's candidacy, and much of it was based on the notion that congressional representation was men's work.¹⁰⁸ Reporter Dorris Westall observed that the "dominant issue of Maine's 2nd Congressional District primary campaign" was the question "Is Maine ready for a woman in Congress?" She noted that "it is a question of sex, not of ability that the voters will decide June 17," and that Chase Smith's opponents had found "no fault with Mrs. Smith except that she's a woman."¹⁰⁹ In response to these attacks, Chase Smith crafted a complex rhetorical justification that played to both sides of the womanhood-personhood divide.

On the one hand, Chase Smith appealed to conservative notions of femininity by actively participating in press coverage that emphasized domesticity and widowhood. For example, she posed for a series of pictures that ran in the Sunday edition of the Portland paper, many of which foreground themes of domesticity or wifely loyalty. One picture featured a photograph of Chase Smith standing in her living room and gazing longingly at a photograph of her deceased husband. The caption that ran alongside the picture noted that her gaze "symboliz[ed] faith in the principles for which he stood and her willingness to carry on his work." Another photo featured Chase Smith in an apron with an iron, and below it was the caption: "we see her as the attractive housewife not 'above' the daily tasks that confront

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 109.

¹⁰⁹ Dorris A. Westall, "Four Maine GOP Candidates Oppose Margaret C. Smith," *Portland Sunday Telegram*, May 19, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

everyday living.”¹¹⁰ Although not afraid to be judged on a level playing field with her opponents, Chase Smith also played to conservative notions of femininity as if to assure women and men who valued domesticity that she was one of them.

Another example of Chase Smith’s appeal to traditional femininity was her use of an anecdote that suggested women were better equipped for government duties than men. During her own campaign and while stumping for presidential candidate Wendell Wilkie, Chase Smith often told audiences:

What has been said about the issue used against me is true—I am a woman. The people of Maine are considered very conservative, you know, and there were a few in this last election who were not quite ready to send a woman to the House of Representatives.

But I must tell you about something that happened in Sidney, Maine. Stopped for some gas and the little, old attendant who recognized me said, ‘Mrs. Smith, I’m going to vote for you.’ I thanked him and asked him why. He replied with real fervor, ‘I’m getting sick of having the men run things. Women ought to take over the government and straighten things out.’¹¹¹

Like the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping, the anecdote reflected the long-standing belief that women were better equipped to “straighten things out” because of their more moral, more ethical, and uniquely domestic nature. Chase Smith also made arguments that explicitly referenced traditional femininity in her stump speech. In soliciting support from her fellow female voters, she argued that women were uniquely able to address certain social issues, saying, “We are needed in government for the very traits of character that some people claim disqualifies us. A woman’s

¹¹⁰ “Maine’s First Woman In Major Political Race,” *Portland Sunday Telegram and Sunday Press Herald*, May 19, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹¹¹ 1940 Speech, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers; Detroit Address, September, 30, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers; New York Address, October 5, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945; Baltimore Address, October 21, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

mother-instinct makes her specially interested in anything that has to do with education and child welfare.”¹¹² Chase Smith, much like many municipal housekeepers, settlement workers, and partisan mothers of the 1920s, appealed to conservative notions of maternal duty and instinct despite the fact that she did not have children. In speeches, Chase Smith told female audiences “women will be called up to help in solving the difficulties that are bound to arise in the next few years. When we think of the thousands of children in the United States even now that are poorly clothed and underfed, we are impressed with our responsibility.”¹¹³ In an effort to court the woman’s vote, she appealed to the traditional role of mother, feminine authority regarding social issues, and the unique maternal instinct that all women supposedly shared, regardless of whether they had children or not.

On the one hand, Chase Smith’s response to gender-based attacks relied upon traditional notions of womanhood. Through verbal and visual texts, she burnished her domestic credentials and justified her candidacy using a rhetoric of expediency. On the other hand, Chase Smith advocated for her candidacy based on her personhood. She revived the qualifications theme from her special election campaign, asking voters to judge her as an individual on the basis of her own accomplishments and abilities, without regard to widowhood status or gender. She frequently told voters, “I do not ask for your sympathy, but instead your confidence and consideration.” She then invited them to compare her record and experience side-by-side with her

¹¹² 1940 Speech, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers. Version of quote also used when stumping for Wilkie. See Detroit Address, September 30, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., MCS Papers; New York Address, October 5, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

¹¹³ 1940 Speech, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

opponents' when considering who made the better candidate.¹¹⁴ Again, she often inserted the paragraph used during the special election into her speeches, asking voters if it was “not better in these trying days to vote for one who has had experience” than a “newcomer.”¹¹⁵ She sought to adopt the persona of an incumbent, implying that her contributions to Clyde’s career made her his political equal and were qualifications for elective office.

Chase Smith also emphasized her credentials in her campaign literature. One campaign advertisement that ran in state papers told voters to “Vote For The One Who Will Vote For You!” It described Chase Smith as “A Woman of Experience, Ability and Sound Judgment!” The ad featured Chase Smith’s picture with a list of her professional and political achievements, including each of her jobs and her positions in business and political organizations. The only mention of Clyde came eight lines down in the resume section. There, Chase Smith’s campaign noted that she was “Wife and Secretary of Clyde H. Smith.” That role was framed as a qualification, noting that she spent “3 ½ years in his Congressional office, 1937-1940.”¹¹⁶ The advertisement was turned into a campaign brochure and distributed to voters.¹¹⁷ In these ways, Chase Smith encouraged voters to disregard gender altogether,

¹¹⁴ 1940 Election Stump Speech, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers; Address, August 23, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

¹¹⁵ 1940 Election Stump Speech, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

¹¹⁶ “Vote For The One Who Will Vote For You!” Political Advertisement, June 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹¹⁷ 1940 Campaign Brochure, Campaigns/Elections General Material File, MCS Papers. An invoice in one scrapbook indicates that at least 15,000 of these “campaign cards” were purchased. See Skowhegan Press Invoice, June 17, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

downplaying her widowhood or her womanhood and, instead, emphasizing universal credentials for office.

Chase Smith was again aided by press coverage that summarized her impressive qualifications. After her special election primary win, a number of stories lauded her background and described the positions she had held in professional settings. The *Boston Post* ran a story under the headline, “Knows Her Way ‘Round In Politics,” along with the subhead, “Mrs. Smith, Candidate for Congress, Has Had Busy Life.”¹¹⁸ The article described Chase Smith as being “well acquainted with a Congressman’s duties” from her time as Clyde’s “chief ‘assistant’” and “constant collaborator.” It also mentioned her work as “secretary, ghost writer, newspaperwoman, country school teacher and telephone operator.”¹¹⁹ Chase Smith played an active role in the development of such stories, granting interviews that focused on the details of her resume.¹²⁰

Chase Smith also leveraged her new role as an incumbent. Having been elected to fill the unexpired term, she gave interviews that focused on substantive policy issues and highlighted her knowledge and issue positions, including the timely issue of national defense.¹²¹ The *Christian Science Monitor* described her as “an unusually attractive businesswoman” whose “long and popular business career” made

¹¹⁸ Lester Allen, “Knows Her Way ‘Round In Politics,” *Boston Post*, May 14, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For example, see “Mrs. Smith Eager To Aide in Building U.S. Defense Force,” *Lewiston Journal*, June 17, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

it seem as though she was “destined to be as successful as that of her husband.”¹²²

The reporter even went so far as to characterize her as being “well established in her own right as a candidate for public office.”¹²³ During her campaign for the full term, Chase Smith offered a more direct challenge to conservative gender ideology. Her approach to campaigning demonstrated ambition and her references to Clyde highlighted her contributions to his political career. Chase Smith made even more public what would have typically been considered private—and even unseemly—behavior from a political wife. She openly acknowledged advising, writing for, and working with Clyde on policy matters in substantive ways. Such acknowledgments advanced a view of the role of congressional wife that was meaningful and political—and could be fashioned into a campaign credential.

Chase Smith’s campaign also featured a robust surrogate operation, which helped defend her against her opponents’ gender-based attacks. These supporters often made the case that she was uniquely qualified on the basis of her experiences as Clyde’s partner in public life. Supporters in Kennebec County formed a “Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington Club,” launching the organization at an event that was covered extensively by the press.¹²⁴ The kickoff featured several speakers that justified Chase Smith’s candidacy on the basis that she was better equipped to do the job. For

¹²² “Maine Congresswoman-Elect Hopes for Seating This Season,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 17, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The name of the club was a play on the title of one of the era’s most popular films about politics. “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” was released just a year before Chase Smith’s campaign for the full term and its central character was a man picked to complete a deceased officeholder’s term in elective office.

example, Mrs. C. E. Towne told the crowd assembled:

My vote will go to Mrs. Smith because to my mind she is the candidate most capable of filling the office because of her heritage [...] Maine has lost one of its ablest statesmen in the passing of Mr. Smith. To take his place we have as a candidate one who inherits all his ideal and dreams, one who can and will carry on the plans they formulated together. For Mr. and Mrs. Clyde H. Smith were a team.¹²⁵

Towne emphasized what had, at that point, become a defining theme of Chase Smith's campaign: The notion that Clyde and Chase Smith had been engaged in a team effort on behalf of his constituents. This portrayal was predicated upon a progressive notion of political partnership and allowed Chase Smith to run on the plans and accomplishments they had created together. Far from being the keeper of her husband's electoral legacy, Chase Smith was portrayed as an equal participant in that legacy. This gave her certain advantages as an incumbent that were far greater than her short official tenure would have normally provided.

The event's main speaker, Professor H. C. Libby, also reminded voters of Clyde's deathbed plea to supporters. His remarks further transformed Clyde's endorsement from a sentimental gesture into a substantial qualification:

I want to make it clear to the voters of this district that had his wife not possessed the ability necessary to equip her for the important work as a member of Congress, Clyde Smith would never have asked the voters to elect her to succeed him.

I happen to know that Mr. Smith came to have profound respect for the business ability, the keen political judgment, quick grasp of details, and the good sense of leadership of Mrs. Smith, and it is solely because he saw in her all these splendid qualifications that he issued his last public statement in her behalf.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ "Supporters of Mrs. Margaret Chase Smith Organize Club at General Meeting Here," *Waterville Morning Sentinel*, June 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Chase Smith and her supporters, like Libby, seemed to sense that the candidate's marital ties to the office made her campaign less threatening in terms of gender. Hence, they tended to highlight her relationship to Clyde throughout the campaign. However, rather than rely solely on the precedent of congressional widowhood as the argument for her campaign, they pushed the boundaries of this rationale. They didn't just argue that voters should support Chase Smith out of sympathy, tradition, or loyalty to her husband and deference to his wishes. Rather, they argued that their marriage and Chase Smith's experiences as a political spouse had uniquely equipped her for this position. Among the field of candidates, they argued, only Chase Smith was Clyde's political equal.

Libby, in particular, carried the equality theme even further. His arguments echoed the natural rights-based approach used by woman's rights advocates in the previous century. He challenged "voters who have expressed the conviction that Congress is no place for a woman."¹²⁷ He explained that women were "endowed with certain 'inalienable rights,'" and while he knew some still "maintain that Congress is a place for men only, [...] I am frank to confess that I find no facts to support it and no reasoning to substantiate it."¹²⁸ Professor Libby also urged voters to consider Chase Smith's considerable experience as a businesswoman and Clyde's secretary. "[B]ecause of this," he said, "it becomes no longer necessary for anyone to support Mrs. Smith solely because of any sentiment expressed in her behalf by her late

¹²⁷ "Supporters of Mrs. Margaret Chase Smith Organize Club at General Meeting Here," *Waterville Morning Sentinel*, June 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹²⁸ "Address of Herbert C. Libby," June 11, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

husband. She comes before us bringing her own qualification and I know she wants us to judge her by them.”¹²⁹ In emphasizing Chase Smith’s individual qualifications, Libby sought to frame the campaign around issues of her personhood instead of womanhood. He invited voters to judge her on the same basis that they would evaluate the male candidates in the race. When voters did this, Libby was certain that they would see that Chase Smith was the strongest candidate. Her resume was filled with experiences that qualified her to hold a seat in Congress, not the least of which was the spousal role that had prepared her to lead. Chase Smith’s marital status served to make these arguments less threatening by appealing to traditional notions of femininity and a wife/widow’s duty even as it broadened them.

This is, of course, not to say that Chase Smith and her supporters solely sought to make the campaign about personhood. Simultaneously, Libby also echoed nineteenth-century arguments from expediency, using womanhood as a rationale for greater electoral opportunities. His arguments sounded much like those made by Louise Coburn, the second woman to graduate from the college where he taught. Libby told voters that women should have access to broader public opportunities because their uniquely feminine nature would yield unique public benefits. He challenged those who felt Congress was “no place for a woman” by laying out a

¹²⁹ “Supporters of Mrs. Margaret Chase Smith Organize Club at General Meeting Here,” *Waterville Morning Sentinel*, June 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

comprehensive summary of conservative notions of femininity:

Women do possess certain attributes of character, mental and moral, that many men do not possess. They have an amazing sense of intuition that seems entirely foreign to men. They have indomitable courage and fortitude, suffering when men would surrender. They view things very largely from the humanitarian angle while men, as the so-called bread-winner, and bread eater, see things too largely from the commercial approach. And I can say from my knowledge of young women in my college classes—an experience over a period of 30 years—that observation leads me to believe that in the long range of things they measure high in their appraisal of human worth and human progress.¹³⁰

In this view, women (and by extension, Chase Smith) deserved to be elected to office not only because they were equal to men, but also because their distinctly feminine attributes made them different from, and in some ways better than, men. In short, Libby told the crowd that if women were admitted to government, their “spiritual superiority” would “raise the moral level of that sphere.”¹³¹ He took an argument form that nineteenth-century women’s rights activists used to support suffrage, coupled it with a strong rationale for why women were men’s political equals, and put it to work for Chase Smith’s campaign.

By the end of his lengthy remarks, Libby had laid out a multi-layered justification for Chase Smith’s candidacy. According to the professor, three key arguments supported her campaign. First, Smith Chase's campaign was sanctioned by the deathbed endorsement of her husband and bolstered by his description of her as an equal partner in his career. Working under that framework allowed the campaign to move beyond the more conservative rationales associated with congressional

¹³⁰ “Address of Herbert C. Libby,” June 11, 1940, Statements & Speeches, Misc., 1920-1945, MCS Papers.

¹³¹ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 111.

widowhood (e.g., wifely duty, sympathetic privilege). He accordingly expanded the boundaries of the path to office and the terms “wife” and “widow” by positioning spousal experience in a two-person career as a viable qualification for public office. Second, Libby and others argued that Chase Smith should be supported because of her own qualifications, which stood out when compared side-by-side with her male opponents’ backgrounds whose gender qualifications were implied. Finally, her candidacy was desirable because of the uniquely feminine and superior attributes that Chase Smith, as a woman, could bring to the job.

Historians have singled out Libby’s “spin” as vital to the campaign, and his remarks received extensive coverage in the Maine press.¹³² Schmidt notes that having described Chase Smith’s candidacy “in such a way that she threatened no one and yet was more than just a grieving widow who hoped to return to Washington for one term,” Libby made her candidacy “not only viable, but highly desirable.” According to Schmidt, “on the battlefield of ‘conventional ideas about woman’s place,’ Libby helped to weight the scales in Margaret’s favor, purify her persona, and secure her future.”¹³³ Whether Chase Smith was actively involved in crafting the discursive strategy that Libby employed remains an open question. In many ways, he was simply pulling together and expanding upon the various strands of discourse that had defined her persona since her announcement for the special election campaign.

Regardless, she was certainly aware of his strategy; some decades later she identified

¹³² “Prof. Libby Heads Club for Mrs. Smith,” *Kennebec Journal*, June 11, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers; “Form ‘Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington Club,’” *Independent Reporter*, June 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers; “Supporters of Mrs. Margaret Chase Smith Organize Club at General Meeting Here,” *Waterville Sentinel*, June 14, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers.

¹³³ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 111.

him as the “manager” of her 1940 campaign, noting that she “owed [him] so very much.”¹³⁴

Ultimately, Chase Smith swept the field in the 1940 elections. She trounced her special election primary opponent, Frederick P. Bonney, taking 92 percent of the vote. In the June 17 general election primary, she bested a field of four male competitors, garnering 64 percent of the vote. And in Republican Maine, her general election Democratic opponent barely stood a chance; Chase Smith beat him by more than 25,000 votes.¹³⁵ That would not be the case in subsequent races, however, particularly in terms of her run for the U.S. Senate in 1948, when gender would emerge as a far more problematic obstacle in her campaign bid.

1948 CAMPAIGN FOR THE UNITED STATES SENATE

When Chase Smith took the oath of office, she became one of only eight women in the 76th session (1939-1941) of the House of Representatives. Caroline O’Day, Edith Nourse Rogers, Frances Bolton, Florence Gibbs, and Clara McMillan were all, like Chase Smith, widows who had been elected to complete the terms of their deceased husbands. Rounding out the class was Jessie Sumner, a single woman and respected judge and attorney, and Mary Norton, the only married congresswoman elected while her husband was alive. While each woman was unique, there was some uniformity in how they handled their positions as female members of Congress. Many actively sought to reassure voters that they “conformed to cultural images of ‘authentic’ women.” For example, they posed for photographs while engaged in

¹³⁴ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, 111.

¹³⁵ 1940 election result data provided by the Margaret Chase Smith Library.

“feminine” activities like cooking or ironing, seeking to pass an informal “domesticity test.”¹³⁶ Yet, while many were eager to reassure voters of their feminine credentials, all were careful to avoid the perception that they had unique concerns that separated them from their male counterparts.

The 1940s required female politicians to strike a careful balance between a progressive agenda and conservative ideals, and Chase Smith did her best to walk the tightrope. During her eight years in the U.S. House of Representatives, there were some indications that she intended to challenge conservative notions of women’s proper place. For starters, she engaged in small but significant gestures that emphasized not her femininity, but her personhood. Chase Smith gradually changed the name she used in public correspondence, a clear violation of a century-old tradition that encouraged a widow to continue using her husband’s name until death or remarriage.¹³⁷ According to Schmidt, this custom continued well into the forties, when “a widow was expected to show respect for her husband by using his name socially in every way.”¹³⁸ Chase Smith honored established practice, using the proper title of “Mrs. Clyde Smith,” throughout her first campaign and first term in Congress.¹³⁹ However, in her second term, she removed all reference to Clyde, simply signing her letters “Margaret Chase Smith.” It was a subtle violation of feminine

¹³⁶ Janann Sherman, “Feminism Between the Waves: Congresswomen in the Undercurrents” (paper presented at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference, Las Vegas, NV, June 15, 2002).

¹³⁷ Cornel J. Reinhart, Margaret Tacardon, and Philip Hardy, “The Sexual Politics of Widowhood: The Virgin Rebirth in the Social Construction of Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century Feminine Reality,” *Journal of Family History* 23 (January 1998): 32.

¹³⁸ Schmidt, “Vibrating to an Iron String,” 382.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

etiquette that carried real significance given the on-going debate over the names that women chose to use in public. Throughout the doldrums, some women mimicked the symbolic gesture that Lucy Stone made in the 1800s, choosing to retain their maiden names when they married. By 1950, there was even talk of reviving the Lucy Stone League in an effort to call attention to the ways that naming practices reflected discrimination against women.¹⁴⁰ Chase Smith surely understood the implications of her decision since she took great pains to explain it.¹⁴¹ According to Schmidt, Smith told people that she needed to add her maiden name since no one recognized her when she used the name Margaret Smith.¹⁴² This, she explained, is why she added “Chase” to the name she used professionally. She made no mention of why Clyde’s first name was dropped from her name altogether.

Chase Smith also engaged in efforts aimed at eroding conservative gender ideals. Legislatively, she was at the forefront of efforts to ensure equality for women, including bills to promote equal treatment in “war work” and parity in compensation.¹⁴³ However, though she pushed the envelope of tradition in her persona and through her advocacy, Schmidt notes that her “goal was *not* to be seen as a troublemaker, a dilemma historically shared by virtually all women with aspirations

¹⁴⁰ For more information about the significance of names during this period, see Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, 56.

¹⁴¹ Schmidt, “Vibrating to an Iron String,” 382.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ An active member of the Armed Services Committee while in the U.S House, Chase Smith shepherded the Women’s Armed Forces Integration Act to successful passage. The bill, which became law in 1948, gave women in the armed forces permanent (as opposed to reserve) status and granted them benefits. For more information, see Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 198; and *Women’s Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948*, Public Law 625, 80th Cong., 2nd sess. (July 12, 1948).

for public office.”¹⁴⁴ Much like her female colleagues in Congress, Chase Smith vigorously avoided being labeled a feminist. She picked her legislative battles carefully, ensuring she would not be solely identified as an advocate for women’s issues. In short, Chase Smith took great pains to be seen as a *member* of Congress, not a *congresswoman*.

Given this approach, it’s not surprising that when the time came time to announce a run for the U.S. Senate, Chase Smith decided to predicate her run on her qualifications instead of her expediency-based justifications. On June 1, 1947, she announced that she would seek election to the seat being vacated by retiring Senator Wallace White. Her statement cited her record in Washington and a desire to serve the people of Maine “more fully.”¹⁴⁵ Much like her campaign in 1940, it appeared that Chase Smith’s preference was to campaign for the Senate on the basis of her record, experience, and qualifications.

“Record-Results-Reliability”: The Rhetorical Strategy for the Senate Candidacy

In running for the Senate, Chase Smith was risking a premature end to her promising congressional career. Only five women had served in the Senate, and no woman had been elected to that body without having first been appointed or elected to fill a vacancy caused by a member’s death.¹⁴⁶ Four of the five female senators were widows who ascended to office under the same circumstances in which Chase Smith had assumed her seat in the House. Up until that point, the longest-serving female

¹⁴⁴ Schmidt, “Vibrating to an Iron String,” 383.

¹⁴⁵ “Statement Made by Margaret Chase Smith,” June 1, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers.

¹⁴⁶ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 74.

senator had been Hattie Caraway, a widow who was appointed to complete her deceased husband's term. Hardly a trailblazer, Caraway rarely even made speeches on the Senate floor, earning the nickname "Silent Hattie."¹⁴⁷ Winning an open Senate seat for a regular term would be an uphill battle. The stakes were compounded by the fact that Chase Smith gave up re-election to her House seat in order to run. While she was the first to announce, the GOP primary field would eventually include Horace Hildreth, the current Maine governor; Sumner Sewall, a former governor; and Albion Beverage, a reverend. If she won the GOP nomination, her election to the Senate would all but be secured in conservative Maine, making Chase Smith the first woman in history elected to both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate. If she lost, she would have no elective office to which she could return.

In keeping with the themes of the 1940 campaign for the full House term, Chase Smith tried to make the Senate race about her record and achievements. In an early letter to would-be supporters, she noted that many felt she was Wallace White's "logical successor because I have more Congressional experience than any other possible candidate and because of my performance record."¹⁴⁸ Her campaign materials echoed this rationale. Chase Smith's organization distributed pamphlets featuring her picture on the cover with the tagline "Record-Results-Reliability."¹⁴⁹ Inside the front page was the heading "Margaret Smith's Stand is Official Record – Not Mere Campaign Promises." This slogan was followed by detailed summaries of

¹⁴⁷ Committee on House Administration, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006*, 106.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from MCS to Supporters, January 1, 1948, Scrapbook 51, MCS Papers.

¹⁴⁹ 1948 Campaign Brochure, Elections and Campaign Memorabilia Folder, MCS Papers.

her legislative accomplishments and positions on issues like labor, foreign policy, taxes, and national defense. The pamphlet also included three pages of endorsements by prominent congressional, military, and media figures, lauding her “intelligence,” “effective work,” and “straight-forward reasoning and expression.”¹⁵⁰ On the back of the pamphlet were the two slogans that Chase Smith hoped would define her campaign: “Don’t Trade a Record For a Promise” and “The ‘Can-Do’ Candidate With the ‘Can-did’ Record.”¹⁵¹ Chase Smith’s campaign produced radio aids highlighting her record as well. One told voters, “A good record is worth carloads of promises [...] Be choosy [...] Margaret Chase Smith is the ‘CAN-DO’ candidate with the ‘CAN-DID’ record ... So, don’t trade a record for a promise.”¹⁵² In all of her campaign literature, Chase Smith ran as an incumbent, highlighting her experience and accomplishments.

Chase Smith echoed this message when interacting with the press. For example, when the *Bangor Daily Commercial* gave her a lengthy column as part of its “The Candidates Speak” series, she devoted the entire piece to an extensive review of her record on key issues, including national defense, taxes, and labor.¹⁵³ In another feature on the race, each candidate was offered substantial space to lay out his or her platform. Beverage, Hildreth, and Sewall each provided lengthy personal statements;

¹⁵⁰ 1948 Campaign Brochure, Elections and Campaign Memorabilia Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Paid Political Announcement, WCOU Radio, June 11, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁵³ Margaret Chase Smith, “The Candidates Speak,” *Bangor Daily Commercial*, March 12, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

Chase Smith let her record and resume speak for itself. Her essay was simply a summary of her background, accomplishments, accolades, and endorsements.¹⁵⁴

In the 1948 campaign, gone were the photo spreads featuring Chase Smith as a grieving widow or domestic woman. Her most prominent profile, a feature in *Parade Magazine*, included six photographs. Four of the photos showed Chase Smith at work or on the campaign trail. The most domestic among them was a picture of her eating a meal at a table with a couple and a small child. It was captioned, “Saturday lunch with her sister’s family is a ‘must’ when Margaret is in Skowhegan.”¹⁵⁵ One profile even noted that “in no campaign has she made a special appeal, as a woman, to gain the woman’s vote,” even though a review of the evidence from 1940 suggested otherwise. Nevertheless, the press reported that Chase Smith “has maintained steadfastly that individual qualifications, rather than sex, should govern the selection of candidates for office.”¹⁵⁶ Chase Smith pro-actively worked to define the parameters of the campaign, keeping the scope of relevant issues restricted to experience, achievement, and policy proposals. However, both the press and her opponents expanded the terrain upon which the election battle would be fought, making gender a prominent theme. Despite attempts to run solely as an incumbent, Chase Smith was forced to engage in the contest as a woman, confronting the complex web of gender ideology that existed at the close of the 1940s.

¹⁵⁴ “Meet the Future United States; Candidates for U.S. Senate,” *Lewiston Journal*, June 19, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁵⁵ Dan O. Gordon, “The Lady from Maine,” *Parade*, June 6, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Helen Henley, “Woman Campaigner Stands on Record,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

Gender-Based Discourses and Attacks

Despite these serious attempts to make individual qualifications the focus of the campaign, gender once again emerged as a salient issue. Chase Smith's male opponents questioned whether a woman should run for, or could win, a seat in the U.S. Senate. The first gender-based attacks came from the Hildreth campaign, which used subtle techniques to make Chase Smith's gender an issue. In one letter sent to supporters of the Hildreth for Senator Club, the campaign declared that with the country facing the dual threats of impending war and Communism, "it is our solemn duty to send to Congress our ablest and most fearless men." The campaign called upon readers to inform friends about Governor Hildreth's background so that they could vote for "The Right Man."¹⁵⁷ Given the unusual presence of a female candidate in the race, appeals to elect the best "man" were likely more than just casual or thoughtless turns of phrase.

In an effort to make Chase Smith's gender a more prominent issue in the race, her opponents also began featuring their own wives in campaign literature and at events, positioning their spouses as ideal women and subtly challenging Chase Smith's femininity. The Hildreth for Senator Group published a newsletter with an update on the gubernatorial First Lady's activities. In a characterization consistent with feminine ideals that eschewed personal ambition, the newsletter reported that, "Mrs. Hildreth, the Governor's gracious wife, is devoted to her family and home, [and] has never sought public appearance." The newsletter also detailed Mrs. Hildreth's campaign speeches before women's groups, explaining that she only made

¹⁵⁷ Letter from President of Hildreth-for-Senator Club to Members, March 25, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

such appearances in “the spirit of a willing helpmate.”¹⁵⁸ The implied contrast being that Chase Smith sought them as a matter of ambition and female political action, a violation of the most conservative interpretations of what constituted appropriate feminine behavior.

Both Mrs. Hildreth and Mrs. Sewall actively campaigned for their husbands.¹⁵⁹ In turn, the press began treating the campaign as some sort of contest between Chase Smith and the wives of her male opponents.¹⁶⁰ Another report noted that Hildreth and Sewall’s “wives have hurled themselves into the breach.”¹⁶¹ While such reports were an acknowledgement of the important role that candidate’s wives played in campaigns, the contrast with Chase Smith made clear a preference for a certain kind of woman: a helpmate, not a political candidate. Furthermore, the progressive aspect of the other candidates’ wives was muted by their tendency to level the most scathing gender-based attacks. For example, while out on the stump, Mrs. Sewall often asked audiences, “Why take a woman to Washington when you can get a man?”¹⁶² As the primary election drew closer, these types of gender-based arguments grew more intense. The press reported that one of the GOP gubernatorial

¹⁵⁸ “Hildreth Newsletter,” February, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Edward D. Talberth, “Women Steal Maine Political Show In Unusual Campaign,” *Portland Press Herald*, March 7, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁶⁰ Noting that Margaret would be working hard to shore up and expand her share of the woman’s vote, a reporter also observed that “the contest will send into action two other prominent women, both worthy vote-getters in their own rights—Maine’s charming First Lady, Mrs. Hildreth, and Mrs. Sewall likewise charming and energetic.” See Lorin L. Arnold, “Women’s Vote Wooed In U.S. Senate Race,” *Bangor News*, December 7, 1947, Scrapbook 50, MCS Papers.

¹⁶¹ Doris Fleeson, “Mrs. Smith’s Rugged Race,” February 25, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

candidates “let it be known among his friends that he did not believe women should be in politics to the extent of holding major office.”¹⁶³ The *Christian Science Monitor* summed up the race, saying the “only argument against her running for that office [Senate] was the fact that she is a woman.”¹⁶⁴

In response to these attacks, Chase Smith adopted and executed a three-pronged rhetorical strategy to address the gender question. First, Chase Smith continued to emphasize her own record and experience, attempting to frame the campaign in gender-neutral terms and tip the playing field toward an area where she could easily best her opponents. Second, the campaign disseminated anecdotes that served to counter claims that the Senate was no place for a woman and prove that Chase Smith could hold her own with her male colleagues. Finally, she incorporated both natural rights and expediency-based arguments in her remarks. Chase Smith simultaneously argued for both greater female political activity and her candidacy on the basis of a woman’s personhood and womanhood.

In addition to using her record to undermine gender-based attacks, Chase Smith’s campaign widely disseminated anecdotes that highlighted her personhood, demonstrating that she was no different from her fellow male politicians and officeholders. For example, campaign literature and interviews featured a story about a Joint House Appropriations-Armed Services Committee trip to sixteen countries in Europe and the Middle East that Chase Smith took with her congressional colleagues.

¹⁶³ Edward D. Talberth, “Women Steal Maine Political Show In Unusual Campaign,” *Portland Press Herald*, March 7, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁶⁴ Helen Henley, “Woman Campaigner Stands on Record,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

At one point on the trip, their plane lost one of its engines. For five hours, the plane hovered over the Atlantic Ocean threatening to crash into the waters below. In the midst of a plane full of panicked men sat a calm, collected, and cheerful Chase Smith.

Chase Smith used this anecdote to silence critics. Writing about the trip in one of her 1948 “Washington & You” columns, she told constituents that while there “was much curiosity about a woman member possibly hampering the style of men members on these trips,” she had “been called the best traveler of all on these trips. I like this because it helps removed the prejudice of ‘no place for a woman.’” Of the near plane crash, she noted that newspapers “carried the story that I was the heroine— that I showed the greatest courage of all and that I calmed some of the nervous men down. But don’t let that fool you – I was plenty scared, I just looked brave.”¹⁶⁵ The story did, in fact, make its way into several state papers. In an article specifically addressing the “prejudice against women as candidates for political office,” the story was cited as proof that Chase Smith was up to the job. The reporter argued that “even the most biased individual should reconsider” upon listening to the story and urged voters to “note the comments of her companions on the trip” particularly Congressman Dewey Short, who reported that Chase Smith ““was the best soldier and sailor of us all.””¹⁶⁶ Given that military service was often the training ground and a key qualification for men seeking political office, Short’s description of Chase Smith as a soldier and sailor was particularly important. It suggested that not only could

¹⁶⁵ Margaret Chase Smith, Washington & You Column, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; Interview on “Woman’s Place,” June 13, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁶⁶ “That Prejudice Against Women,” *Lincoln County News*, October 23, 1947, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

Chase Smith hold her own with her male colleagues in any circumstance, but that she served as their equal.

Another anecdote often cited as proof of Chase Smith's toughness came from the campaign trail. While stumping in the state, she slipped on ice and broke her arm. Instead of canceling her scheduled appearances, Chase Smith went to the hospital, had the arm set, and arrived in time to make her next speech. Congressman Gordon Canfield of New Jersey made special note of this story in a floor statement, and Chase Smith's Senate campaign, seeing an opportunity, reprinted and widely distributed his speech. In the statement Canfield tied the broken arm and plane mishap anecdotes together, saying, "[t]hat the gentlewoman from Maine kept a speaking engagement at Rockland, 60 miles away, 4 hours after the fracture, comes as no surprise to me because I know she can take it." He went on to recount her bravery and demeanor during the congressional trip, praising her as the member "who best withstood the rigors and dangers encountered" and remained "undisturbed" by the ordeal. According to Canfield, Chase Smith's demeanor caused the flight sergeant to remark that she was "a regular guy." Canfield himself testified, "She can take it, and those who have seen her under fire can bear witness."¹⁶⁷ Canfield's description, like Short's, portrayed Chase Smith as the equal of her male colleagues, serving to minimize and refute the kinds of gender-based differences her opponents sought to accentuate.

¹⁶⁷ "Remarks of Hon. Gordon Canfield," February 26, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers. A brief excerpt from Canfield's remarks was also featured in a campaign brochure. See 1948 Campaign Brochure, Elections and Campaign Memorabilia Folder, MCS Papers.

In a number of public statements, Chase Smith also used natural rights-type arguments to confront gender-based attacks directly. Following the announcement that she would enter the race, she gave a series of speeches to groups of women, encouraging them to become more involved in politics. In a speech delivered during the summer of 1947, she directly challenged the gender imbalance in politics and the professions by critiquing the private/public sphere divide. She told the crowd:

‘Women are all in their place’ is the comment that is so often heard. But what is their place? The answer of practically all men, and the majority of women is, ‘The Home.’ [...] You never hear the comment, ‘Men are all right in their place’ because their place has never been restricted. [...] If ‘what’s sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose,’ why then is there a dearth of women in certain fields and why are those fields dominated by men to the almost complete exclusion of women – particularly the field of politics?¹⁶⁸

In another speech, she argued for greater parity among the sexes in Congress and elsewhere:

The shadings of development and promotion cannot be as subtle in politics [as in business] for there is nothing subtle about being a candidate for political office. The old prejudice of men against women is given full warning for resistance. Immediately when a woman candidate announces, the male cry is that ‘public office’ is no place for a woman or ‘the State is not quite ready for a woman in that office.’ When asked ‘Why’ the answer is invariably that ‘she can’t hold her own with the men’ or ‘she can’t neglect her home duties for her public office duties.’

Performances disprove these weak answers. There are many examples of women officeholders who have more than held their own with men. There are plenty of examples of women public officials who have successfully maintained their homes and reared their children. A man legislator’s

¹⁶⁸ Margaret Chase Smith, “Is There a Future in Politics for Women?,” August 1, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers. For versions of this speech given before a Republican Women’s Luncheon, the League of Women Voters, and a gathering of women in Pittsfield, Maine, see “Republican Women,” April 10, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers; “League of Women Voters, Portland,” August 20, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947; and “Pittsfield Republican Women,” August 26, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947), MCS Papers.

division of his professional time as a lawyer oddly enough is never challenged.¹⁶⁹

In these passages, Chase Smith was asking audiences to completely revise the gendered dynamic that existed between men and women by offering a sharp critique of traditional norms. Chase Smith encouraged her audience to judge female candidates by the same standards used to evaluate men. Her remarks even endorsed the kind of sex-specific agenda and gender solidarity that Chase Smith and her female colleagues in Congress typically took such great care to avoid. And when it came to gender inequality, Chase Smith's pointed remarks spared no group, pointing the finger of blame at both men and women. In January 1947, she told an audience that both sexes were equally responsible for the dearth of women in public, chastising men who "vigorously oppose" female candidates and women "because they haven't stood together and exercised their power of the majority voting power."¹⁷⁰ In late spring 1948, Chase Smith called upon the women of the state to rectify this situation by voting against her opponents' "whispering campaign that the

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Chase Smith, "Bar Association – Dist of Columbia," January 20, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. See also "Press Release Women's Bar Association of D.C.: 'No Place for a Woman,'" January 20, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; and Margaret Chase Smith, "Is There a Future in Politics for Women?," August 1, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers. Versions of this speech were also given before the League of Women Voters, Republican women in Pittsfield, Maine, and a women's club. See "League of Women Voters, Portland," August 20, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers; "Pittsfield Republican Women," August 26, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers; and Margaret Chase Smith, "Women's Place – Where?," Federation News – Women's Clubs, February 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁷⁰ Margaret Chase Smith, "Is There a Future in Politics for Women?," August 1, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers. Versions of this speech were given before the League of Women Voters and Republican women in Pittsfield, Maine. See "League of Women Voters, Portland," August 20, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers; and "Pittsfield Republican Women," August 26, 1947, Statements & Speeches, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers.

Senate is no place for a woman.” She explained that:

This issue [of my record] is a challenge to me. But the issue that the Senate is no place for a woman is a direct challenge to every woman in Maine. I am confident that the women will accept that challenge for certainly if they are good enough to campaign as wives of candidates for the United States Senate, then they are not without the necessary qualifications for the Senate. I have avoided making the status of being a woman an issue in this campaign for I truly believe that one’s sex should not be a determinant in the selection of public officials. But my opponents have raised the issue – and the challenge to the women of Maine – and I believe that they will accept that challenge on June 21st.¹⁷¹

Through these personhood arguments, Chase Smith raised the significance of the contest, calling upon female citizens to use their vote as a way to challenge the limitations on public activity embodied by traditional femininity.

However, even as Chase Smith advanced arguments that highlighted her “sameness,” she appealed to notions of “difference” as well. Early on, her expedient appeals argued that greater female participation would improve the government because of woman’s uniquely feminine attributes and contributions. Later in the campaign, she made her own campaign a symbol of the fight between the purifying impact of feminine politics and the dirty tricks and moneyed interests of her opponents.

Alongside arguments that women were just as capable as men, Chase Smith argued that women were well suited to elective office because they were different

¹⁷¹ “Smith Smear Strategy,” May 21, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also see Margaret Chase Smith, Somerset County Women’s Republican Club Remarks, Skowhegan, ME, May 21, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; and Margaret Chase Smith, Pittsfield Campaign Address, June 15, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. The portion of the remarks addressing claims that the Senate was no place for a woman received press coverage as well. See Edward D. Talberth, “Rep. Smith Vigorously Refutes ‘Smear Attack,’” *Portland Press Herald*, May 22, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

from men. In a speech that echoed expediency-based arguments of the suffrage movement and the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping, she told audiences:

Basically, the incentive and the attraction of more women in higher public offices should stem from the fundamental fact that women are the governors of the HOME. They legislate the rules of the home – they execute and enforce the rules of the home – and they interpret the rules of the home. The importance of their role as governors of the home is that the home is the most fundamental form of Government. Our community governments are no more than federation of individual Home Governments. The HOME then should not be severed from the Government. In fact, there has been too little of the Home in the Government and too much Government in the HOME. The most obvious and natural way to reverse this trend is to put more of the HOME governors in the Government – and that means women. That is why there is a definite and inescapable future in politics for women.¹⁷²

Chase Smith's remarks highlighted woman's empowerment in the domestic sphere, a characteristic consistent with traditional notions of femininity. Yet, she also characterized domestic activities and experiences as preparing and qualifying women for public office. In doing so, like the suffragists and municipal housekeepers who came before her, Chase Smith sought to stretch the boundaries of the wife/mother role to include new contexts. For Chase Smith, that context was the Senate, a place where no woman had won election in her own right without being appointed first. She was not content to see the boundaries of these identities be drawn to only include local offices. She noted that there was a willingness "to expand this concept to permit some venturing beyond the confines of the home by approving of women engaging in non-

¹⁷² Margaret Chase Smith, "Women's Place – Where?," *Federation News – Women's Clubs*, February 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. See also Margaret Chase Smith, "Is There a Future in Politics for Women?," August 1, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers. Versions of this speech were also given before the League of Women Voters and a gathering of Republican women in Pittsfield, Maine. See "League of Women Voters, Portland," August 20, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers; and "Pittsfield Republican Women," August 26, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers. Similar language also appeared in WOL Radio Broadcast Interview with Margaret Chase Smith, November 24, 1947, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. IV, 1947, MCS Papers; and Margaret Chase Smith, *Washington & You Column*, 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

domestic activities,” and she argued that this needed to be expanded beyond “fields that are considered predominantly feminine” such as “State Superintendent of Schools or Commissioner of Charities and Corrections.”¹⁷³ During the campaign, Chase Smith argued that woman’s unique role and nature qualified her for political and civic roles beyond the confines of the neighborhood, the community, and the state. Her discourse provides insight into one way that women incrementally advanced into higher offices and positions. Basing their appeals on domestic femininity and engaging in a process of casuistic stretching, women made more and more public, political activity fit within the confines of the roles of wife and mother, including positions at the local, state, and federal levels. Chase Smith was now using these same appeals to conquer a new context: the U.S. Senate.

Chase Smith’s expediency-based appeals were not solely rooted in the traditional roles of wife and mother. She also argued on the basis of women’s supposedly more peaceful and more ethical nature. In a “Washington & You” column published in early 1948, she wrote that “peace would be installed and guaranteed if we had more women in the United Nations and in top Government positions of the various nations of the world,” explaining that was “why I have been crusading for more women to get into politics and for the women themselves to organize and exert their potential electorate control by supporting and electing qualified women candidates.” In speeches, she told audiences that “America’s peace leadership stems

¹⁷³ Margaret Chase Smith, “Bar Association – Dist of Columbia,” January 20, 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also see “Press Release Women’s Bar Association of D.C.: ‘No Place for a Woman,’” January 20, 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; and Margaret Chase Smith, “Women’s Place – Where?,” *Federation News – Women’s Clubs*, February 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

directly from the influence and participation of American women in shaping the decisions of this country. [...] In other words, wherever you find the woman's voice granted even an approach to parity with that of the man's you will find more peaceful nation."¹⁷⁴ Again, Chase Smith couched her appeals for greater female opportunity in terms consistent with traditional femininity. This time, she was arguing on the basis of women's supposedly more peaceful nature.

As time went on, Chase Smith subtly changed the text of her basic speech. Asking the question "Where is the proper place of women?" she deftly challenged the conventional wisdom that women belonged in the home. Noting the many objections to her candidacy on the basis that "the Senate is no place for a woman," Chase Smith told audiences, "My answer is short and simple – woman's proper place is everywhere."¹⁷⁵ For women, the true question was "where can they best serve." Chase Smith then positioned their uniquely feminine nature and attributes as having value "everywhere – (1) in the home as wives and mothers; (2) in organized civic, business and professional groups; (3) in industry and business, both management and labor; and (4) in Government and politics."¹⁷⁶ In this way, Chase Smith paid deference to traditional womanhood while expanding the sphere that could benefit from woman's greater involvement. She was slowly and skillfully pushing the

¹⁷⁴ Margaret Chase Smith, "Bar Association – Dist of Columbia," January 20, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also see "Press Release Women's Bar Association of D.C.: 'No Place for a Woman,'" January 20, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; Margaret Chase Smith, "Women's Place – Where?," Federation News – Women's Clubs, February 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

boundaries of traditionally feminine identities, trying to extend the argument beyond lower offices and use it as the rationale for the office to which she aspired.

The Crusade Against A Smear

For much of the campaign, Chase Smith stuck to her record and answered gender-based attacks with equalizing anecdotes and arguments that appealed to both sides of the personhood-womanhood debate. However, when anonymous smear sheets began to circulate throughout the state, Chase Smith and her campaign advisers felt she had to more directly confront her opponents.¹⁷⁷ The smear sheets covered a broad range of issues. In a sign that women voters were now perceived as an important voting bloc in the campaign, her opponents specifically targeted them, urging women to look at Chase Smith's record. The sheets then proceeded to greatly distort many of Chase Smith's votes in Congress, suggesting that she was unfaithful to her party and sympathetic to communism. Another smear sheet contained a list of 14 points under the heading "Why I Shall Not Vote for Margaret Chase Smith." First among the reasons was "I prefer a man to represent Maine in the U.S. Senate, the most august body in America." Other points attacked her religion (Catholic), her education and moral stature (lacking), and her record (communist). The smear sheet also contained the best evidence that her widowhood status was still a threat. Point six on the list stated, "I don't like the way she got her husband," giving voice to far-fetched rumors that a school-aged Chase Smith had somehow wooed Clyde Smith from his first wife in an illicit affair. Point seven attacked her path to office more explicitly, stating "She slipped into Congress on the coat-tails of her dead husband.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 106.

She has been re-elected only because she represents a small district, and had no man opposing her.”¹⁷⁸ Political writer Edward Talberth identified the author of one of the smear sheets as Dorothy Sabin Winslow, a Hildreth supporter who said she had been asked to “do what I could” while claiming that Hildreth “had no knowledge of the letter or its contents.”¹⁷⁹

According to biographer Janann Sherman, Chase Smith’s lead continued to widen, but reports coming into the campaign indicated that the gender question could ultimately prove problematic without a more vigorous rebuttal.¹⁸⁰ A field study completed by the Chase Smith campaign in the Spring of 1948 contained notes to that effect, revealing that the issue had penetrated the grassroots level. For example, one canvasser wrote that a former Chase Smith supporter in Harrington had “switched over and is now for Sewall and on ground that the Senate is no place for women.”¹⁸¹ As the primary drew closer and the smear sheets circulated, Chase Smith expanded her expediency strategy. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, nineteenth and twentieth-century reformers had long argued that women would have a purifying effect on politics, helping to remove the corrupt and moneyed elements from the process. Chase Smith seized upon this argument. In doing so, she cast her message in

¹⁷⁸ Cora Edgerly Smear Sheet, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, Margaret Chase Smith Library, MCS Papers.

¹⁷⁹ Edward D. Talberth, “Maine Politics,” *Portland Press Herald*, May 23, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁸⁰ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 86.

¹⁸¹ “Third District Survey,” March or April 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

terms consistent with the crusading rhetorical style that was particularly popular among Republican women.

According to Catherine Rymph, long after suffrage was secured, Republican women's organizations continued to vigorously employ a rhetorical style perfected in the nineteenth century by entities like the Women's Christian Temperance Union. This style "framed political issues as moral crusades that women were particularly prepared to lead."¹⁸² Republican women, in particular, were drawn to the style and, even after suffrage had been secured, they continued to frame "politics as an urgent, moral crusade," arguing "that the superiority of women [...] uniquely equipped [them] to pursue these crusades." The crusading style "encourage[d] women to participate in politics by convincing them that only women's moral superiority could adequately confront the issues at hand."¹⁸³ In the waning days of the primary election, Chase Smith's discourse reflected this style as she sought to cast her campaign as a crusade against the dirty tricks and corrupt interests of her male opponents.

Chase Smith first addressed the smear sheets on May 21, 1948 before the Somerset County Women's Republican Club. The speech marked the beginning of a period that Chase Smith and her advisors considered a turning point; in her autobiography, she explains that they saw "her reply to the smear [as] the battle cry of the crusade of her supporters for her and for clean politics."¹⁸⁴ During the speech, Chase Smith explained that she had always "respected the principle that real success

¹⁸² Rymph, *Republican Women*, 4-5.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 112.

cannot be gained by running down your competition,” and therefore, she had “not made one word of criticism of my opponents.” Chase Smith proceeded to explain that, despite her efforts, “the campaign has reached the smear stage.”¹⁸⁵ She then characterized her approach as taking the moral high ground, noting that she would “refuse to stoop to the smear tactics that my opposition has chosen.”¹⁸⁶ She then defended her voting record by going claim by claim through the smear sheets and exposing the attacks as misleading and dishonest.

Chase Smith no longer limited her expediency-based appeals to suggestions that women in general would improve politics through their uniquely feminine attributes and skills. In responding to the smears, she claimed that she, in particular, could accomplish that goal. Chase Smith used every opportunity to contrast her high-minded approach with her opponents’ dirty tricks. In Fryeburg, she told attendees at a public meeting sponsored by the BPW that she hoped ““to stand on her own feet and her own record,’ and has ‘never found it necessary to smear another candidate.’” She said, ““I am a business woman. I have always believed that if the product I am selling is good, one does not need to undermine that of a competitor.’”¹⁸⁷ In Pittsfield, she argued, “I can and am offering the electorate a real record while the best that they

¹⁸⁵ “Smith Smear Strategy,” May 21, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also see Margaret Chase Smith, Somerset County Women’s Republican Club Remarks, Skowhegan, ME, May 21, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; Statement Over Station WLBZ-Bangor, June 1, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers; and Radio Transcriptions, June 5, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁸⁶ “Smith Smear Strategy,” May 21, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also see Margaret Chase Smith, Somerset County Women’s Republican Club Remarks, Skowhegan, ME, May 21, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁸⁷ “Rep. Smith Will Stand on Record; Sees No Need To Smear Opponents,” *Portland Press Herald*, May 25, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

[my opponents] can do is to make promises. It is increasingly evident that the slogan ‘Don’t Trade a Record for a Promise’ has been so unanswerable that they have desperately resorted to political tactics that the Maine people have never tolerated.”¹⁸⁸ Chase Smith continued to campaign on her record, contrasting her above-the-fray approach with the unethical tactics of her opponents. A June radio broadcast provides the best example of this approach. Chase Smith told listeners:

I have endeavored throughout this contest to keep my campaign on a high level. [... M]y opposition has seen fit to disregard this constructive approach to the issues of the day and, rather, have chosen to inject vicious attacks upon me and upon my record by means of misrepresentations printed anonymously and distributed slyly by paid workers.¹⁸⁹

The press began to adopt this framework as well, casting the election as a contest between Chase Smith’s high-minded, ethical approach and the dirty tricks of her male opponents. Noting that Chase Smith preferred to stand on her record, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that she “has consistently followed this principle, refusing to use opponents’ mistakes as a basis for her own campaign.”¹⁹⁰ Ed Talberth reported that the letters attacking Chase Smith were seen as “‘ill advised,’ ‘rotten politics’ and ‘smear tactics.’”¹⁹¹ Press reports also indicated that the public was beginning to see the campaign from this perspective. Talberth noted that voters across

¹⁸⁸ Margaret Chase Smith, Pittsfield Campaign Address, June 15, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁸⁹ Statement Over Station WLBZ-Bangor, June 1, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also see Radio Transcriptions, June 5, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Helen Henley, “Woman Campaigner Stands on Record,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁹¹ Edward D. Talberth, “Maine Politics,” *Portland Press Herald*, May 23, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

the state sent him the smear sheets accompanied by letters that “expressed views not unlike this one: ‘I have only my own vote, but I do think the Republican Party or its candidates have gone pretty deep into the slime when these methods have to be used to get support, if such methods win support.’”¹⁹²

Adding to the salience of Chase Smith’s crusade was the role that money played in the campaign. Press reports warned of a pending “Golden Flood” in the GOP primary, which “promised to set a new high in candidate expenditures.”¹⁹³ While Hildreth and Sewall were said to have significant “financial reservoirs” backing their campaigns, Chase Smith was thought unable to “match dollars with the two men on her own.”¹⁹⁴ Campaign disclosure statements in May put the tallies for each campaign’s total expenditures at \$3,481.60 for Hildreth; \$4,979.98 for Beverage; and \$8,460.51 for Sewall. In the final disclosure reports before the primary, Sewall’s spending ballooned to \$10,981.¹⁹⁵ Chase Smith spent only \$1,546.34, less than half of her most frugal competitor.¹⁹⁶

The vast sums of money spent by Chase Smith’s opponents fueled political machines staffed by professional consultants. In contrast, Chase Smith’s campaign organization was characterized as a crusade that reflected the kind of volunteerist

¹⁹² Edward D. Talberth, “Maine Politics,” *Portland Press Herald*, May 23, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁹³ “The Big Campaign Spending Hasn’t Really Begun As Yet, But Flashy Wind-Up Expected,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 1, 1948, Scrapbook 54, MCS Papers.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Kent Foster, “Sewall Spends Most in U.S. Senate Race,” May 22, 1948, Scrapbook 55, MCS Papers.

¹⁹⁶ “Candidates File Reports for April,” *Portland Press Herald*, May 10, 1948, Scrapbook 54, MCS Papers.

politics long associated with traditional notions of appropriately feminine political activity. Reporters noted that Chase Smith's "'organization' consists of unpaid volunteers throughout the State who are working with the quiet zeal and steady purpose of crusaders. Many of them do not even draw reimbursement for their expenses. She is her own campaign manager."¹⁹⁷ A profile described her as a "woman of moderate financial means" who was "not possessed of a paid bring-'em-to-the-polls organization."¹⁹⁸ Chase Smith also embraced this David-versus-Goliath type narrative. In interviews she emphasized that her previous campaigns were self-financed. "She never has solicited funds," noted one reporter, "and only recently yielded to a friend's insistence that he be allowed to solicit money for her senatorial campaign."¹⁹⁹ Adding to the characterization that she was running a more ethical campaign, Chase Smith stressed that most donations to her effort were small contributions collected from loyal constituents, not the larger donations typically associated with special interests.²⁰⁰ Chase Smith's campaign produced print ads that further emphasized the disparity in how she and her opponents approached financing. Declaring that a political reporter was right when he said Chase Smith did not have the kind of "folding money" possessed by her "wealthy opponents," the ad argued that instead she had "a wealth of experience," "a wealth of ability," and "a wealth of

¹⁹⁷ Helen Henley, "Woman Campaigner Stands on Record," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁹⁸ Edward D. Talberth, "Maine Politics," *Portland Press Herald*, June 20, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

¹⁹⁹ Helen Henley, "Woman Campaigner Stands on Record," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

non-paid friends supporting her.”²⁰¹ The “folding money” issue was also featured in a June 5 radio address in which Chase Smith reiterated her defense against the smear campaign. At the end of the address, another voice came on and asked, “Was he [the reporter from the *Bangor Daily News*] right when he said [Chase Smith] would ‘slip back’ when her opponents start writing the checks and throwing in a lot of ‘folding money’? Answer ‘No’ by voting for MARGARET CHASE SMITH for United States Senator on June 21st.”²⁰² In the crusade against moneyed interests, Chase Smith became the symbol of ethical politicking and good governance. Her opponents became symbols of the kind of mud-slinging and corrupt dealing that needed to be cleaned up. And voters were encouraged to help win this crusade by casting their ballot for Chase Smith and against her opponents.

Chase Smith turned the smear sheets and campaign expenditures to her advantage, calling out the tactics of her opponents and elevating her campaign from a personal quest to a moral crusade. In language consistent with the “crusading style” that resonated with many Republican women, Chase Smith told voters that the campaign “has reached the proportions of a crusade against money politics and smears. To have become a symbol of such a crusade is the greatest honor that I could ever receive – even greater than the honor of United State Senator itself.”²⁰³ In the waning days of the primary, Chase Smith appealed to voters almost exclusively on this basis, telling them “we must not underestimate the moneyed machine of our

²⁰¹ “Was Mr. Arnold Right?” 1948 Campaign Ad, Scrapbook 56, MCS Papers.

²⁰² Radio Transcriptions, June 5, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

²⁰³ Margaret Chase Smith, Pittsfield Campaign Address, June 15, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

opponents. In short, we [...] must crusade as we have never crusaded before.”²⁰⁴ The day before the primary election, she said, “The issue tomorrow is clear. It is the rank-and-file against the paid professionals. What the voters of Maine do tomorrow will do much to either stop or perpetuate machine and money politics in Maine.”²⁰⁵ It was the perfect close to the campaign that became Margaret Chase Smith’s crusade.

The Chase Smith campaign framed the 1948 primary election as a contest between good and evil, moneyed interests and pure motives, professional politics and grassroots volunteerism. In one fell swoop, Chase Smith elevated the campaign to a symbolic contest between two gendered approaches: one defined by the moneyed interests, professional consultants, and dirty tricks of her male opponents, the other embodied by Chase Smith’s honesty, integrity, grassroots support, and substantive ideas. Chase Smith elevated the campaign to the level of a crusade that carried consequences far beyond the simple matter of her own win or loss. Her campaign became a crusade against big money, unethical campaign tactics, and the political class. It also became a crusade to advance women’s progress in the public sphere. Chase Smith encouraged women to use their vote not just to support her, but also to fight for the right to take their place alongside men at every level of government. It was one of many ways that Chase Smith empowered women as she advanced her candidacy. In addition to elevating the gendered significance of her success or defeat,

²⁰⁴ Margaret Chase Smith, Pittsfield Campaign Address, June 15, 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

²⁰⁵ “Radio Broadcast of Margaret Chase Smith Made Over Station WGUY, Bangor,” June 20, 1948, *Statements & Speeches*, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also delivered as a radio address the following morning. See Radio Manuscript, June 21, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

she treated women as a voting bloc worthy of direct appeal, enhanced their political clout as voters, and advocated for opportunities that would empower them to serve as leaders. The significance of this effort was only heightened by threats that Chase Smith's election would discourage Maine's governor from appointing women to state government positions. Of this, Chase Smith said her opponents were now "stooping to the threat that support of me will hurt the cause and impede the progress of women in State Government. This is a threat to every woman in Maine, a threat that I am confident will be courageously defied by the women of Maine."²⁰⁶ According to Chase Smith, the warning that a female senator would diminish the opportunities for women at the state level was just "another way of saying – leave it to the men; restrict the women to appointive offices, and let the men decide whether they want to appoint any women or not. Quite a challenge to women."²⁰⁷ By 1948, women had made remarkable progress and were considered viable candidates for gubernatorial appointments. Chase Smith coupled challenges to her candidacy with efforts to attack those gains. The success of her campaign became a mechanism for those who wanted to advance women's progress, not erode it.

In her final address before the primary election day, Chase Smith focused almost exclusively on the symbolic nature of her candidacy. She noted that the

²⁰⁶ Interview on "Woman's Place," June 13, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

campaign “has transcended personalities” and told the audience that:

The fundamental issue of this particular campaign has grown much larger than myself or my opponents – for the people of Maine have come to feel that there is much more at stake in this campaign than the individual candidates themselves. The candidates for United States Senator are important only for what they symbolize. Each of us symbolizes something to the Maine voters. My supporters say that I am a symbol of a ‘grass roots’ protest against political machines, money politics and smears. They say that the issue is simple and clear – that the choice is one way or the other. And with respectful humility, I must say they are right.²⁰⁸

When the returns were in, Chase Smith—and all that she had come to symbolize—took 52 percent of the primary vote. Her closest competitor, Governor Hildreth, slumped over the finish line with just 25 percent of the total. Chase Smith’s primary win was considered the final contest in the statewide campaign; in conservative Maine, the general election didn’t prove much of a challenge and Chase Smith took out Adrian Scolten easily and early, ultimately garnering over 159,000 votes to his 64,074.²⁰⁹

Of Chase Smith’s 1948 victory, the *Christian Science Monitor* remarked that “Any day now, mothers in the United States may start saying to their daughters, even as fathers have long speculated to their sons, ‘Maybe you will grow up to be President!’” Another reporter wrote, “In a nation proud of its ‘self-made’ men, [Margaret Chase Smith] is writing history as a self-made woman.”²¹⁰ These accounts were a sign that Chase Smith’s successful campaign was not an individual

²⁰⁸ “Radio Broadcast of Margaret Chase Smith Made Over Station WGUY, Bangor,” June 20, 1948, Statements & Speeches, vol. V, 1948, MCS Papers. Also delivered as a radio address the following morning. See Radio Manuscript, June 21, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

²⁰⁹ 1948 Election Data provided by the Margaret Chase Smith Library.

²¹⁰ “Distaff Pluck Plucks the Votes,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 28, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

achievement, but a significant accomplishment for women's progress in the doldrum decade of the 1940s.

CONCLUSION

In her biography of Chase Smith, Schmidt notes that she “belongs in the category of business and professional women who found ways to excel in the years immediately preceding and following World War II and is a link between suffrage activism and the re-emergence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s.”²¹¹ Yet, as illustrated by this chapter, Chase Smith's importance is not limited to her place among the pantheon of female leaders. One of her greatest contributions is that—historically and rhetorically—she served as a vital source of continuity between the pre-suffrage period and the female activism of the 1960s. Chase Smith exemplifies the ways that women continued to make progress and advance female equality despite the lack of a vibrant woman's movement during the doldrums. As a congressional widow, she expanded this matrimonial path to office, using it to further broaden the public significance of the wife and widow roles, directly challenge gender inequality, and transform traditional femininity by making it compatible with new characteristics and new contexts.

By the time Chase Smith's husband passed away, congressional widowhood was a well-traveled path to public office. Yet, while this path had empowered several women by opening doors to new opportunities and greater political activities, it could also tether women to their husband's successes and popularity, making it harder to exert their own agency and craft independent identities. Chase Smith's 1940

²¹¹ Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*, xxv.

campaign is instructive in that it demonstrates that a widow could escape such a trap and quickly transform their widowhood status into an identity that offered greater independence. In her 1940 campaign, Chase Smith embraced the widow role while simultaneously stretching it by offering a more egalitarian view of political marriage. Building off of Clyde's deathbed characterization of their marriage as a partnership, Chase Smith established her own credentials by taking ownership of their shared achievements. Such efforts allowed Chase Smith to forge an identity associated with, but also separate from, her husband, which gave her greater independence and control.

Chase Smith's campaign discourse is also significant in terms of how it addressed the on-going ideological tension between personhood and womanhood. She did not resolve it, but she did account for it in complex ways that proved liberating for women. In her 1940 and 1948 campaigns, Margaret Chase Smith based her candidacies both on a woman's natural rights and her special nature—on sameness as well as difference. The common theme that ran through this complex set of arguments was a call to advance not only her career, but also the place of women in public life. At times, Chase Smith did this by stretching traditional notions of femininity to include new characteristics and new contexts, such as the United States Senate. She argued that woman's activities in the home as a wife and mother uniquely equipped them for a role in government, and she claimed a greater public role for women based upon their supposedly more peaceful nature. Adopting the framework of a "crusade," she also associated femininity with political purity, advocating for both her own election and greater female participation on the basis that women could help purge

the political process of moneyed interests and dirty tricks. Yet, at other times, Chase Smith did not stretch traditional ideals; rather, she challenged them directly. During both her 1940 and 1948 campaigns, she called attention to the lack of gender parity in government, argued for female political equality, and tried to open opportunities that would enable women to exert their own agency.

Historians have noted that Chase Smith's nuanced approach made her "the most dangerous kind of troublemaker" in terms of gender.²¹² In both her campaigns and her tenure in office, Chase Smith "consistently displayed fidelity to prevailing conceptions of woman's 'place' in costume and demeanor, even as she simultaneously created a self that thrived outside of the cultural role for women."²¹³ This rhetorical approach enabled Chase Smith to bridge the womanhood-personhood divide and, in the process, accomplish many "firsts." She became the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate in her own right and the first woman have her name placed in nomination for the presidency by either major political party. More importantly, however, Chase Smith encouraged society to rethink the way it saw women candidates—and encouraged women to rethink the way they saw themselves. She asked voters to evaluate female candidates as they would their male opponents, emphasizing her record and demanding to be judged by the same standards applied to any man. That Chase Smith and her husband defined their marriage as a political partnership laid the foundation for this argument. She also appealed directly to women, heightening their importance as a voting bloc and encouraging them to view

²¹² Schmidt, "Vibrating to an Iron String," 395.

²¹³ Ibid.

their vote as a powerful tool that could be used to exact change. She not only sought to improve women's sense of political efficacy; she also sought to expand their political opportunities. Through her speeches, she encouraged women not only to vote, but also to run for office and get involved in politics. Through her example, she showed them how.

Ultimately, a career that began with one widow's campaign in a Republican primary culminated in one woman's race for the presidency. Margaret Chase Smith's 1964 presidential bid illustrated just how much those who ascended to office through matrimonial ties could achieve. Yet, it would not be the last time a matrimonial path to office would launch a career and change women's lives. Just two years after Margaret Chase Smith ended her bid for the highest job in the nation, a quiet and seemingly apolitical governor's spouse named Lurleen Wallace would embark upon a campaign for the highest job in her state.

CHAPTER 4: LURLEEN WALLACE: SURROGACY AND THE SOUTHERN LADY, 1966-1968

By 1967, it had been more than thirty years since a woman had served as the chief executive of a state. Of all the places where the third female governor in U.S. history could have been elected, Alabama may have been the most improbable. Of all the women who could have ascended to the position, Lurleen Burns Wallace may have been the most unlikely.

Lurleen Wallace was a unique case among a unique class of women. Unlike many of the congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates featured in this study, she expressed no interest in public affairs and very little interest in her husband's political career before her candidacy. Whereas women like Margaret Chase Smith and Miriam Ferguson inconspicuously aided their husband's campaigns, Wallace resisted playing even a minor role in her husband's electoral efforts. Unlike Smith, who had been a partner in her husband's congressional career, Wallace remained remarkably apolitical and stuck to duties that were strictly ceremonial in nature. Furthermore, while many widows and surrogates relished public speaking and politicking once their roles as wives and widows freed them from gendered constraints, Wallace was slow to warm to the spotlight.

Wallace's personal reticence to any public role was not the only thing that made her candidacy unlikely. She also faced a perilous landscape of gender ideology. The publication of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963 represented a sign to many that things were changing. Yet the South's resistance to even the mildest manifestation of feminist consciousness was a reminder that in some parts of the

country, things stubbornly remained the same. Further complicating matters was Wallace's marriage to one of the most notable opponents of change—Alabama's segregationist governor, George C. Wallace.

When she announced her candidacy in 1966, Lurleen Wallace did so in a time and place riddled with gendered restrictions, and in a marriage defined by rigid gender roles. Yet, in less than two years she would evolve from a relatively private, apolitical person into the sixth most admired woman in the world.¹ That evolution—and how it helped transform the region's gender outlook and expanded political opportunities for women—is the subject of this chapter.

Little has been written about Wallace, her candidacy, and her brief tenure as the first female governor of Alabama, but her career certainly merits further scholarly attention. First and foremost, this study expands our understanding of the ways in which women used the path of gubernatorial surrogacy to secure electoral opportunities, transform gender ideologies, and open up new spaces for female engagement. As we have seen in this study, women like Lurleen Wallace often drew upon the prevailing public vocabulary, using conservative gender ideology and expediency arguments to create a rationale for their candidacies. Once in office, they then became independent political figures and challenged patriarchal norms, altering prevailing gender ideologies and addressing electoral inequalities in the process. Studying discourse by and about Lurleen Wallace gives us a better understanding of how the path of gubernatorial surrogacy continued to provide a means for female

¹ Jack House, *Lady of Courage* (Montgomery: League Press, 1969), 118. The Gallup Poll named Lurleen Wallace the sixth most admired woman in the world in December 1967. The honor put her in the top ten with Queen Elizabeth II, Lady Bird Johnson, Indira Ghandi, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, and Jackie Kennedy.

empowerment. And by analyzing the discourses generated by and about Wallace, we gain a better understanding of how this rhetoric drew upon, reflected, and helped culturally shape the 1960s South, ultimately challenging gendered constructs, expanding electoral opportunities, and helping draw social issues further into the public sphere.

Studying Wallace's campaign and tenure also provides insight into a figure in women's history that has often been misunderstood by scholars. In her study of female governors, Susan Weir sums up Wallace's administration in one line: "There is little evidence that Lurleen Wallace exercised independent decision making authority during her years in office."² As this chapter will show, however, a close analysis of her public discourse reveals that Wallace indeed underwent a substantial evolution during her transition from candidate to officeholder, developing legislative initiatives and using both the power of her office and her discourse to accomplish independent goals.

Finally, exploring Wallace's public discourse fills a current void in public address studies. Recently, Christina Moss found that scholars have neglected southern rhetoric in general, and rhetoric produced by southern women in particular.³ She called upon scholars to recover and analyze women's historical speeches, specifically those "of wives of statesmen and politicians," in order to better understand the

² Susan J. Weir, "The Feminist Face of State Executive Leadership: Women as Governors," accessed January 1, 2008, <http://ac/wwu.edu/~sweir/womengovs98.htm>.

³ Christina L. Moss, "The Re-Conceptualization of Southern Rhetoric: A Meta-Critical Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2005), 225-227.

rhetoric of the region and fill in “an unrepresentative canon.”⁴ The discourse produced by Lurleen Wallace, a wife *and* a politician, answers this call and broadens our understanding of the challenges faced by southern female orators and the strategies they employed to address them.

In keeping with these aims, the current chapter explores Lurleen Wallace’s 1966 gubernatorial campaign and her brief tenure in office, which was cut short by her tragic death in 1968. It is broken into three sections that analyze Wallace’s twenty-seven-month evolution from first lady to gubernatorial surrogate to assiduous, engaged officeholder. The first section of this chapter discusses the events leading up to Wallace’s gubernatorial campaign, including the period she spent as a homemaker, first lady, and candidate. Analysis of campaign discourse reveals how Wallace’s performance as a gubernatorial surrogate closely hewed to key characteristics of the “Southern Lady” construct, successfully fashioning it into a justification for her election. The second section builds upon this analysis, demonstrating how Lurleen Wallace expanded the southern lady ideal during her brief term as governor by exercising the power of her position in ways that were subtle, yet significant. Drawing upon Kenneth Burke’s concept of “casuistic stretching,” special attention is paid to how her rhetorical and legislative leadership on public spaces, better mental health facilities, and civil rights issues helped broaden the southern lady construct by maintaining the spousal duty of wifely support, while developing her own independent identity and voice.

⁴ Moss, “The Re-Conceptualization of Southern Rhetoric,” 225-227.

The third section of this chapter focuses on Wallace's final eleven months in office. Facing grave illness, Wallace engaged in rhetorical activities that bore striking similarities to the "soft consciousness-raising" efforts of southern second-wave feminists. Through interviews, medical bulletins, and press conferences, Wallace challenged aspects of the southern lady ideal and exposed southerners to a woman in control of her own health decisions. For the region and the time, it was a progressive enactment that served to highlight gender inequality in women's health care treatment. The chapter closes with a discussion of the implications of Wallace's contributions to our public vocabulary as it pertained to women and political power in the decades covered by this study.

LURLEEN WALLACE AND THE MYTH OF THE SOUTHERN LADY

On January 16, 1967, Lurleen Wallace stood on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol and took the oath of office, making her the 46th governor in Alabama history. Just four years earlier, Wallace's husband, George, had taken the same oath on the same steps after a meteoric rise through the ranks of Alabama Democratic politics. From the time he served as a page in the Alabama State Senate at the age of sixteen, George Wallace had pursued politics with singular determination and focus.⁵ Shortly after returning from overseas military service with the Army Air Corps during World War II, he ran for and won a seat in the state legislature. He served as a legislator from 1946 until 1952, before winning election to a circuit judgeship, a position he held for six years.

⁵ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 30-31.

As a state legislator, George's ambition and tenacity drew the attention of top leaders in the Democratic Party. He managed Governor "Big Jim" Folsom's re-election campaign, and in 1958, launched his own bid for governor. Wallace's first attempt was unsuccessful, but he learned from the loss and became governor in 1962. Just two years later, having used his statewide office to establish a national reputation, Wallace competed for the Democratic presidential nomination in three primaries.

By the standards of political spouses, Lurleen Wallace was about as behind-the-scenes as one can get. A Northport native from a working-class family, she met George Wallace when she was 16 years old and working at a five and ten cents store in her hometown.⁶ They married in 1943 and, within a year, she gave birth to their first child, Bobbi Jo. A second daughter and a son followed, in 1950 and 1951, respectively. Her fourth and final child, Janie Lee, was born in 1961.

For much of her adult life, Lurleen was a full-time homemaker and mother, a job that was never easy given George's all-consuming political ambitions.⁷ They often lived in less-than-ideal conditions, money was tight, and George was frequently absent due to his never-ending efforts to court voters.⁸ Wallace biographer Dan Carter

⁶ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 51-52.

⁷ The only exception to this is a brief period during George's tenure as a judge when Lurleen was encouraged by friends to apply for a job as a part-time secretary to the superintendent of education. She earned less than twenty-five dollars a week for her clerical work, but according to Carter, "gained a sense of accomplishment" and was able to hire someone to assist with childcare. See Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 81.

⁸ Jules Loh notes that the Wallaces's "first home ... was a converted chicken shack with a concrete floor and a hot plate for a stove." Jules Loh, "Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead," Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

notes that “in twenty years of public life [George] had never once paid the least attention to Lurleen when her concerns interfered with his political ambition.”⁹ For example, when George’s position as a judge brought the couple’s first real taste of financial security, Lurleen hoped he would give up further aspirations for higher office. She once recalled, “I would have been content ... for him to stay circuit judge from then on.” George, however, had his sights set on the governor’s office, and would not be content until he achieved his goal.¹⁰

The strain of being a politician’s wife took its toll on Lurleen, and at one point in their marriage, she seriously considered leaving George.¹¹ In an attempt to salvage their relationship, she decided to campaign with him and see if it would bring them closer. As they traveled throughout the state in 1962, the marriage grew stronger, but Lurleen’s interest in politics did not. Of their outings, she said, “I was frightened every time I got near a crowd. Most of the time, I’d just sit in the car and wait for him.”¹²

While not uncommon for southern women to feign a lack of interest in politics, Lurleen’s disinterest seems to have been complete and sincere. In school, she had been “an indifferent student.”¹³ Having graduated from high school when she was 15, she was too young to pursue her plans for nursing school. She enrolled instead in

⁹ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 265.

¹⁰ Marshall Frady, *Wallace* (New York: Random House, 1996), 192.

¹¹ Anita Smith, *The Intimate Story of Lurleen Wallace* (Montgomery: Communications Unlimited Incorporated, 1969), 77-78; Frady, *Wallace*, 192.

¹² Frady, *Wallace*, 192.

¹³ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 52.

typing and shorthand classes at the local business college, but professionally, that was as far as her career advanced outside the home.¹⁴ One Alabama editorial writer recalled that Lurleen “was looked at as a modest homebody without any ‘careerish’ interests whatever.”¹⁵

Throughout her adolescence and early adulthood, Lurleen was more interested in fishing, water skiing, and flying lessons than in public affairs or current events.¹⁶ Of her childhood, she said, “‘Politics was something Daddy discussed at our house with other people, not with me.’”¹⁷ Her disinterest didn’t seem to waver much despite marrying one of Alabama’s rising stars.¹⁸ Carter observes that Lurleen “was as intelligent as and probably more capable than many of the men that ran Alabama’s government,” but “her real handicaps were her shyness in public and her total uninterest in the grubby business of politics.”¹⁹ Of the two decades she spent as a wife, mother, and first lady, she said, “Why, it never even crossed my mind that I’d

¹⁴ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 53.

¹⁵ Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶ Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁷ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 53.

¹⁸ “I don’t suppose I saw her in the Governor’s office more than five times [until she ran for office],” recalls an old hand on the Wallace team. She had never made a speech in her life, and her essential shyness was evident to all who came in contact with her. It has long been known that she would have been just as happy to live out her days as a local judge’s wife in the sleepy village of Clayton, [...] where she could water-ski or pole-fish.” Ray Jenkins, “The Queen of Alabama and the Prince Consort,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 21, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁹ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 273.

ever enter politics myself. That was George's job. We were in rural politics and my job was to stay home and raise the kids and look after the house."²⁰ As late as the spring of 1965, when a reporter asked her a question with political implications, she replied, "Oh, I never get involved in politics. Quite literally, I let George do it!"²¹ Her reticence toward political involvement was so strong that one reporter actually characterized Lurleen as a "political liability" for George during his race for governor in 1958.²²

Of course, when George was elected governor in 1962, her homemaking work took on new significance. In addition to raising their children and tending to the needs of their home, Lurleen fulfilled a slate of domestic ceremonial responsibilities associated with her husband's work. She dutifully completed these tasks, but her performance of her official position fell well within the boundaries of the most conservative interpretation of the role.²³ Author Marshall Frady observes that, as first lady, she was "an obscure and rather lonely figure, pleasant enough on public occasions, but essentially a private person, unassuming and unprepossessing."²⁴ Far

²⁰ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 77.

²¹ "Let Lurleen Speak for Herself," *Gasden Times*, February 20, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²² Jules Loh, "Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?," Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²³ A *New York Times Magazine* profile noted that in her time as First Lady, Lurleen was "no more or less distinguished than her predecessors. She has given the standard teas [... and] cheerfully lent her prestige to charity benefits and even sat in on some planning sessions, but she has usually not offered up a suggestion unless called upon." Ray Jenkins, "Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama," *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁴ Frady, *Wallace*, 191.

from embracing the political and public aspects of her role, “it was as if she went into a kind of private, resigned semiretreat, like so many other women approaching middle age.”²⁵

Lurleen’s public performance of the first lady role was in keeping with prevailing gender norms in the region, where the southern lady ideal had stubbornly resisted revision for over a century. According to historian Anne Firor Scott, beginning in the early 1800s, the South “adopted a more rigid definition of the role of women than any other part of the country and had elevated that definition to the position of myth.”²⁶ That myth became known as the southern lady, an ideal that prescribed the proper role, sphere, and activities for women.

The gendered concept of the “lady” was, of course, not exclusive to the South. As discussed in Chapter One, it was a powerful construct in circulation across early America. However, Jacqueline Boles and Maxine P. Atkinson note that the ideal “found a special niche in the South,” where an “agrarian society, made possible by slavery, provided a strong ideological basis that elevated the ladies of the manor to secular sainthood.”²⁷ In that part of the country, which included Wallace’s home state of Alabama, the ideal was particularly influential and inveterate.²⁸

²⁵ Frady, *Wallace*, 191.

²⁶ Anne Firor Scott, “After Suffrage: Southern Women in the Twenties,” *The Journal of Southern History* 30, no. 3 (August 1964): 299.

²⁷ Jacqueline Boles and Maxine P. Atkinson, “Ladies: South by Northwest,” in *Southern Women*, ed. Caroline M. Dillman (New York: Hemisphere, 1988), 129.

²⁸ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), x.

The southern lady ideal had many characteristics. Boles and Atkinson identified twenty such characteristics in their study of historical documents written by and about southern women. The descriptors they uncovered include “simple, good, passive, delicate, innocent, submissive, mannerly, economical, humble, sacrificing, sympathetic, kind, weak, generous, pious, shallow, nonintellectual, hospitable, rich, and calm.”²⁹ In her temperament, the southern lady was supposed to be “calm, pious, enduring, tactful, tender, amiable, sweet, and prudent.”³⁰ The ideal also conveyed the expectation that women be “chaste, godly, and compassionate.”³¹

For the purposes of this study, two aspects of the southern lady role merit special attention. First is the ideal’s emphasis on domestic activities in the private sphere of the home. Much like the true woman and the republican mother, the home was the southern lady’s domain and her roles as wife and mother determined her activities.³² In particular, the raising of children was her primary responsibility. However, unlike her northern and western counterparts, the southern lady did not enjoy special authority within a domestic environment. Despite the fact that the home was gendered feminine, the activities that occurred within that sphere were ultimately controlled by the husband.³³

²⁹ Boles and Atkinson, “Ladies: South by Northwest,” 130.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

³¹ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 3.

³² Boles and Atkinson, “Ladies: South by Northwest,” 130.

³³ *Ibid.*, 129.

Hence, the second and related attribute of interest is the ideal's emphasis on submission and obedience to one's husband. Southern women were expected to be "passive and dependent," and the southern lady ideal urged them to put men first.³⁴ Above all, a woman was expected to be a "devoted, and obedient wife," and "to accept without question the doctrine of male superiority and authority."³⁵ In part, this aspect of the ideal was based upon the belief that "the lady required control, protection, and guidance from men," and as such, "she was dutifully passed from father to husband to son."³⁶ In part, the ideal was a reflection of the region's Protestant fundamentalism and its conservative notions of gender. Well into the mid-twentieth century, church doctrine reinforced the separate spheres construct and articulated a subordinate position for women; biblical scripture was used to encourage southern women to be submissive to their husbands and to make sacrifices for them.³⁷

As with the other gender ideologies discussed in this study, the construct of the southern lady was articulated and reinforced by a wide array of mediums and institutions, including parents, churches, journals, sermons, speeches, books, and magazines.³⁸ Southern novelists played a significant role in propagating the ideal by fanatically "idolizing and idealizing southern women in their work."³⁹ However,

³⁴ Ashli Quesinberry Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists: Women's Liberation Newsletters in the South," *Southern Communication Journal* 70, no. 2 (2005): 94.

³⁵ Boles and Atkinson, "Ladies: South by Northwest," 129; Scott, "After Suffrage," 299.

³⁶ Boles and Atkinson, "Ladies: South by Northwest," 129.

³⁷ Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists," 95.

³⁸ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 21; Boles and Atkinson, "Ladies: South by Northwest," 129.

³⁹ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 14-15.

Boles and Atkinson note that the ideal was not just a fictional characterization that had no bearing on women's material lives. Their review of the diary entries in journals revealed that white southern women made serious attempts to attain the ideal.⁴⁰ Whether or not the construct was actually attainable or compatible with their material existence, southern white women embraced it and attempted to enact it.

While historians have compared the southern lady with the nineteenth-century true woman, they note two important distinctions: first, the southern construction placed "more restrictions on women's lives," and second, it "had surprising staying power."⁴¹ While the true woman eventually gave way to the new woman in other regions of the country, the southern lady remained. It survived the Civil War, woman's suffrage, the 1920s, and was influential well into the twentieth century.⁴² Writing in 1964, just two years before Lurleen Wallace would launch her gubernatorial campaign, Scott found that the ideal maintained a strong presence on the southern scene.⁴³ As late as 1988, Boles and Atkinson report that seventy percent of the contemporary women who responded to their study agreed that a lady ought to be "submissive," a statistic that speaks to ideal's resilience.⁴⁴

The southern lady archetype influenced how men saw women, how women saw themselves, and how both behaved. Scott notes that the image "lived on, not as a

⁴⁰ Boles and Atkinson, "Ladies: South by Northwest," 129.

⁴¹ Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists," 95.

⁴² Scott, "After Suffrage," 300-301; Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists," 94.

⁴³ Scott, "After Suffrage," 318.

⁴⁴ Boles and Atkinson, "Ladies: South by Northwest," 136.

complete prescription for woman's life but as a style which as often as not was a façade to ward off criticism of unladylike independence or to please men.⁴⁵ Even as women expanded their activities and took advantage of new professional and educational opportunities, they diligently performed the role.⁴⁶ Hence, some of the greatest resistance that feminists encountered when trying to alter patriarchal institutions or prevailing gender ideology came from fellow southern women who feared changes in the institution of marriage or a world without static gendered identities.⁴⁷ As Lurleen Wallace considered a run for governor in the waning days of 1965, the South was "perhaps *the* haven for perpetuating women's traditional roles."⁴⁸ Chief among such roles was that of the southern lady, a construct that would become part of the rationale for Wallace's 1966 candidacy as a gubernatorial surrogate.

By the fall of 1965, the events that would prompt Lurleen Wallace to emerge from her private and remarkably apolitical world were underway. George Wallace's gubernatorial term was coming to a close, and an anti-secession clause in the state's constitution prevented him from running for re-election. Barred from holding consecutive terms and reluctant to run for a U.S. Senate seat, George was facing a four-year period in the political wilderness. It was a situation he found all the more vexing because it threatened to derail his plans to build on his success in the 1964

⁴⁵ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 225-226.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists," 92.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

presidential primaries by launching an independent bid for president in 1968. George knew to be successful he needed “the continuity” that consecutive terms would provide.⁴⁹

At first, George attempted to convince the Alabama State Legislature to repeal the anti-secession clause. That effort ran into fierce opposition in the senate and the measure failed in late October 1965. However, George was prepared with a contingency plan. In fact, he already had put a poll in the field to assess the feasibility of a run by Lurleen. When early returns were positive, George floated the trial balloon of her candidacy in late October.⁵⁰ While Wallace himself refused to confirm anything on the record, a cabinet official appeared to substantiate it on background, telling reporter Bob Ingram, that when Wallace mentioned the possibility in a meeting, “he was smiling but he wasn’t grinning.”⁵¹

Initially, few took the idea seriously. Of the rumor, reporter Ingram wrote, “The idea of Wallace running his wife is so bizarre, so very difficult to take seriously, that it is not easy even to comment on it. Yet it would be nothing short of negligence not to report that serious thought is being given to this route.”⁵² Behind the scenes,

⁴⁹ Stephen Leshner, *George Wallace: American Populist* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 1994), 352.

⁵⁰ Bob Ingram, “Forecast: No Senate Race, Lurleen for Governor,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 27, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁵¹ Al Fox, “Wallace Sends Up Trial Balloon,” *Birmingham News*, October 27, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Bob Ingram, “Forecast: No Senate Race, Lurleen for Governor,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 27, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁵² Bob Ingram, “‘Done In’ Twice By JP, Wallace Won’t Forget It,” *Advertiser-Journal*, October 24, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

the Wallaces and their allies were still debating the plan and considering possible alternatives. When the succession amendment finally failed, Albert Brewer, George's floor leader in the House (and the man who would later serve as Lurleen's lieutenant governor), was the only person who thought to actually call Lurleen. Brewer and his wife, Martha, had grown close to Lurleen during George's time in office. He told her, "Get your running shoes on. The succession bill has failed." In response, Lurleen said, "Uh-uh, not me. *You*." She teased Brewer and laughingly told him, "Martha and I'll give teas all over Alabama."⁵³

1966 Gubernatorial Campaign

Rumors of a run by Lurleen swirled around the capitol building for nearly five months. Finally, on February 24, she appeared alongside her husband in the Alabama House of Representatives and announced her candidacy.⁵⁴ Much like Miriam Ferguson, Lurleen portrayed her announcement as the act of a devoted wife and Alabamian. Specifically, she cast her candidacy as the natural extension of her duties as a southern lady who was subservient to her husband's wishes and, therefore, committed to fulfilling his political needs. The entire text of her announcement speech ran only 171 words long, yet it managed to reference her husband five times, making note of his administration's accomplishments in virtually every paragraph.⁵⁵

⁵³ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 272.

⁵⁴ William K Wyant, Jr., "Woman, Republican Star in Alabama Political Show," *Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Don Dowe and Al Fox, "Makes It Official—Mrs. Wallace's Bonnet In Ring," *Birmingham News*, February 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA

⁵⁵ Statement by Mrs. George C. Wallace, February 24, 1966, Alabama Governor Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030865, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

It characterized her candidacy as the ultimate spousal sacrifice made for the good of her husband, her state, and its citizenry. She told the crowd assembled:

I am happy today to offer the voters of Alabama the opportunity of enjoying continued progress, prosperity and honest, efficient government which has been so much in evidence during the Administration of my husband. The overwhelming support of his Administration by the people indicates that they want and demand a continuation of the policies and practices he has inaugurated and conducted.⁵⁶

She explained the reason for her candidacy in simple terms: “My election would enable my husband to carry on his programs for the people of Alabama.”⁵⁷ Not inconsequently, this line of the speech became one of the most frequently quoted by news outlets.⁵⁸

Positioning her campaign as a mere continuation of her husband’s administration was, by 1966, part of a pattern and portrayal familiar among congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates. Lurleen joined a long line of women who had characterized their decision to run not as the independent act of a woman citizen, but as an act of support made in keeping with the domestic and civic responsibilities of a wife. Wallace’s new, more public persona was in keeping with her responsibility as a southern lady to support her husband in the private sphere of the home.

⁵⁶ Statement by Mrs. George C. Wallace, February 24, 1966, Alabama Governor Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030865, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Roy Reed, “Gov Wallace’s Wife Enters Race to Succeed Him,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; William K Wyant, Jr., “Woman, Republican Star in Alabama Political Show,” *Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

In this way, Wallace's rhetoric was not only consistent with her surrogate and widow counterparts, but also reflective of her region. Historically, any challenge to traditional gender ideology in the South had been severely limited. According to Scott, women's rights advocates had disputed a few characteristics of the southern lady ideal, but they left most aspects of the construct completely intact, including the prescription that the home was the woman's proper "sphere." Their advocacy for greater educational opportunity, for example, challenged the notion that women were intellectually inferior, but was ultimately couched in expediency arguments that justified such opportunities on the basis that an education would allow women to more effectively fulfill the domestic responsibilities that were uniquely theirs.⁵⁹ By using expedient means to make their case, advocates made significant, albeit limited, gains for expanded female opportunity. Wallace's rationale for her candidacy fit squarely within this rhetorical tradition. By articulating a justification steeped in marital subservience and domestic duty, she was advocating for greater female electoral opportunity, but only within certain parameters and under specific conditions.

Highlighting her husband so prominently provided Wallace with a potent rationale for her candidacy, but it also led to coverage that tended to deny her agency altogether. The *New York Times* opened up its account of her campaign announcement by declaring that, "Gov. George C. Wallace announced today that his

⁵⁹ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 71.

39-year-old blond wife, Lurleen, would be a candidate to succeed him.”⁶⁰ On another occasion, the *Times* said Lurleen “was put into the race by her husband” and that George “entered his wife, Lurleen, into the race.”⁶¹ Such descriptions completely ignored Lurleen Wallace’s own role in the endeavor despite the fact that she had personally announced, registered, and entered the electoral contest.

Over the next nine months Lurleen Wallace’s gubernatorial campaign hewed closely to the parameters set by the announcement. Together, the Wallaces barnstormed across the state of Alabama, maintaining an aggressive schedule of joint appearances.⁶² The campaign crisscrossed the state with a caravan containing a car for George and his aides, a car for Lurleen and a female companion, five trucks for the musical acts, two wagons of decorations and set-up materials, and one red truck with a portable speakers’ platform in tow.⁶³ The event at each stop followed a reliable and predictable formula. First, Lurleen would make a short, two-page speech that echoed her announcement remarks; she referenced topics, but she never strayed too far into specifics.⁶⁴ She did mention the need for better schools, assure listeners that the Governor’s mansion would remain alcohol-free, promise honest government, and

⁶⁰ Roy Reed, “Gov Wallace’s Wife Enters Race to Succeed Him,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁶¹ Gene Roberts, “Wife of Wallace Wins in Alabama; Negro Vote Heavy,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁶² Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 281.

⁶³ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 360.

⁶⁴ Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

praise local government and free enterprise.⁶⁵ A news outlet that covered Lurleen's events faithfully noted that in the general election she even added a few comments criticizing state and national newspapers.⁶⁶ However, most of Lurleen's stump speech was devoted to George and the good that the continuation of his policies and program could accomplish for the people of Alabama. She promised voters that once elected she would "continue, with my husband's help, the same type of government you [the voters of Alabama] have experienced in the last three years and we will continue to stand up for Alabama."⁶⁷ During the general election, she even pledged "four more years of the same."⁶⁸

Throughout the campaign, Lurleen continued to align herself with her husband's legacy, ideology, and policies, making no plans or pronouncements of her own. Most notably, Lurleen consistently described herself as "the instrument" through which this good work would take place.⁶⁹ The remark, which was a standard line in her stump speech, was reflective of the southern lady ideal in that it made Lurleen the passive vehicle for George's continued success.

⁶⁵ Ray Jenkins, "Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama," *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁶⁶ "Race to Continue Husband's Policy," *Birmingham News*, November 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁶⁷ Steve Fayer, Daniel McCabe, and Paul Stekler, *George Wallace: Settin' the Woods on Fire*, DVD, Directed by Daniel McCabe and Paul Stekler. Boston, MA: WGBH Educational Foundation, 2000.

⁶⁸ "Lurleen Plays Charming Wife at Conference," *Birmingham News*, November 9, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁶⁹ Ray Jenkins, "Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama," *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

The southern lady characteristics of subservience, submissiveness, and passivity could be seen in all aspects of the events. Lurleen not only used her speeches to prop up George's agency rather than exert her own, she also played a secondary role in their shared events. While she spoke first at each rally, her remarks occupied a tiny fraction of the time set aside for George's speeches. One reporter noted that she "rarely [speaks] for more than five minutes."⁷⁰ Early on, it was reported that her regular stump speech only lasted two minutes.⁷¹ One reporter timed her remarks and found her delivery lasted four.⁷² In contrast, he reported that George spoke for 50 minutes at Lurleen's campaign events.⁷³

According to reporter Ray Jenkins, Lurleen's short remarks "never amounted to more than a few words of endorsement of her husband's policies and an introduction of George."⁷⁴ She would introduce George with some dramatic intonation, saying at the end of her speech, "I give you my husband and your Governor, the man who will be my No. 1 assistant in the next administration, George

⁷⁰ "Race to Continue Husband's Policy," *Birmingham News*, November 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁷¹ Ray Jenkins, "Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama," *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁷² Gene Roberts, "Wallace Making Press His Target," *New York Times*, April 14, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁷³ Gene Roberts, "Wallace Making Press His Target," *New York Times*, April 14, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA. Stephen Leshner puts the timeframe for delivery of George's remarks at approximately forty-five minutes. Leshner, *George Wallace*, 361.

⁷⁴ Ray Jenkins, "A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...," *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

C. Wallace.”⁷⁵ Lurleen’s short speeches and animated introduction of George coupled with his lengthy remarks positioned George, not Lurleen, as “the main attraction” at her campaign events.⁷⁶

The *Birmingham News* observed that Lurleen consistently “let her husband do practically all the talking.”⁷⁷ In his speeches, he took on the state’s newspapers and the two major political parties, discussed major policy issues, and laid the groundwork for his up-coming presidential campaign.⁷⁸ In fact, George rarely mentioned Lurleen at all, focusing instead on his own policies and political plans. One reporter who attended a rally early in the campaign noted that when George took over, “it suddenly was the campaign of 1962, with his presidential forays of 1964 in Wisconsin, Indiana and Maryland thrown in.”⁷⁹ The *New York Times* noted that on the rare occasion George did mention Lurleen’s candidacy, he referred to it “as a ‘technicality’ that became ‘necessary’ only because the State Senate would not approve a constitutional referendum.”⁸⁰ He made it clear who would run the

⁷⁵ Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁷⁶ Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁷⁷ “Lurleen Plays Charming Wife at Conference,” *Birmingham News*, November 9, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Al Fox, “Wallace Takes Over at Rally for Wife,” *Birmingham News*, March 5, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸⁰ Gene Roberts, “Wallace Making Press His Target,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

administration, telling a crowd, “If my wife is elected, I shall continue to speak for you.”⁸¹ In another instance, he explained that, “If my wife is elected governor of the state, we are quite frank and honest to say that I shall be by her side and shall make the policy decisions affecting the next administration.”⁸² In an increasingly more blunt formulation, he told voters, “I will dictate the policies,” and “both of us will be the governor.”⁸³

During the general election, Lurleen’s role expanded as she became part of George’s remarks as well. However, her role reinforced the impression of passivity and subservience. From her seat behind George on the dais, she would produce one newspaper clipping after another from a folder in her lap as he excitedly delivered his remarks. In what was almost a rudimentary PowerPoint presentation, George would make reference to a newspaper story and Lurleen would supply it. She’d then sit with her hands folded as he spoke, returning the clipping to the folder when he was done and offering up a new one as evidence of his claims.⁸⁴ Silently and stoically, Lurleen enacted the southern lady, a wife dutifully and quietly engaging in activity solely aimed at assisting and supporting her husband’s political career.

⁸¹ Al Fox, “Wallace Takes Over at Rally for Wife,” *Birmingham News*, March 5, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸² William K Wyant, Jr., “Woman, Republican Star in Alabama Political Show,” *Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸³ Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸⁴ Frady, *Wallace*, 27-28; Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

Throughout the primary and general election, the submissive and subservient aspects of the southern lady ideal were continually on display. Lurleen literally gave up rhetorical space and time on her own podium to help advance her husband's voice, ideas, and career. This performance involved more than just campaign stump speeches. All campaign discourse—banners, buttons, billboards, campaign literature, advertisements—reflected what reporter Ray Jenkins called “the official but unstated strategy: ‘Obscure Mrs. Wallace’s role and leave the impression [George] Wallace is seeking re-election.’”⁸⁵ Campaign collateral was emblazoned simply with the phrase “Wallace for Governor,” making no effort to distinguish that it was a different Wallace now running for the seat.⁸⁶ Advertisements featured a photo of both George and Lurleen, and his photo was the bigger of the two.⁸⁷ Voters were enticed simply to cast their ballot for “Wallace,” with no mention of which Wallace would receive their vote.⁸⁸ Billboards said only, “Keep a good administration.”⁸⁹ The only place one could find any allusion to Lurleen's name was where it was required by campaign

⁸⁵ Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gene Roberts, “Wallace Making Press His Target,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

law: in the disclaimer buried in the fine print, which read, “Paid political advertising by friends of Mrs. George C. Wallace.”⁹⁰

So complete was Lurleen’s subservient role in the whole affair, Gene Roberts of the *New York Times* observed that, “A stranger to the state’s politics could not tell from the campaign billboards that Mrs. Wallace even is a candidate.”⁹¹ Jenkins’ coverage even echoed the ideology of the southern lady, noting that Lurleen had “played an utterly passive role in the whole drama.”⁹² He explained that “it takes a conscious effort to remember that after all, it is Lurleen, not George, who is running for Governor—this quiet, almost shy, wisp of a women who stands beside her husband as the faithful rush forward to pledge support.”⁹³

By solely advocating for her husband’s agenda, Wallace’s persona reflected the southern lady who, rather than crafting a political agenda of her own, stood by her husband’s political judgments and supported his work in the public sphere. She had completed the wife-as-surrogate persona, which meant she could be viewed as merely a stand-in and an ornamental figure offering support and adding some level of legitimacy to George Wallace’s second run for governor. The implication was, one

⁹⁰ Al Fox, “Wallace Takes Over at Rally for Wife,” *Birmingham News*, March 5, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁹¹ Gene Roberts, “Wallace Making Press His Target,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁹² Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

reporter said, “universally accepted [...] that she would be something of a bill-signing automaton while her husband continued to set state policy in every particular.”⁹⁴

Surprisingly, gender was rarely an overt issue in the campaign discourse or coverage. At only two moments did it truly become visible in Lurleen’s engagement with opponents, once in the primary and once in the general election. Both times, it backfired horribly on Lurleen’s opponents. In the waning days of the primary, Attorney General Richmond Flowers challenged Lurleen’s ability to govern by questioning whether she’d ever graduated from high school and noting she’d only “worked in a dime store and been a housewife.”⁹⁵ Carter notes the attack fell flat in part because it violated a sense of decency among “chivalrous” southern voters.⁹⁶ In the general election, Republican Jim Martin made a more explicit gender-based attack. In remarks before Republican leaders, he said, “We don’t want no skirt for governor.”⁹⁷ He then took out a full-page newspaper advertisement the night before the election with a photo of Martin and Lurleen side-by-side under the headline, “THE REAL CHOICE TOMORROW! A MAN OR A WOMAN.” Below the headline and photographs was ad copy that described Martin as “a he-man, a battler, and a winner in the United States Congress,” and Lurleen as “a nice wife, trying to do

⁹⁴ Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁹⁵ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 286.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 290-291.

a man's job in Montgomery."⁹⁸ But even here, the specter of George Wallace cast its long shadow; in even bigger font was the warning to voters, "Don't Kid Yourself – George Wallace is Grabbing for Personal Power!"⁹⁹ Two paragraphs of fine print followed, attacking Wallace's naked political ambition.

Far from challenging traditional gender ideology, the campaign response reinforced it. Lurleen does not appear to have ever addressed the attacks directly. Instead, George responded by inserting a new standard line into his stump speech: "My opponents say they don't want no *skirt* for governor of Alabama. That's right—no *skirt*. Well, I want you to know, I resent that slur on the women of this state."¹⁰⁰ The line earned applause every time and enabled George to fulfill his role in the gendered dynamic of the Deep South.¹⁰¹ Lurleen was sacrificing and submitting to her husband, and now George was chivalrously protecting her.

In addition, surprisingly little press coverage explored the gender issue beyond noting that Lurleen's election would be a "first" in Alabama history and Miriam Ferguson had achieved a similar "first" decades earlier in Texas. When the prospect of Lurleen's candidacy was initially raised, reporters did discuss the feasibility of a female candidate winning in the Deep South. In November 1965, before she had officially declared, a reporter from the *Birmingham News* asked attendees at the Alabama Farm Bureau Convention what they thought of her chances.

⁹⁸ Political advertisement, *Birmingham Post-Herald*, November 7, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Frady, *Wallace*, 196.

¹⁰¹ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 290.

One replied, “I don’t think the people would vote for any lady as a governor.”

Another noted that his county had voted the full Republican slate into office the prior year with one exception: the race where a Republican woman ran against a man.¹⁰² In addition, the *New York Times* reported “it is rumored that [...] it would be difficult to get Mrs. Wallace elected. There is a considerable prejudice against women in politics in this state. Some men still believe that it was a mistake to let them vote.”¹⁰³

Eventually, conversations about such concerns dissipated, likely because Lurleen’s public performance made it clear that her candidacy would not serve as a direct challenge to the gender roles of the South. Favorable polls and cheering crowds also quickly muted the gendered aspect of her run.¹⁰⁴ Early on, Lurleen began to consistently place at the front of the potential pack of contenders in media-sponsored political polls.¹⁰⁵ After winning the Democratic primary, she won every poll in the state.¹⁰⁶ The more her candidacy seemed destined for victory, the further the issue of

¹⁰² James Chisum, “Mrs. Wallace Is a Loser, Delegates Say,” *Birmingham News*, November 9, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁰³ Roy Reed, “What Next for Alabama’s Governor Wallace?,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁰⁴ The *New York Times* reported that “the laughter stopped as thousands showed up at [Lurleen’s] rallies.” Gene Roberts, “Wallace Making Press His Target,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁰⁵ Writing in late November 1965, Bob Ingram reported that George Wallace had “watched with interest the many public opinion polls taken by radio stations throughout Alabama. Mrs. Wallace has won most of them.” Bob Ingram, “Waiting for Gov to Drop the Other Shoe,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 21, 1965, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁰⁶ “Lurleen Wins Landslide Race; to Be Barbour’s 6th Governor,” *Clayton Record*, November 10, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

gender seemed to fade from the press coverage. Far more prominent in press reports was the theme of George's political ambition.¹⁰⁷ One seasoned Democrat lamented that George's ambitions knew no bounds, remarking that "if there were a president of the universe, he would run for that."¹⁰⁸ Very quickly, the emphasis shifted from whether a woman should run to what her husband would do with the power if she won. Any "serious criticism" was aimed at George.¹⁰⁹

Ultimately, the team of George and Lurleen Wallace attracted a coalition of voters that included black and white, male and female, white collar and working class. In the May Democratic primary, she coasted to victory against nine opponents, commanding 54 percent of the vote.¹¹⁰ In fact, her victory was so decisive she was able to avoid a run-off, having secured more than twice as many votes as her closest competitor.¹¹¹ In November, she carried 65 of Alabama's 67 counties, including the

¹⁰⁷ Throughout the campaign, there was substantial commentary expressing concern over George Wallace's attempts to circumvent the state constitution and what some viewed as his voracious appetite for power. Many framed the election in these terms. See William K. Wyant, Jr., "Woman, Republican Star in Alabama Political Show," *Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1966; "Elect Jim Martin," *Birmingham News*, November 7, 1966; "Candidates and Issues," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, November 7, 1966; "Wallace Spits on Constitution," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 7, 1966; Tom Lankford, "Governor Hopefuls Gang Up On Wallace," *Birmingham News*, March 30, 1966; Rex Thomas, "Wallace Political Potential Strongest in State History," *Mobile Register*, November 13, 1966; "Wallace Too Powerful, Editor Says," *Birmingham News*, October 14, 1966; and "Behind the Smokescreen," *Alabama Journal*, November 7, 1966. All contained within Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁰⁸ William K. Wyant, Jr., "Woman, Republican Star in Alabama Political Show," *Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁰⁹ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 362.

¹¹⁰ "Lurleen Plays Charming Wife at Conference," *Birmingham News*, November 9, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹¹¹ William K. Wyant, Jr., "Woman, Republican Star in Alabama Political Show," *Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA. Under state law, a run-off election was required unless the winner of

county her Republican opponent called home.¹¹² According to Anne Permaloff and Carl Grafton, Lurleen was seen as adding “a dimension to his [George’s] appeal,” while he gave Lurleen credibility.¹¹³ John Patterson, one of Lurleen’s opponents in the primary, confided to a friend, “There wasn’t any way in the world of beating her.” While men wanted to vote for her as “a maneuver to support her husband,” women were inspired by the presence of a female candidate. Said Patterson, “You had old women, eighty, ninety years old ... going and registering to vote that never voted in their life. Just so they could vote for her.”¹¹⁴ Even George’s own brother conceded that Lurleen had won her own supporters. “In the beginning of the campaign, people were voting for George,” he said. “But as the campaign progressed and more people saw Lurleen, they were voting for her.” Friend and gubernatorial aide Catherine Steineker explained that “there were people who couldn’t stand George C., but they all loved Lurleen.”¹¹⁵

Her success was due, at least in part, to her careful appeals to conservative gender ideals. Frady, who covered Lurleen’s candidacy as a reporter, observed that, in keeping with the tradition of the southern lady, she appeared completely submissive

the primary is able to secure a victory by winning more votes than the next two candidates combined. For vote tallies, see “Mrs. Wallace’s Official,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, May 10, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹¹² “Lurleen Plays Charming Wife at Conference,” *Birmingham News*, November 9, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹¹³ Anne Permaloff and Carl Grafton, *Political Power in Alabama: The More Things Change* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 237-8.

¹¹⁴ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 284.

¹¹⁵ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 365.

to her husband and even reflected a certain religious piety in her performance. “She submitted to everything,” he said, she “surrendered herself to her husband’s furious public passion, much as an evangelist’s or missionary’s wife might, after so many years, finally surrender herself to attend to her husband’s lonely and obsessive communion with God, thereby accepting forever her own diminishment.”¹¹⁶ Virginia Durr, the “grande dame” of the civil rights community in Montgomery, watched the Wallaces closely and also saw gender ideology at play in Lurleen’s candidacy. Durr openly despised George Wallace, but she felt more sympathetically towards Lurleen. “She was sweet, you know, one of those sweet southern women that did everything that had to be done,” said Durr. She “seemed to symbolize to so many people all they think a ‘Southern Woman’ should be: pretty, dainty, a good mother and certainly an obedient wife, brave under suffering and doomed.”¹¹⁷

In electoral success, Lurleen became the complete embodiment of the southern lady, who was ultimately supposed to be a symbol of her husband’s success.¹¹⁸ During the campaign, Wallace took this enactment to new heights by making herself the “instrument” through which voters validated George’s power and popularity. This aspect of her successful candidacy reflects Scott’s observation that the South was a place where “Obedient, faithful, submissive women strengthened the image of men who thought themselves vigorous, intelligent, commanding leaders.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Frady, *Wallace*, 205.

¹¹⁷ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 322.

¹¹⁸ Boles and Atkinson, “Ladies: South by Northwest,” 130.

¹¹⁹ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 18.

With a win for Lurleen, George's political power was reaffirmed, his masculinity and electoral continuity maintained, and his image strengthened for a second presidential run.

The benefits for Lurleen were far more mixed. On the one hand, she had done little to distinguish herself as an independent voice or to directly challenge the region's prevailing gender norms. On the other hand, as a candidate she had subtly begun to transform the southern lady ideal by bringing the construct out of the home and on to the hustings. It was a transformation that Wallace would slowly build upon during her brief tenure in office.

1967-1967: A RHETORICAL EVOLUTION IN A WALLACE ADMINISTRATION

While the very act of running for and winning election to the governor's office was a pioneering achievement, Lurleen's campaign itself did little to challenge prevailing gender ideology. It cast her as a passive "instrument" that would continue her husband's policies and programs instead of proposing her own. In this way, Lurleen's persona and performance was very much reflective of the times. According to Ashli Quesinberry Stokes, in the 1960s, "White Southern women in particular faced the problem of seeing themselves as agents of change."¹²⁰ The backlash against the decade's early civil rights and anti-war activists compounded this problem. Violence, bombings, and the threat of state-sanctioned and unsanctioned gender-specific punishments, such as vaginal searches and jail rapes, had a chilling effect on

¹²⁰ Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists," 96.

female activism.¹²¹ Stokes notes that for white southern women, there was “clear evidence that any action undertaken to challenge the status quo was unwelcome.”¹²² It was also clear that marital status was no safeguard against criticism or censure. Burned into the memory of every white married woman in Alabama was the case of Viola Liuzzo, a white housewife and mother of five who had been savagely murdered on a lonely, dark highway for no other reason than that she gave a few civil rights workers a ride to a march.¹²³

While Lurleen’s campaign performance conformed to gender roles in a way that did not risk critique or threats of violence, it did carry its own consequences. In their study of discourse by and about female political leaders, Karrin Vasby Anderson and Kristina Horn Sheeler note that wives are occasionally “cast in the role of the puppet—extensions of their husbands’ political careers who ... acted as mouthpieces for the candidates to whom they were married.”¹²⁴ This role represents the “most passive” characterization of female leaders and, when applied to a governor, portrays the female officeholder as “an instrument, an object, a token to be manipulated by

¹²¹ In Alabama, the case of Viola Liuzzo served as a particularly powerful example of what happened to women when they challenged the status quo. A thirty-nine-year-old housewife and mother of five from Detroit, Liuzzo had been moved by the actions of and the violence endured by the civil rights activists working and marching in Alabama. She drove to the state and offered her help, transporting activists to events. One night she delivered marchers to Selma. On her way home, she was stopped by four Klansmen and murdered. In the wake of the murder, the Klansmen were quickly identified, but state and local law enforcement officials focused most of their energies on slandering and discrediting the victim. Finding little actual evidence on which to base their claims, they engaged in a malicious smear campaign. The Klan alleged Liuzzo was found without underwear on and with barbiturates in her system. Conservative politicians, including George Wallace, suggested she had been obsessed “with ‘orgies’ and ‘fornication’ and ‘debauchery.’” See Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 257-259.

¹²² Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists,” 96.

¹²³ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 257-259.

¹²⁴ Karrin Vasby Anderson, and Kristina Horn Sheeler, *Governing Codes: Gender, Metaphor, and Political Identity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 16.

some more powerful other—most often a man, and more specifically a husband.”¹²⁵ By the time Lurleen assumed office, the “puppet” metaphor had become one of the primary frameworks through which the public understood her candidacy and administration. Many questioned Lurleen’s legitimacy and insinuated that George Wallace, not Lurleen, was in control of political decisions and duties. Journalists often referred to the administration as “the Governors Wallace and the Wallace Administrations I and II.”¹²⁶ According to Frady, her administration was dismissed in some quarters as a mere continuation of her husband’s, where the sole “difference was that now Lurleen served as head of state while he acted as prime minister; she attended to the ceremonial functions, leaving him that much freer for his maneuverings.”¹²⁷

Lurleen’s campaign had positioned her as the ideal domestic helpmate who was submissive to her husband’s political agenda and professional goals, dedicated to fulfilling her domestic duties, and committed to the provision of support for her spouse above all else. As a southern lady she sacrificed her own agency to advance the policies, programs, and political prospects of her husband. For some, the notion that Lurleen Wallace could make substantial and intellectual contributions to her own administration seemed doubtful and unlikely. Reinforcing this impression was the fact that her first weeks as governor-elect connected the initial weeks of the new administration with the public appearances of the campaign. In her first post-victory

¹²⁵ Anderson and Sheeler, *Governing Codes*, 18.

¹²⁶ Permaloff and Grafton, *Political Power in Alabama*, 241.

¹²⁷ Frady, *Wallace*, 203.

press conference, the Wallaces repeated the format of their campaign events. Lurleen made brief remarks and then handed the podium over to George, who used the opportunity to discuss his future plans for a possible presidential run. The *Birmingham News* ran its write up under the headline, “Lurleen Plays Charming Wife at Conference,” reporting that “Governor-Elect Lurleen Wallace continued to play today the part of the charming, smiling, and demure wife . . . she remained quiet while Gov. Wallace did most of the talking.”¹²⁸

At her inaugural ceremony, the optics were very similar to the campaign since tradition dictated that George, the out-going governor, speak as well. George spoke first and introduced Lurleen, and at ten pages and twenty-four minutes long, her inaugural was the longest address she had ever delivered. However, Lurleen did not use the occasion to depart from the kind of discourse developed during the campaign. Instead, she built upon the rationale she’d offered in support of her candidacy and characterized her perspective as a wife and mother as her only independent contributions to her own administration. She told Alabamians:

If there is any change in my administration, it will not be a change of policies or priorities, but rather one of attitude to our programs. It will be an attitude reflecting an inner feeling of wife and mother. [...] For these reasons, as wife and mother, as well as your Governor, I shall be inclined to examine programs of each of our departments from the standpoint of how they affect the family. I shall, of course, be interested in more and better opportunities for the family breadwinner. I shall be intensely interested in [...] providing personal security for the individual, his home and his family.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ “Lurleen Plays Charming Wife at Conference,” *Birmingham News*, November 9, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹²⁹ Governor Lurleen B. Wallace Inaugural Address, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030842, Folder 11, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

Lurleen's inaugural address established a role that was traditional and limited in scope. She emphasized her experience in the domestic sphere and again donned the persona of the southern wife, limiting the range of policies subject to her interest and influence. Furthermore, while the significance of her candidacy and her place as a "first" in Alabama politics offered Wallace the possibility of advancing a more expansive definition of womanhood, she eschewed the opportunity. She could have called for greater equality or noted that her election was a harbinger of coming progress and change. She chose, instead, to downplay the historic significance of her swearing-in ceremony, telling listeners, "For the first time in the history of Alabama a woman has been elected to the office of Governor. [...] For those who may seek the real meaning of this occasion, it is my belief that it will not be found in any element of uniqueness."¹³⁰

Coverage of the inauguration picked up on these comments. The *Washington Post* headline read, "Mrs. Wallace Vows More of the Same as Husband Runs for Presidency."¹³¹ Another paper commented on the historic nature of the event, but did so by crediting George with making it possible. It used classic domestic imagery to make the point, telling readers, "Mrs. Lurleen Wallace, the former dime store clerk who swapped her apron strings for her husband's coattails, moved into the governor's office in Alabama Tuesday, the third woman to occupy such a position in any

¹³⁰ Governor Lurleen B. Wallace Inaugural Address, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030842, Folder 11, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹³¹ Robert E. Baker, "Mrs. Wallace Vows More of Same as Husband Runs for Presidency," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

American state.”¹³² Others viewed the address from a different perspective, however, seeing signs of Lurleen’s emerging independence. One report noted, “Even though her inaugural address often appeared to be an act of ventriloquism, there were moments when the speaker was unmistakably Lurleen.”¹³³ In particular, the reporter cited Lurleen’s references to her perspective as a mother and her concern for the family as evidence of greater independence. The words Lurleen chose did not directly challenge conservative gender ideals, but the notion that she had taken an active role in drafting them challenged the accepted wisdom about Lurleen. It also signaled the subtle and substantial ways that she would transform the southern lady construct during her sixteen-month administration.

Greater Agency in Rhetorical Process and Practice

Indeed, if one knew where to look, there were signs that Lurleen was quickly adapting to and quietly using the considerable powers associated with her new office. Upon being sworn in, Wallace had become the elected leader of three million people and the administrator of 157 agencies and 21 state boards. Her powers were broad and touched all aspects of Alabama political and civic life. She could grant clemency to condemned prisoners, veto all legislation, and as commander-in-chief of the Alabama militia, direct the actions of its more than 18,000 officers and enlisted men. She also exerted significant control over the state’s purse strings since the Alabama

¹³² Steve Ball, Jr., “Lurleen Gets Oath As ‘Bama Governor,” *Atlanta Journal*, January 17, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹³³ Ray Jenkins, “The Queen of Alabama and the Prince Consort,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 21, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

governor was authorized to supervise expenditures of over \$1 billion a year.¹³⁴ In the early months of her administration, Lurleen continued to rely heavily on aides and her husband, who had moved into an office across the hall from her own. Over time, however, she also began to take a greater role in discharging her duties.

As Lurleen began to more fully exert her authority, she also broadened the southern lady construct. Her efforts reflected casuistic stretching, a rhetorical process that, according to A. Cheree Carlson, has particular appeal to women. Often caught between their traditional roles and contemporary circumstances that require change, casuistic stretching allows women to displace traditional terms, moving them from “an accepted context” into “a new territory.”¹³⁵ In the process, “the new context ‘borrows’ respectability from the established context.”¹³⁶ During her campaign, Wallace transformed the southern lady construct by bringing it out of the private sphere and into the public square, even as she displayed fidelity to the construct’s characteristics. During her sixteen months as governor, she would continue to faithfully enact the role’s traditional attributes, but she would also layer new principles upon the old identity through her speech-making and her leadership on initiatives aimed at more public spaces, better mental health facilities, and civil rights matters.

¹³⁴ The complete list of Alabama’s gubernatorial powers at the time of Lurleen Wallace’s election can be found in House, *Lady of Courage*, 115-116.

¹³⁵ A. Cheree Carlson, “Creative Casuistry and Feminist Consciousness: The Rhetoric of Moral Reform,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 21.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

Some of the clearest evidence of this evolution involved the delivery and drafting of her speeches. During the campaign, Lurleen's public speaking was one of the ways in which she compared less favorably to her husband and, as a result, was taken less seriously. One newspaper noted, "Mrs. Wallace is something less than a professional speech maker, a pursuit in which more than incidentally the governor [George Wallace] excels."¹³⁷ Her early attempts at speechmaking were described as "short, toneless, metronomic, without humor or any of her husband's kind of raw passion." It was observed that "her syllables [were] slow and deliberate and enunciated with an unchanging expression of vaguely scowling earnestness—she sounded, really, like a high-school valedictorian delivering a laboriously crafted commencement address."¹³⁸ Lurleen, who had never given a speech before announcing her campaign, was critiqued for both the delivery and substance of her remarks.

However, during the campaign, Lurleen's speech-making abilities subtly and slowly evolved, and she became a more confident speaker. Carter observes that she "seemed to blossom" over the course of the primary and general elections, delivering her short speeches "with conviction" and responding to the crowds.¹³⁹ The *Birmingham News*, which covered her faithfully over her years in the public eye, noted the change as well. A few days before the November general election, it ran a

¹³⁷ "The Governor's 'Calls,'" *Birmingham News*, July 27, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹³⁸ Frady, *Wallace*, 196.

¹³⁹ Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 290.

story that praised her development of “an emphatic manner of speaking that, in its own way, is as effective as that of her famous husband. And shorter.”¹⁴⁰

Several people close to Lurleen later pointed to a series of primary rallies in April 1967 as the “turning point in her politicking and speech-making.”¹⁴¹ That month, George had fallen ill and was unable to attend campaign events. Rather than cancel, Lurleen decided to appear alone and she began to experiment with her short text. At a rally in Ashland, she replaced the words “our administration” with “my administration,” for the first time rhetorically laying claim to her own candidacy.¹⁴² Wallace also began to mix and match sections of her four standard stump speeches. According to close friend and confidant Catherine Steineker, Lurleen would sit down and edit them, saying “Now let’s take this from this one,” and ‘Let’s take this part from the other one.’¹⁴³ At this point Lurleen began to appreciate the power of the bully pulpit and her own abilities in wielding that power. She began to take control of her own events and texts. In the process, she began to demonstrate how a political space could be a place of empowerment for a woman—not by casting off the southern lady persona, but by stretching it to fit the demands of a new context. Wallace was always careful to maintain the construct’s key characteristics, but she began to add a measure of independence and civic awareness to it as well.

¹⁴⁰ “Race to Continue Husband’s Policy,” *Birmingham News*, November 2, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 84.

¹⁴² House, *Lady of Courage*, 48.

¹⁴³ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 85.

Lurleen's broadening of the southern lady construct coincided with a very personal awakening, as she became cognizant of her own abilities. According to Steineker, "she saw that she could really do it if she had to. She saw, too, that the people were really listening to her speeches. [...] So she took it and went."¹⁴⁴ By the time that the general election campaign rolled around in the fall of 1966, Lurleen had evolved as a public speaker. Speeches became fuller and a bit more detailed. She made attempts to adapt to her audiences, ad libbing material about the community in which she was speaking. A photographer who covered Lurleen's candidacy once recalled sitting with Lurleen and the other young reporters in the mornings, sipping coffee before they all piled into cars and departed for the day's events. According to him, she "had turns of phrases she would try out" on them as "the lady candidate would read us the words she had composed." Occasionally she would share a passage that George didn't like to see what they thought. He recalled, "She read the words. We listened. She finished and waited. Never did we write about that in an unworthy manner. We knew she was trying. We knew she was serious."¹⁴⁵ Biographer Anita Smith notes that although Lurleen was never able to achieve top billing at her own campaign events, these efforts meant that by the end of the campaign, "she was no longer merely introducing George."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 84-85.

¹⁴⁵ Wayne Greenhaw, "Old Photographer Brings Back Memories of Days on Campaign Trail," *Alabama Journal*, April 22, 1991, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 84-85.

Lurleen's forays into speechwriting and speechmaking continued into her gubernatorial term as she changed wording and sentences "to make it sound more like her."¹⁴⁷ Reporter Jules Loh reported that, by the early days of her administration, she was able to "appear before an audience with chin high, hand steady, voice firm." She told reporters she relied upon written texts because she would "never be an off-the-cuff speaker," but in style and substance she had come into her own. Loh observed that Lurleen's "moderate tongue is in distinct contrast to his [George's] rapid-fire delivery and frequent lapses into gross vernacular. Lurleen Wallace's sense of taste would never, for example, indulge his description of the federal court system as 'a sorry, no-account, lousy outfit.'"¹⁴⁸ While one long-time observer conceded that "she could never match her husband's bombastic oratory or his capacity for whipping up a crowd," four months into her term "she showed an astonishing grasp of stage appearances" and "achieved a substantial degree of poise and self-assurance on the platform."¹⁴⁹

Lurleen's efforts were so effective that a rumor began to spread that she had received voice and speech training.¹⁵⁰ According to her close confidants and aides the rumor wasn't true. She simply began to take greater liberties and use friends as

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 91-92.

¹⁴⁸ Jules Loh, "Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?," Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁴⁹ Ray Jenkins, "The Queen of Alabama and the Prince Consort," *New York Times Magazine*, May 21, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 91-92. Jenkins reports Lurleen had improved "with a little professional coaching." Ray Jenkins, "The Queen of Alabama and the Prince Consort," *New York Times Magazine*, May 21, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

“sounding boards” when she rehearsed. Catherine Steineker once recalled an evening during Lurleen’s tenure when the governor called her at home at around eleven at night and asked Catherine to come over and help with a speech. Steineker recalled, “We worked on that speech until about 3 a.m.” While the technical nature of the remarks meant linguistic changes weren’t possible at that late hour, Steineker and Wallace spent four hours working on delivery. “We picked out the words that Lurleen should give the most emphasis to. Then Lurleen would say the speech over to herself in the mirror, and then say it to me. She even turned her back to me and said it to make sure that her voice was carrying as it should.”¹⁵¹ Through the process of revision and rehearsal, Lurleen had begun to take ownership of her speeches. A reporter noted, that while Lurleen always spoke with “a staff-prepared text,” she reviewed it “several times before delivery, making her own marginal notations and underlinings.” He found her speeches could be “somewhat dull,” but conveyed “a satisfactory amount of forcefulness and seriousness.”¹⁵²

Given that fiery rhetoric was the hallmark of George Wallace’s career and the source of much of his political power, Lurleen’s increasingly active role in her own speechmaking is even more significant. Long-time observer, political reporter, and Wallace biographer Frady once observed that, for George, speeches were “not for the purpose of communication, explanation, or persuasion;” they were “another form of

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 91-92.

¹⁵² Ray Jenkins, “The Queen of Alabama and the Prince Consort,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 21, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

action.”¹⁵³ By exhibiting more control over her speeches, Lurleen was reclaiming some of her political agency and taking independent action. She continued to portray herself as the dutiful southern wife, supporting George as he played an important role in policy-making, engaged in backroom-dealing, and began campaigning for the presidency. Yet, she also demonstrated obvious independence in her speeches, an area that had once been George’s sole domain and the source of much of his political power. These efforts worked to imbue the old construct of the southern lady with new meaning. Through her speechmaking, Lurleen was layering a new measure of independence onto the old characteristic of subservience, making compatible the two seemingly contradictory ideas of supporting one’s husband as a southern wife and claiming a greater public voice at his expense. In the context of her marriage, Lurleen taking ownership of her speeches was, perhaps, even more significant than taking ownership of her legislative agenda and administrative decisions. Once in office, she began to do both—and the public began to notice.

Just a couple of weeks before her inauguration, a reporter cast doubts on the campaign-season claims that George would maintain complete control, noting that Lurleen “has reportedly shown woman-like streaks of independence lately.”¹⁵⁴ Among the events and items that spurred speculation were interviews in which Lurleen more fully asserted herself. In one such press meeting, she told reporters, “I am the governor, [...] I have a lot to learn and I intend to learn as much as I can and

¹⁵³ Frady, *Wallace*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Robert E. Baker, “Mrs. Wallace Vows More of the Same as Husband Runs for Presidency,” *Washington Post*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

do as best as I can. I know the importance and the dignity of the office I hold.”¹⁵⁵

One reporter noted that “her tone is not that of someone playing a game, and in her first weeks in office Mrs. Wallace has left little doubt she takes the job seriously.”¹⁵⁶

Reporters also noted “little manifestations of independence” that seemed to signal her intention to more fully assume her new role.¹⁵⁷ Several remarked upon the bust of “the strong-willed Egyptian queen,” Nefertiti, in her office, her gift of an apron for George, and her comment that he would become her “highway beautification director.”¹⁵⁸ She attracted attention when she bumped George from the seat he usually occupied in the governor’s official government car, and she raised eyebrows when she hung the following poem in her office:

A woman may be small of frame,
With tiny feet that patter,
But when she puts one small foot down,
Her shoe size doesn’t matter.¹⁵⁹

People also noticed when arrangements for both the \$1-a-year salary and the office space for George, who was supposed to be her “No. 1 Adviser,” remained

¹⁵⁵ Jules Loh, “Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?,” Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

incomplete.¹⁶⁰ The Associated Press viewed these as signs that “she might assert herself to an extent few imagined before her election.”¹⁶¹ Reporter Jules Loh noted, “Mrs. Wallace does little to discourage [such] speculation.”¹⁶²

Lurleen’s public discourse also helped fuel the sense of unfolding transformation. In public appearances, she began to take ownership of her new office. Before the legislature she made reference to “my office” and “my cabinet,” and it was reported that she “was persuasive when she talked of how strongly she felt about the importance of highway financing.”¹⁶³ She announced plans to attend meetings of certain boards over which the governor presided, such as those of the University of Alabama trustees.¹⁶⁴ She told members of the press corps that she intended to “be an active chief executive, would show up for work every day if possible, might even initiate a few measures of her own.”¹⁶⁵ At a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Mobile she

¹⁶⁰ Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶¹ Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶² Jules Loh, “Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?,” Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶⁵ Jules Loh, “Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?,” Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Jules Loh, “Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead,” Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Ray Jenkins, “A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...,” *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box

passionately relayed her thoughts about commerce and education in her remarks.¹⁶⁶

And while she had previously declined to even discuss the governor's duty to conduct clemency hearings for those on death row, she now told reporters "'it's the governor's responsibility, and I will do it. I will sit in on the clemency hearings.'"¹⁶⁷

One of the most notable moments occurred at her first official press conference when Lurleen stressed that she had not reached a final decision about gubernatorial appointments, leading many to conclude that she might replace her husband's advisors with her own. While Lurleen ultimately retained nearly all of George's advisors, she turned heads when she replaced a key official. The press called it "a small victory," noting that she held her ground and refused to change her mind or allow the official to "stay awhile, for appearance's sake."¹⁶⁸ Instead, she removed and demoted him only a few weeks into her term. After her first staffing decision, officials took her more seriously, seeing she was willing to exercise her power over personnel.¹⁶⁹

Speaking to the nuanced persona Lurleen was developing, Loh noted that "larger signs of political life" seemed to indicate that George Wallace maintained

6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶⁶ Jules Loh, "Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead," Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶⁷ Ray Jenkins, "A Woman May Be Small of Frame ... But ...," *Alabama Journal*, January 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

power, while Lurleen's evolution from candidate to officeholder also suggested she would take broader role.¹⁷⁰ For reporters, it was confusing, but the circumstances reflected the process of casuistic stretching. While Lurleen had not pushed George from power once the office was hers, she was also exercising her prerogatives as the state's chief executive. Rather than be trapped by an either-or dilemma, Lurleen was intent on having it both ways. She would support George as a southern wife while taking independent action as a southern governor. Reporter Loh observed that her actions and words had "made it plain that her governorship would be no mere charade," and she left the strong impression that she would "leave her own stamp on the office."¹⁷¹ At least one legislator sensed a shift in the balance of power, having been convinced by her actions "that hers, not her husband's, will be the voice that matters." He said, "'When I want to talk to the governor I want to talk to the governor, not the governor's dollar-a-year assistant.'¹⁷²

Over the span of her sixteen months in office, Governor Lurleen Wallace would continue to stretch the boundaries of her gendered identity as she left her mark in four areas: public parks and recreational spaces, mental health facilities, race and civil rights issues, and women's health. In the first three areas, she identified a programmatic goal and used the various powers of her office to accomplish it.

¹⁷⁰ Jules Loh, "Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead," Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁷¹ Jules Loh, "Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?," Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA; Jules Loh, "Lurleen May Be More Than Mere Figurehead," Associated Press, February 19, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Rhetorical Leadership on Public Spaces, Mental Health, and Civil Rights

In one of her first independent acts as governor, Lurleen placed the establishment of more state parks and conservation areas on her agenda. The idea had first occurred to her while attending the Southern Governors Conference in Kentucky with George not long after she had clinched the Democratic nomination. The conference was held at a public resort, which Lurleen viewed from the deck of a steamboat. She came away convinced that Alabamians should have the same kind of public spaces for recreation. When she told George about her idea, he replied, “Well, you’re going to be governor.”¹⁷³ Perhaps realizing for the first time the power that would come with the office, Lurleen filed away the idea.

Lurleen’s goals in this area were not unlike those of Lady Bird Johnson, who served as first lady during Wallace’s time in office and concentrated her energy on pursuing beautification projects and environmental conservation efforts.¹⁷⁴ While their goals were very similar, Lurleen’s methods were different and bore the mark of an acting governor. She first used the power of her office to commission a study on the logistical aspects of adding more public spaces. She then persuaded the legislature to appropriate \$43 million for the expansion of state parks.¹⁷⁵ In her May address to legislators, she listed action on a proposal for “a program for parks and recreation” as

¹⁷³ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 371.

¹⁷⁴ Lewis Gould, “Lady Bird (Claudia Alta Taylor) Johnson,” in *American First Ladies*, ed. Louis Gould (New York: Garland Publishing, 2006), 504.

¹⁷⁵ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 371.

the second of her top four priorities for the up-coming session.¹⁷⁶ It was the first initiative that Lurleen pursued of her own volition, not as a continuation of her husband's administration.

The second initiative aimed to resolve a serious public health crisis and fit within the tradition of work undertaken by the women's rights advocates discussed in Chapter One, who tried to bring social issues like care for the sick and vulnerable, the protection of children, and latent domestic matters, into public view. In her inaugural address, Lurleen had quickly referenced the need for programs to care for "the sick, disabled and handicapped," but there was little evidence that she had any real plan for accomplishing that goal.¹⁷⁷ By the end of her second month in office, it had become her signature initiative. In February, she visited Bryce Hospital and Partlow State School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Appalled by the conditions at both facilities, she set out to use her position as governor to enact major reforms.

More so than her campaign rallies, Lurleen's visits to these mental health facilities seemed to awaken her to the real and considerable needs of the state's citizens. Reporters who accompanied her on the tours captured the profound impact that the visits had on her. Reports described her as visibly moved by the conditions and her interactions with patients. She was described as "misty-eyed" and "fighting

¹⁷⁶ Speech to the Joint Session of the Alabama Legislature by Governor Lurleen B. Wallace – Regular Session, May 2, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030864, Folder 008, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹⁷⁷ During the inaugural address, Wallace said, "The mental institutions of our state, overcrowded and understaffed, must receive additional attention. [...] We shall strive to give the sick, disabled and handicapped an opportunity for recovery – and opportunity to regain the feeling of self-reliance and independence which means so much to each of us. No one will question the necessity of such programs." Governor Lurleen B. Wallace Inaugural Address, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030842, Folder 11, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

back the tears as she walked through the wards housing the more seriously ill.”¹⁷⁸ As she toured a ward at Partlow, she heard a mentally challenged child cry, “Mama.” Reporters noted Wallace was “most visibly affected” and had “a look of pain on her face” when she heard the child cry out.¹⁷⁹ It was reported that at Bryce Hospital “the governor almost broke down when a patient described by a doctor as ‘a very deteriorated schizophrenic’ ran up to her and hugged her.”¹⁸⁰ Lurleen seemed transformed by the experience, aware not only of the urgent need but also of her ability to ameliorate it. In impromptu remarks to reporters, she expressed an urgent need “to do something to help.”¹⁸¹ She said, “I came to see what facilities are here and what are needed. I can see it’s certainly overcrowded. They need new buildings and they need bed space.”¹⁸² In a foreshadowing of what was to come, she said the crisis at the state’s mental health facilities would “certainly be of interest to me during the session of the Legislature.”¹⁸³ In fact, Lurleen Wallace was preparing to use every tool at her disposal to ensure the legislature made it a priority.

The methods that Wallace employed to achieve her objectives marked a dramatic shift from the persona she had adopted during the campaign. Rather than lending her support to statewide charities or holding social functions to call attention

¹⁷⁸ “Lurleen Tours 2 Institutions,” *Mobile Register*, February 25 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

to the cause as a first lady might, Lurleen used the power of her office to enact her agenda. A week after she toured the facilities, Lurleen called the state legislature into special session to consider a highway proposal. She used the occasion to address the mental health initiative, mentioning it at the very beginning of her speech. She told legislators of her trip to Bryce Hospital and Partlow School, describing the need as “heartrending” and urging the state legislators to appropriate some of the more than \$4 million in bank interest revenues “to meet the obvious need of our mental institutions.”¹⁸⁴ She also began to explore the power of the bully pulpit by attempting to apply popular pressure on the legislature. She took her message directly to the people of Alabama, a sophisticated approach for a woman who had once expressed a fear of crowds. Lurleen accordingly would use public events to make appeals directly to the medical community. In a speech before the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, she drew from personal experience, noting that because of her own health challenges, she and the audience shared “a deep concern, for the health of the people of this State.”¹⁸⁵ She told them that she’d hoped health initiatives would become the cornerstone of her legacy as governor: “[W]hen historians of the future write of the Lurleen Wallace Administration, I personally can think of no tribute more pleasing to me than for them to say that my Administration was concerned about the health needs of the people.”¹⁸⁶ Finally, she focused in on the mental health crisis, calling it “one of

¹⁸⁴ Lurleen B. Wallace Speech Before the Legislature of Alabama in Special Session Assembled, March 2, 1976, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 009, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹⁸⁵ Governor Lurleen B. Wallace Speech to the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, April, 21, 1967, Alabama Governor Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 032, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

the immediate areas of need,” and used testimony from her visits to the state’s facilities to bolster her case for action:

Only a few weeks ago, accompanied by Dr. Robert Parker, I made a tour of the facilities in Tuscaloosa for the mentally ill. I had been prepared for what I would see there, but even with preparation, it was a shocking experience. As I walked through the wards of Bryce Hospital and Partlow School, I thought to myself how good it might be if all Alabamians could make the same tour. I think I know what their reaction would be. I am not ashamed to tell you what mine was. That night I got down on my knees and thanked the Lord that my four children were healthy, physically and mentally. I also made a vow that whatever I could do, I would do to improve the lot of our mentally ill.¹⁸⁷

Wallace continued, laying out the detailed legislative and administrative work she had completed to date in order to make good on that vow. She also discussed other public health concerns, including tuberculosis, venereal disease, and pollution. She closed by expressing hope that the medical community would work with her to “improve the health of the people.”¹⁸⁸ In tone, detail, and substance, it was a speech remarkably different from the short, bland, and vague campaign remarks she had routinely delivered just a year earlier.

Meanwhile, Lurleen kept applying pressure on the legislature. On May 2, 1967, she appeared before the members once more when they convened their regular session. Again, she reflected upon her trip to Bryce and Partlow, noting that the trip left her “deeply moved” and “convinced” that the state must make better facilities and more funding a priority. She thanked them for allocating funding that would be used to address the “urgent and immediate need” at the state’s mental health facilities.

¹⁸⁷ Governor Lurleen B. Wallace Speech to the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, April, 21, 1967, Alabama Governor Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 032, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Finally, she listed her top four priorities for the up-coming session, and mental health proposals were first on the list.

In addition to speeches before the legislature and the public, Lurleen used press conferences to advance her agenda through the state's media. At a September 1967 event, she publicly signed a legislative package creating regional centers and hospitals that would ensure quality care for special needs citizens and the mentally ill.¹⁸⁹ Far from being solely a ceremonial occasion, the press conference gave Lurleen an opportunity to continue to garner public support, which would be critical since one of the bills included authorization for a \$15 million bond that Alabamians would have to vote on a few months later. While signing the three bills that the legislature had presented her, Lurleen "said it was a 'fine moment in our history.'" She added that "providing better facilities and care for the mentally ill of our state is a matter that has long been on my heart and mind. I am sure the citizens of Alabama are proud that this challenge has been met."¹⁹⁰ She concluded, "I know I speak for them when I express appreciation to the legislature for taking this action which has so long been needed."¹⁹¹ In November 1967, she used another press conference to advocate approval of the bond issue.¹⁹² Before members of the media, she said, "I am encouraged that progress is being made on constructing additional facilities for the

¹⁸⁹ William O. Bryant, "Legislation Signed By Gov. Wallace," *Alabama Journal*, September 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Don F. Wasson, "Who Speaks for State? When Will They Speak?," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 26, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed children of our state. I hope that the people will approve the General Obligation Bond Issue on this matter which will be voted on December 5.”¹⁹³

By the time she was done, Lurleen had persuaded the legislature to enact a two-cent-a-pack cigarette tax to help fund better mental health facilities. She had also successfully convinced the legislators and the voters to issue a \$15 million bond for the effort.¹⁹⁴ Less than a year before Lurleen’s death, reporter Don Wasson heralded this work as one of the few “good” and “notable accomplishments” of the legislative session. He gave Lurleen full credit for the initiative, calling it “the one shining light” of the session and noting it “was Mrs. Wallace’s program from the start.”¹⁹⁵ He praised the quick action and significant signs of movement, observing that “the entire program is so worthwhile and commendable it is a wonder that it wasn’t enacted years ago. It should prove to a lot of folks that a lady governor can do a lot for a state and Mrs. Wallace has earned a solid place in Alabama history by the enactment of the mental health program.”¹⁹⁶ Wallace’s efforts not only constituted a major milestone in Alabama health care, they also served to further transform the southern lady ideal. Lurleen had stretched the boundaries of the ideal by engaging in activities previously considered inappropriate for a proper southern wife. She moved even further into the

¹⁹³ Statement by Governor Lurleen B. Wallace, November 20, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹⁹⁴ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 369.

¹⁹⁵ Don F. Wasson, “The ’67 Legislature: Its Plusses, Minuses,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 3, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

public sphere, assuming the mantle of spokesperson for the people and advocate for the public good. Far from being passive and lacking intelligence, she took bold action and used a sophisticated combination of approaches to achieve her goals. Yet, even as she transformed the role, she remained faithful to it. Key to this was her effort to remain a submissive and sacrificing wife; her efforts, while remarkable, did not displace her husband, who continued to play a prominent role in her administration. Lurleen was layering new over the old, weaving the contemporary with the traditional, and stretching the southern lady construct to fit a new context.

The third area where Lurleen's imprint can be seen is in the area of civil rights and race relations. Early on, the issue of school desegregation threatened to derail her administration, an issue that one reporter described as "a burden she inherited from her husband but carried uncomplainingly."¹⁹⁷ By 1966, George Wallace was a well-known antagonist in the nation's civil rights struggle. While he started his career as a more progressive southerner (even asking to be appointed to the Tuskegee Institute and serving with distinction for several years), he eventually became associated with the most violent elements of the backlash against civil rights. His change in position appears to have occurred in 1958, when he was defeated in his first gubernatorial campaign due to accusations that he was "soft" on racial matters. George confided in friends that he would "never be outniggered again" as he began a fifteen-year campaign to cultivate and capitalize upon racist attitudes, white rage, and public fear.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 373.

¹⁹⁸ Dan T. Carter, "Legacy of Race: George Wallace and the Transformation of American Politics," *The Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 1 (1996): 26.

Perhaps best known for his oratory in this area, most Americans were familiar with George's "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" pledge in his 1962 inaugural address.¹⁹⁹ Many were also familiar with his 1963 stand in the schoolhouse door, during which he tried to prevent federal authorities from integrating the University of Alabama.²⁰⁰ In the early years, George's language was overtly racist and his discourse was filled with claims that blacks were "*inherently* lazy, lacking in intelligence, sexually promiscuous, and prone to" violence.²⁰¹ According to Carter, as time went on, George learned to couch his abhorrent racism in "coded language," which was "not explicitly racial but unmistakable in its symbolic intent."²⁰²

Lurleen's personal views on the subjects of civil rights and race relations are not well-known, but as a candidate she certainly pledged to continue the segregation policies that her husband had championed. Within the first few months of her administration, the issue of school desegregation emerged again when a three-judge panel issued a ruling in the case of *Lee vs. Macon County*. Their federal order required that 99 Alabama school systems be immediately desegregated at all levels. It was described as "the most dramatic series of school segregation orders" to "hit the

¹⁹⁹ Inaugural Address of Governor George C. Wallace, January 14, 1963, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030860, Folder 012, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL

²⁰⁰ For a detailed account, see Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 142-151.

²⁰¹ Carter, "Legacy of Race," 22.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 22, 26.

state since 1963,” and prompted one newspaper to ask, “Will Lurleen Stand in School Doors?”²⁰³

Governor Lurleen Wallace had a narrow range of options. She could comply and order the integration plans, she could appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court and request a stay of the order pending its decision, or she could defy the order using a legislative practice known as “interposition,” a maneuver “placing the state between its people and the federal government.” Other state legislatures had attempted interposition in the past, but its validity had never been legally tested so it was unclear how such an action would fare if challenged in court.²⁰⁴

Lurleen Wallace addressed the matter in a speech before her first joint legislative meeting.²⁰⁵ She advocated for the path of interposition, asking lawmakers to give her administration the power to intervene between the local boards and the federal court. She also requested a cease and desist order be sent to the federal panel who issued the ruling and the exercise of police powers and additional police manpower be authorized, if necessary.²⁰⁶ In advance of her remarks, the press noted that the “language of her recommendations” would need to be “carefully couched in phrases which could not be construed as open defiance of court orders or any other

²⁰³ Al Fox, “Will Lurleen Stand in School Doors?,” *Birmingham News*, March 26, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 374.

²⁰⁶ James Bennett, “Little or No Opposition to Lurleen’s Requests Is Expected,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, April 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

constitutionally adopted law.”²⁰⁷ When it was delivered, some reporters assumed that the speech was solely ghost-written by George Wallace, but speech drafts found through archival research and the final text itself cast doubts upon that claim.²⁰⁸ The archival files reveal the subtle, but significant, impact Lurleen Wallace’s administration had on matters of race and civil rights.

Early drafts of the speech can only be described as defiant and closely aligned with George Wallace’s demagogic style. The first draft of the speech, in particular, reflects George’s tendency to be “stunningly disconnected and even incoherent.”²⁰⁹ It ricochets between race-baiting, lamenting the federal government’s victimization of Alabama and its people, and urging utter defiance of federal authorities, telling Alabamians to resist at all costs “their bloody conquest.”²¹⁰ The draft includes inflammatory, race-tinged language, making reference to the order’s demand for “thorough and indiscriminate mixing” and warning of “the effect of forced, massive mixing of the races at teen-age social events [. . . and] indiscriminate mixing in restrooms, in classrooms and cafeterias.”²¹¹ It uses the phrase “checkered, unnatural assemblage” to characterize integrated schools and describes integration in other parts

²⁰⁷ Al Fox, “Will Lurleen Stand in School Doors?,” *Birmingham News*, March 26, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁰⁸ Dan Dowe, “Lurleen’s Speech Still a Mystery,” *Birmingham News*, April 5, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁰⁹ Carter, “Legacy of Race,” 9.

²¹⁰ Draft 1 of March 30th Speech to Joint Session of Alabama Legislature, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

of the country as resulting in “jungles – teachers and pupils, alike are preyed upon by beasts.”²¹² The draft text calls the order “flagrantly unconstitutional” and pledges to “use every lawful means – to the outermost limits of the law – to see that this cruel, despicable decree shall not impinge upon our people.”²¹³ Predictably, it praises the actions of George Wallace for his “leadership” and “indisputable fairness,” which have “worked wonders” in Alabama and “set a standard for the nation” of “courage” and “excellence.”²¹⁴ In short, the draft is consistent with the type of rhetoric George Wallace had built a career delivering.

In contrast, the substance and tone of the final text is markedly different from the earliest draft. While it also advocates for resistance to the federal order, the argument is logical and almost lawyerly in the presentation of its case. The speech begins by explaining the events that have brought the legislature into session. It then offers an interpretation of what the federal order would do and makes an academic case for the policy of interposition. The only time the final text makes mention of George Wallace is to briefly reference his place in the historical debate over integration. To be clear, the effect of the speech was the same (resistance to the order) and the policy recommendations contained within it did not mark a departure from the positions held by George Wallace. With the exception of one particularly

²¹² Draft 1 of March 30th Speech to Joint Session of Alabama Legislature, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

inflammatory line comparing the order to “what Hitler did in Germany,” the final text bore little resemblance in tone, language, and style to the original draft.²¹⁵

Across the three drafts of the text, one passage reveals the way in which the Lurleen Wallace administration appeared to have a cooling effect on George Wallace’s ideas. The first text includes a passage about an idea that historians have specifically attributed to George, namely “the idea of assembling a kind of state-wide vigilante posse of some one hundred thousand volunteers, ‘so when the troops come, we’ll have a few folks waitin’ for ‘em.’”²¹⁶ The earliest draft contains language actually proposing this initiative. It reads, “Having been invested with the police powers of this State, I shall begin immediately to deputize 100,000 Alabamians – men and women – to resist this evil force.”²¹⁷ In a subsequent draft, the language is altered and suggests a less caustic policy proposal, asking instead for the passage of “appropriate legislation authorizing the employment of an additional 500 State Troopers [...] for the purpose of seeing that the laws of this State are appropriately enforced.”²¹⁸ In the final text, the policy proposal is watered down even further, merely requesting that the legislature “consider whether additional State Troopers

²¹⁵ Lurleen B. Wallace Speech to the Joint Session of the Alabama Legislature, March, 30, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

²¹⁶ Frady, *Wallace*, 229.

²¹⁷ Draft 1 of March 30th Speech to Joint Session of Alabama Legislature, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

²¹⁸ Draft 2 of March 30th Speech to Joint Session of Alabama Legislature, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

may be required in order that the children of our State be protected.”²¹⁹ Rhetorically, it was a departure from the George Wallace years. As one newspaper observed, “It is not the nature of former Gov. Wallace to take a steady hand on the tiller. He is more inclined, by temperament, to organize the mutiny.”²²⁰

The more moderate tone of Lurleen’s discourse was welcomed by the legislature. Of her speech, one state senator said, “She showed remarkable restraint under pressure.” Another applauded her effort as “a very temperate speech, but with the firmness it needed. She made me proud of being a member of her legislature.” Another said simply, it was “the best [speech] I’ve heard since I have been in the legislature.”²²¹ It certainly was a departure from the kind of bombastic, racist screeds for which George Wallace had become famous.

It is difficult to determine whether the more moderate rhetorical approach was due directly to Lurleen’s editorial input, but if so, it was not the only time she had such an impact on the debate over civil rights policies. In the wake of the federal order, her administration had invited nine other southern governors to a conference for the purpose of discussing the integration rulings. In a sign of changing times, several actually declined the invite, realizing that the time for public grandstanding had passed and choosing instead to oppose the measures in court and abide by any

²¹⁹ Lurleen B. Wallace Speech to the Joint Session of the Alabama Legislature, March, 30, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

²²⁰ “It’s Lonely at the Summit,” *Birmingham News*, April 16, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²²¹ “State Senate, House Seem to Back Lurleen,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 31, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

judicial decision.²²² Even Alabamians seemed to sense the tide was shifting, and the response from the public and news outlets reflected just how far Lurleen had come in terms of her legitimacy as governor. In her legislature speech, Lurleen had declared, “if we stand alone, we will go alone.” When a local newspaper challenged that position, it addressed Lurleen directly, stating, “She got part of her answer Friday. We stand almost alone. The unanswered part remains: Where *are* we going? Toward calm and measured attempts to control the damage we have inflicted, in large measure, on ourselves or toward more of the same, which could make Alabama a leper even among Southern States?”²²³ Some citizens publicly spoke out in opposition to the interposition plan as well, placing ads that directly addressed Lurleen in the newspaper.²²⁴

In the midst of this tumultuous debate, the governors of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia, the North Carolina director of department of administration, and a legal aide to the governor of South Carolina, met with Lurleen and George at the conference in Alabama. All had agreed to release a statement after their meetings, but there was substantial debate about the proposed language. When they had wrapped up deliberations, the Louisiana governor backed out and wanted a rewrite, telling George, “I know you are going to use this on the stump, but I can’t use it in Louisiana.” In an event that exemplifies the broader authority Lurleen had

²²² “It’s Lonely at the Summit,” *Birmingham News*, April 16, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ “Newspaper Ad Hits at Lurleen’s ‘Racism,’” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, April 12, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

established over her administration, George did not act unilaterally or continue to debate the matter on his own. Instead, George went looking for Lurleen, who had gone to the living quarters in the mansion. According to aides, he was heard asking aloud, “Where is the governor? We have some important business down here. Where is the governor?” When Lurleen had returned, all of the parties met for another three hours. When the statement was finally released, George had lost the battle and the language was “toned down.”²²⁵ The press took notice. The *Montgomery Advertiser* commented, “By Alabama standards, the statement of the four Southern governors was bland and innocuous. [...] As George Wallace likes to play the game, it was a bore.”²²⁶

Lurleen’s response to violence towards civil rights advocates and integration supporters was noticeably different as well. By the standards set during her husband’s administration, Lurleen’s years in office were relatively peaceful. However, after the statewide desegregation order, white supremacists began to threaten the three judges who had presided over the case. In late April, someone detonated a bomb at the home of one of the judge’s mothers, mistakenly thinking that the home belonged to the judge. Press reports described Lurleen as “angry” and emphasized her “strongly worded statement” in response to the attack.²²⁷ She immediately condemned the act as “cowardly” and issued a \$5,400 reward, \$5,000 more than the standard maximum

²²⁵ House, *Lady of Courage*, 112-113.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ “Gov. Wallace Offers \$5400 Reward for House Bombers,” *Birmingham News*, April 27, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

amount issued, to find the “fiend or fiends” responsible. Furthermore, she said if the bombing was “in any way related to recent decisions of Mrs. Johnson’s son [the judge], it must be clearly understood that this is not the American way or the Alabama way to protest such decisions.”²²⁸ She also said “it was difficult to express my ‘abhorrence and scorn’ for those responsible for the explosion,” adding “I know I speak for all Alabamians when I say we detest such action and hope and pray that the malicious and fiendish demons who committed this act will be speedily apprehended and punished.”²²⁹

Lurleen’s statement was a departure from the way George handled similar events. As governor, George refused to rein in the abusive police tactics of Bull Connor, served as an impediment to those seeking justice for victims of racially-motivated violence, and had to be publicly shamed into condemning the vicious murder of Viola Liuzzo. Furthermore, he routinely used stump speeches as an opportunity to incite race-based rage and encourage violence in his audiences.²³⁰ As late as October 1968, he was routinely telling audiences that if civil rights protesters “start a riot down here, first one of ‘em to pick up a brick gets a bullet in the brain, that’s all. And then you walk over to see the next one and say, ‘All right, pick up a brick. We just want to see you pick up one of them bricks, now!’”²³¹

²²⁸ “Gov. Wallace Offers \$5400 Reward for House Bombers,” *Birmingham News*, April 27, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Carter, “Legacy of Race,” 11.

²³¹ Ibid.

While Lurleen maintained a policy of resistance to integration, her approach to such matters differed in tone and style. In addition, she stood firmly against the kind of violence that had marked her husband's term in office. As one historian has noted, Lurleen deserves "credit" for taking immediate action and "not wait[ing] for the public outcry before responding forcefully to the violence."²³² The stylistic differences in how the Wallaces addressed integration orders and civil rights again points to the subtle shifting and transforming of the southern lady role. To the extent that she disagreed with George, Lurleen never aired such differences of opinion in public. She also maintained the overall thrust of his administration's segregation policies. However, in rhetorical matters she exerted influence, which occasionally led to material differences in how such matters were ultimately resolved. On civil rights issues, Lurleen's deft balancing act of old and new had an important impact—both in terms of the level of violence and her gendered performance.

After the integration orders, George paid less and less attention to state matters. His focus was on the 1968 presidential race and, beginning in March, he and his aides were traveling the country to build an organization and begin ballot drives in the states where he would compete. As a result, Lurleen was making more and more of the decisions on her own and taking a much larger role in state matters.²³³ For example, she actively opposed a bill that would allow tractor-trailers to use piggyback trailers to double their capacity. Both her husband and the trucking lobby supported it, but Lurleen was concerned that the policy change would hasten the wear and tear

²³² Leshner, *George Wallace*, 377.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 378-379.

of state roadways. She stood up to consistent opposition, particularly from George, who would come home each night and ask, “Honey, you haven’t changed your mind on that trailer bill, have you?” To George’s dismay, she did not.²³⁴

In a speech before the National Guard Association of Alabama, she sounded every bit the state militia commander-in-chief, discussing Guard deployments to Vietnam and her efforts to protect the state’s service members during the proposed national reorganization of the Army National Guard.²³⁵ At a Governor’s Day event at the University of Alabama, she discussed the nuances of the debate over academic freedom on college campuses.²³⁶ Lurleen enacted her official role and used the formal powers of her office, and in countless ways, her impact was felt throughout the administration.

Lurleen took important steps in the areas of mental health, public spaces, and civil rights. However, her most important contribution during this period could not be found on lists of accomplishments or citations for awards. Through her speechmaking, legislative initiatives, and public pronouncements, her political and rhetorical performance of helped stretch the boundaries of the southern lady ideal, pulling it out of the home and making it compatible with electoral office and public life. In the process, she challenged some of the construct’s old traits, such as its prescriptions for passivity and weak-mindedness. And while she often remained

²³⁴ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 378.

²³⁵ Address of Lurleen B. Wallace Speech to the National Guard Association, April 1, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 025, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

²³⁶ Lurleen B. Wallace Speech for Governor’s Day at University of Alabama, April 28, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

faithful to the ideal's characteristics of wifely sacrifice and submissiveness, she imbued the old characteristics with new ones, including independence, ambition, and political action. These efforts transformed the construct and provided a new avenue for greater female political participation.

Ultimately, Lurleen's biggest leadership challenge was much more personal and unpredictable and would lead to the further transformation of the southern lady ideal. Diagnosed with cancer in the late spring of 1967, Lurleen Wallace set out to try to save her life. In the process, she would contribute to an emerging movement that changed the lives of countless women.

HEALTH TRANSPARENCY AND FEMALE EQUALITY: A STUDY IN "SOFT CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING"

In June 1967, Lurleen Wallace entered St. Margaret's Hospital for a series of tests, which confirmed the existence of a tumor in her abdomen.²³⁷ On July 4, she traveled to M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston, and on July 10, doctors there removed a malignant growth as well as a section of her colon.²³⁸ Just six months into her gubernatorial term, Lurleen Wallace was leading a state while fighting for her life. Her struggle over the next eleven months was a case study in the era's gender disparity in health care. During this period, she balanced her personal concerns with her professional obligations by offering voters total transparency and engaging in activities that shared characteristics with the "soft consciousness-raising" strategy of early second-wave southern feminists. By sharing her personal story in a frank and

²³⁷ House, *Lady of Courage*, 125.

²³⁸ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 382; House, *Lady of Courage*, 124.

open manner, Lurleen Wallace became an early and influential example of female empowerment in health care. Her openness about her condition, her treatment, and her concerns provided Alabamians with the vivid image of an outspoken woman in the public sphere, sharing details about health matters that were usually obscured from public view. Such an example worked to further transform the southern lady construct as well, for while Lurleen was kind and calm, she was anything but passive and weak in her public battle against cancer. Instead, she showed great strength as she controlled her own health care decisions and took on the established practices of the patriarchal medical establishment.

Lurleen's diagnosis in 1967 was not her first bout with cancer. In 1965, while serving as first lady, she was diagnosed with uterine cancer and underwent a hysterectomy to treat it. Unbeknownst to Lurleen, doctors had suspected she was at risk for cancer as far back as 1961. That year, she delivered her last child, Janie Lee, by C-section. During the delivery, doctors saw what they thought was either a malignant growth or precancerous tissue. In accordance with prevailing cultural practices, the doctors did not tell Lurleen about their suspicions. Instead, they told her husband, who refused further tests and treatment on her behalf and never shared the doctor's concerns with her.²³⁹

While Lurleen did not know about the 1961 incident, a few close family friends and gubernatorial aides did. They were asked to participate in the deception and keep the information from Lurleen. One friend, Nita Halstead, agreed to keep quiet, but developed a covert scheme aimed at getting Lurleen additional medical

²³⁹ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 44.

care. Not long after Janie Lee was born, the two women took a trip to Atlanta. There, Nita made arrangements for Lurleen to see a friend of the Halsteads who was a cancer specialist. Since she was sworn to secrecy, Nita had to get Lurleen to agree to be examined without revealing why it was necessary, so she pretended that she had to be examined and told Lurleen she was anxious about it. Thinking she was seeing the doctor as a supportive gesture for a friend, Lurleen agreed to be examined as well. While the doctor didn't find any cause for concern, he was also unable to perform a thorough examination since he could not risk giving Lurleen any reason to suspect that there was something wrong.²⁴⁰ The entire affair exemplifies the sorry state of women's health care in the 1960s.

As time went on, the circle got wider and the secret spawned a rumor. By the time George ran for governor in 1962, state gossip suggested that Lurleen had actually been diagnosed with and treated for cancer in 1961. One day, a woman approached Lurleen while she was out on the campaign trail with George. She said, "My sister had the same thing you had, and she's doing just fine now." Lurleen didn't let on, but she couldn't understand what the woman was talking about. Afterwards, she turned to a friend and asked, "What does she mean?" The friend, perfectly aware of what the woman was referring to, tried to wave it all off as a misunderstanding.²⁴¹

Incidents like these make it easy to understand how Lurleen Wallace must have felt when she finally learned that the doctor's initial suspicions had been kept from her. While seeking treatment for her confirmed diagnosis, a family friend

²⁴⁰ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 45. Nita Halstead shared her story in an interview with biographer Anita Smith.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

casually referenced the 1961 speculation, and Lurleen learned of both George's decision and the years of deception.²⁴² While she forgave George, Lurleen forever remained deeply disturbed at having been kept from information that could have preserved her health and, ultimately, saved her life. The situation left her feeling powerless and deeply suspicious that her husband and doctors may once again conspire to keep information about her medical condition from her. Wallace quietly experienced the kind of transformation shared by a growing number of women across the country. Having experienced something deeply personal, she became aware that there was something political and unequal about the way women's health care was delivered. This awareness activated the same impulse that caused her to take on the state's mental health crisis. It ultimately led her to further bring social issues out of the shadows and into the political sphere; this time, the issue was women's health.

The knowledge about her 1961 diagnosis prompted Lurleen to take two important actions in 1967. First, she enlisted a group of friends to help ensure that she remained informed. Lurleen would dispatch them to follow-up with her male doctors and get updates about her condition. She would then compare what doctors had told her with what they had told her friends to see if there were any inconsistencies. If there were no inconsistencies, she knew that her doctors had told her the truth. If her friends' reports did not square with her own, Lurleen would know she had once again been the victim of deception and could take action to address it. Through this

²⁴² Smith, *Intimate Story*, 44. Anita Smith notes that there are different reports about when exactly Lurleen found out about George's decision in 1961 to keep the doctor's concerns from her. She was either told in 1965 before her first cancer surgery, or in July 1967 before her second surgery. Regardless, by the time she had surgery at M.D. Anderson and began her eleven-month battle with the disease, she was aware that the original suspicions in 1961 had been kept from her.

complex reporting web, Lurleen remained informed about her condition and treatment plans.

In addition to ensuring she had current and accurate information, Wallace also went to great lengths to keep Alabamians informed. Over the course of her eleven-month battle, she engaged in a discursive campaign of transparency about her diagnosis, her treatment, and her health status. This was a remarkable act for several reasons. First, in the 1960s cancer was still very much a taboo topic. Scientific knowledge of the disease was scarce, and the public often mistook a diagnosis for a death sentence. Therefore, it was quite rare for cancer patients to speak openly about their condition. This was especially true for women who were afflicted with cancers that affected reproductive organs; such was the case for Lurleen whose health struggles stemmed from her original diagnosis of uterine cancer.²⁴³

Second, during this era, it was exceedingly rare for public officials to share detailed information about their health. As recently as 1963, President John F. Kennedy had gone to great lengths to hide his diagnosis of Addison's Disease and other ailments from his constituents.²⁴⁴ When Lurleen went public in 1967, a

²⁴³ Barron Lerner notes that as late as 1974, when a cancer diagnosis affected and required removal of an organ with such intense connections to motherhood and sexuality, "the silence was often deafening." Barron Lerner, "The Truth About Betty Ford and Breast Cancer," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 23, 2011, accessed February 14, 2013, <http://www.suntimes.com/news/otherviews/6617744-452/the-truth-about-betty-ford-and-breast-cancer.html>.

²⁴⁴ Robert Dallek has reviewed John F. Kennedy's medical files and notes the great lengths that the president went to in order to keep his health problems a secret. According to Dallek, "only Jackie, Joe, Bobby, and Jack's doctors were fully informed." Robert Dallek, "The Medical Ordeals of JFK," *The Atlantic*, December 2002, accessed February 14, 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/12/the-medical-ordeals-of-jfk/305572/?single_page=true

prolonged effort aimed at total transparency about one's on-going health challenges was a rarity among elected officials.

Finally, it was uncommon for a woman to be so forthcoming with details about her health because, as the 1961 deception makes clear, it was rare for women to have so many details about their health. While the modern woman's rights movement was emerging, health equality did not become a prominent focus until well after Lurleen received her diagnosis. The birth of the women's health movement is usually placed in 1969.²⁴⁵ That year, Barbara Seaman began promoting her investigations into woman's health, which would eventually lead to "informed consent," the recognition that every patient has a right to have all information about medications and procedures.²⁴⁶ Not until 1970 did the "doctor's group" collectively publish *Women and Their Bodies*, the document that would eventually evolve into the seminal text of the women's health movement, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.²⁴⁷ Even then, it wasn't truly until the early 1970s that feminists explicitly encouraged women to participate actively in their own health care, and it was 1974 before the work of women like breast cancer activist Rose Kushner began to address the unique issues of female reproductive cancers.²⁴⁸ These efforts came much too late for Lurleen Wallace, who passed away a year before the women's movement even began to tackle health issues

²⁴⁵ Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 3.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁴⁸ Barron Lerner, "No Shrinking Violet: Rose Kushner and the Rise of American Breast Cancer Activism," *The Western Journal of Medicine* 174 (2001): 362-365.

in earnest. When viewed within this context, Wallace's efforts to keep the public informed can only be seen as progressive and pioneering.

Wallace's eleven-month effort to fully communicate with her constituents about her health involved in-depth interviews, regular medical bulletins, press conferences, and the facilitation of media access to her doctors. It began as soon as Lurleen suspected she had cancer again with the release of a public statement in June 1967, informing Alabamians that her doctors had found a pelvic tumor, explaining that the tumor may be malignant, and outlining her plans to seek treatment at M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston.²⁴⁹ After Lurleen's initial surgery on July 10, 1967, she remained at M. D. Anderson for much of the month, even relinquishing the powers of her office for a sixteen-hour period.²⁵⁰ She spent much of August that year in Gulf Shores, Alabama, but returned to Houston in September for seven-and-a-half weeks of radiation treatments.²⁵¹ Throughout this period, she issued medical bulletins and made her doctors available for interviews.²⁵² Alabamians were kept informed of her rest schedule, her mobility, her pain level, and the details of her malignancy.²⁵³

Lurleen also gave interviews, sharing her personal feelings about her condition and updating the public. In late summer, she told a reporter, "The first time someone tells you that you have cancer, it's bad enough, but the second time it's so

²⁴⁹ Smith, *Intimate Story*, 44.

²⁵⁰ House, *Lady of Courage*, 125.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 126-130.

²⁵² "Gov. Wallace Signs Bills, Sees Children," *Alabama Journal*, July 16, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

much worse. They started giving me radiation therapy this week and will continue for five more weeks in an effort to kill any cancer cells that might have gone unnoticed. I have every hope these X-ray treatments will keep the cancer from returning. I feel the worst is over.”²⁵⁴ She also commented candidly about the surgery in July to remove the malignant tumor, which had taken four-and-a-half hours and caused speculation across the state. She said:

I learned that there had been some rumors back in Alabama that I had died on the operating table. Of course it’s obvious that rumor was false. For my own satisfaction, I was glad the surgery had taken so long. For I felt if I’d been in the operating room only forty-five minutes, it would have meant the doctors just opened me and sewed me up. At least, with four hours of surgery, you have the assurances they did something.²⁵⁵

It was a very candid and personal reflection that gave the people of Alabama not only information about Lurleen’s condition, but also insight into her personal feelings about her illness.

Upon returning from her summer away from the Capitol in September, Lurleen held a press conference. It was her first official public appearance since receiving treatment in Houston, and she was very open about her continued treatment. She said she felt the surgery was “a complete success” and explained she would be in Houston for approximately six weeks for additional treatment. Ensuring Alabamians had a full understanding of how state work would be completed during her treatments, she explained that she would return on weekends and take steps to keep up with state business while at M. D. Anderson in Houston. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this press conference is that she held it on her own; press reports

²⁵⁴ House, *Lady of Courage*, 128-129.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

note that George was absent from the gathering.²⁵⁶ The press conference was also remarkable when one considers that the governor's press corps was comprised primarily of men.²⁵⁷ While many female rhetors took pioneering action by speaking to promiscuous audiences comprised of women and men, one of Lurleen Wallace's most impressive contributions is that she not only openly described conditions and treatments stemming from uterine cancer, but she did so in front of audiences comprised almost entirely of male reporters. At a time when female reproductive cancers were rarely discussed publicly at all, a woman informing men about such a condition was truly remarkable.

In November, Lurleen marked her return home from radiation treatments with another press conference, opening with an update on her health. She told reporters she was "pleased to be back" and expressed appreciation for the "wonderful expressions of concern during my period of hospitalization and subsequent treatments." She explained that while she was "feeling fine" after more than seven weeks of radiation and "had no reason to believe that I will not have a full recovery," she had plans to "return to Houston for periodic check-ups." She also updated Alabamians on her work plans, noting she would be working from both the Capitol and the Governor's Mansion in the coming weeks."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ William O. Bryant, "Legislation Signed By Gov. Wallace," *Alabama Journal*, September 1, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁵⁷ Careful review of press coverage from throughout Wallace's tenure as governor reveals only one female reporter, Anita Smith. All others are male.

²⁵⁸ Statement by Governor Lurleen B. Wallace, November 20, 1967, Alabama Governor, Administrative Files 1958-1968, Container SG030863, Folder 022, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

One of the most interesting aspects of the November press conference was that Lurleen allowed state media to photograph her at the event, despite the fact that cancer treatments had taken a toll on her appearance, leaving her thin and drawn.²⁵⁹ The act was notable not only as an act of transparency, but also as a matter of gender ideology. In a state where the prevailing gender ideal prized feminine beauty, she allowed herself to be photographed at a time when living up to that ideal would be impossible. Such an act further violated the southern lady's prescription that women be beautiful, a fact that reporters noted in their coverage.²⁶⁰ One wrote, "Lurleen Wallace knew when she called that press conference on Monday that she didn't look as well as she did back in July before her first trip to Houston. But she wanted the people of Alabama to know that she was back at work. And pictures, it seems, would just have to be part of it."²⁶¹ It was yet another way that Lurleen Wallace transformed the southern lady ideal; this time, by directly challenging the notion that feminine beauty was essential if one was to be womanly.

Unfortunately, even after the fall radiation treatments, Wallace's health continued to fail, requiring long absences from her office. Yet, even in the face of ongoing health challenges, she continued to be open with the public about her health.

The press was informed via medical bulletins of the various issues she encountered as

²⁵⁹ Don F. Wasson, "Who Speaks for State? When Will They Speak?," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 26, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁶⁰ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 180-181.

²⁶¹ Don F. Wasson, "Who Speaks for State? When Will They Speak?," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 26, 1967, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

her health continued to decline.²⁶² One of the most remarkable aspects of Lurleen's transparency was the close relationship she developed with Anita Smith, a female reporter for the *Birmingham News* who had been assigned to cover Wallace's health battles. Lurleen gave Anita Smith seemingly unrestricted access. They met regularly, and Lurleen was often candid about her condition and her concerns. Smith even stayed with the Wallaces in Houston during the many months when Lurleen was receiving treatment. Lurleen regularly spoke to her on the record and off, giving Smith detailed information about her health.

In 1967, Smith filed a story that resulted from a lengthy interview with Wallace. It was the closest Wallace ever came to publicly acknowledging the concerted effort that kept her in the dark about her health issues in 1961. Lurleen told Smith,

If the cancer comes back and I have it again, I want to know. I have the right to know and the doctors will tell me. I know that. I told the doctors from the beginning to tell me the whole truth. I don't want anything hidden from me about my condition. If I have cancer again I want to be told. The doctors have been frank with me and I have been frank with the people. [...] I believe strongly that one of the main parts of the battle against cancer is a good mental outlook—convincing yourself that you are going all right once the doctors tell you that you are getting along well, but if the cancer does come back, I want to know.²⁶³

In the context of the 1960s Deep South, Lurleen Wallace's discourse had a certain political salience. Once the quintessential southern lady (who was submissive to her husband's ideas and opinions during the campaign), Wallace became an important example of a woman defying gendered tradition by publicly establishing herself as

²⁶² See House, *Lady of Courage*.

²⁶³ House, *Lady of Courage*, 128-129.

someone aware and in control of her health decisions. Furthermore, her comments in the Smith interview shared characteristics with the “soft consciousness-raising” strategy commonly used by early southern feminists advocating for gender equality; Wallace shared personal experiences and reevaluated an aspect of life commonly considered private and shielded from public view.²⁶⁴

By 1968, consciousness-raising (CR) was becoming a frequently used tactic among women’s rights activists.²⁶⁵ It was “a mode of interaction or a type of rhetorical transaction uniquely adapted to the rhetorical problem of feminist advocacy.”²⁶⁶ At its most basic, CR aimed “to bring individual personal narratives into dialogue not only with other such narratives, but also with the public and political discourses in relation to which they would yield new feminist meanings.”²⁶⁷ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell notes that through CR women “seek to understand and interpret their lives as women, but there is no ‘message,’ no ‘party line.’”²⁶⁸ They share “personal feelings and experiences” and the resulting discourses “create awareness (through shared experiences) that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared, a result of their position as women.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists,” 97.

²⁶⁵ Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*, 4.

²⁶⁶ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation: An Oxymoron,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 78.

²⁶⁷ Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women’s Liberation Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 34.

²⁶⁸ Campbell, “Women’s Liberation,” 80.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

CR itself is a fluid rhetorical practice. According to scholars, it can occur in small group settings or in independent acts of writing, speech-giving, or other discursive activities, existing on a continuum of sorts.²⁷⁰ On one end, “soft CR” focuses on the revelation of personal experience; on the other end, “hard CR” requires individuals to “bridge the gap between personal insight and collective action.”²⁷¹ In short, “soft CR” as a rhetorical practice can be an “end in itself” as opposed to a “political strategy, a recruitment device, or a resource for feminist theory-building.”²⁷² It was soft CR that southern feminists in the 1960s most frequently engaged in, as “women tried to constitute a feminist identity” by “focusing on sharing their personal experiences of reevaluating various aspects of their lives.”²⁷³ In the region, feminists most often used “soft CR to develop feminist identity rather than employing it to build feminist theory or create feminist action.”²⁷⁴

While Wallace would have never self-identified as a feminist, her discourse certainly bore the characteristics of this approach and called attention to women’s health. She shared her feelings about her disease and openly discussed her concerns, ultimately creating awareness of the disease and a woman’s right to know about her condition and have a say in her treatment. Through her public disclosures, Wallace

²⁷⁰ As part of her discussion about CR, Campbell analyzes an essay and demonstrates how it reflects the necessary stylistic features of the form. She notes that such features are “equally present in essays, speeches, and other discourses completely divorced from the small group setting.” See Campbell, “Women’s Liberation,” 80-81. See also Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*, 22.

²⁷¹ Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists,” 97.

²⁷² Hogeland, *Feminism and its Fictions*, 27.

²⁷³ Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists,” 98.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

was also “risking the self,” an aspect of CR that Campbell identifies as particularly important.²⁷⁵ Given the time and place in which she made her revelations and the position she held in doing so, Wallace risked not only her office, but also the public’s perception of her “femininity” as she allowed reporters to detail and document her illness and the physical toll it took on her appearance.²⁷⁶

In January 1968, doctors found another tumor and they decided to try to shrink it with betatron radiation, requiring another visit to Houston.²⁷⁷ By the end of February, Lurleen’s health declined significantly. She was rushed to St. Margaret’s Hospital in Montgomery, where she underwent surgery to remove the shrunken tumor and a segment of her bowel. The surgery marked the beginning of a 51-day hospital stay.²⁷⁸ On April 13, Lurleen returned to the Governor’s mansion, where she passed away on May 7, 1968.

It is possible that, had she lived, Wallace may have engaged in more direct activism regarding health equality. As Lisa Gring-Pemble has observed, consciousness-raising can serve as a “pre-genesis” phase for women’s rights activism, a stage in the development of consciousness that precedes one’s awareness of an exigence and an interest in resolving it.²⁷⁹ Viewed from this perspective, Wallace’s interviews and other public remarks about her health may have been the type of

²⁷⁵ Campbell, “Women’s Liberation,” 80.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Leshner, *George Wallace*, 382; House, *Lady of Courage*, 136.

²⁷⁸ House, *Lady of Courage*, 142; Smith, *Intimate Story*, 92.

²⁷⁹ Lisa Gring-Pemble, “Writing Themselves Into Consciousness: Creating a Rhetorical Bridge Between the Public and Private Spheres,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, no. 1 (1998): 42.

consciousness-raising activity women routinely engaged in before becoming aware of their capacity to be a force for change and participating in more direct forms of activism. Wallace's untimely death leaves us with many questions about where her consciousness-raising activities may have led her, but the discourse she was able to deliver had a meaningful impact. Not long before her death, the *Star News* hailed her as "a woman, with her very life at stake, who has demanded that her physicians tell her all the facts so that she can keep the people of Alabama fully informed."²⁸⁰ Her efforts to control her own health and provide information to the public made Lurleen Wallace a powerful example of female empowerment in a time and place where few examples existed. On the occasion of her death, this work led one newspaper to observe that despite all she had accomplished, "her greatest legacy was her courage."²⁸¹

CONCLUSION

Dan Carter once observed that George Wallace "instinctively understood" the power of the visual and the verbal to shape voters beliefs, impressions, and actions.²⁸² He knew that being without the bully pulpit was to be out of sight and out of mind among the electorate, and so he used an unusual route to maintain a public presence. In doing so, he retained the stage, but he also had to share it, giving Lurleen Wallace the opportunity to emerge as a leader in her own right. One of the great ironies of the 1966 campaign is that through his machinations, George Wallace, a man who railed

²⁸⁰ House, *Lady of Courage*, 128-129.

²⁸¹ Associated Press, "The Day Lurleen Wallace Died Was Like No Other," *Tuscaloosa News*, May 8, 1998.

²⁸² Carter, "Legacy of Race," 8.

against the New Left and its attempts to secure greater equality for all, gave a woman the public space to advance causes of her own, craft a rhetoric of her own, and develop a distinct persona of her own.

Lurleen Wallace's campaign and career is not a simple story of female empowerment or feminist activism. Like many of the women in this study, her motives, actions, and performance was nuanced and complex. As a candidate, she relied upon and reinforced many aspects of the southern lady ideal, including its prescriptions for women to be passive, remain subservient to their husbands, and serve as symbols of their success. While her campaign did little to directly challenge prevailing gender norms, by the standards of the 1960s Deep South, Lurleen Wallace still made substantial contributions to the cause of women in public office as a candidate. Just the image of a woman campaigning for and winning elective office by large margins was an important moment in a place where many women deeply questioned their political efficacy. The significance was not lost on the *Montgomery Advertiser*, which reported on the unique scene that unfolded when Lurleen won the 1966 primary as her oldest child celebrated the victory, having "become the first daughter to vote for her mother for governor."²⁸³ As the first woman to run for the governor's office in Alabama, let alone win, Lurleen Wallace became an important symbol to the women of her state. This fact was evident during the campaign as women were moved by her candidacy and came out to support her. One reporter captured the significance at a rally as a middle-aged, blue-collar woman approached

²⁸³ "The May Queen On Telestar," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 5, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

Lurleen and said, “I’m so proud of you.”²⁸⁴ The scene was repeated again and again in counties across Alabama as women approached and hugged Lurleen Wallace “as if they were old friends.”²⁸⁵

Once in office, Lurleen Wallace never fully freed herself from the southern lady ideology, but she did help change it, giving it new shape and meaning. Underlying her efforts was the practice of casuistic stretching through which old ideals are given new attributes. As Lurleen became more comfortable with the tasks of speechwriting and speech-making, she also became more aware of the power of her office. As governor, she used the bully pulpit and her administrative powers to enact initiatives that improved mental health facilities and expanded spaces for public recreation. There is even evidence that her efforts yielded a subtle, but significant shift in the way Alabama handled the issue of public school desegregation. This shift resulted in a quiet break with the lawless and violent approach that had plagued Alabama’s recent past. While Lurleen continued to enact the southern lady by supporting and deferring to her spouse in some matters, she challenged other aspects of the role. Her performance expanded the spaces considered “appropriate” for women by putting the old construct in the new context of elective office. It also expanded the issues associated with the role, bringing social issues like mental health and civil rights into the purview of matters the southern lady could consider. Finally, she expanded the activities the southern lady could properly engage in by lobbying

²⁸⁴ Ray Jenkins, “Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Run for Governor of Alabama,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 1966, Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

the state legislature, appealing directly to the public, and wielding the powers of her office.

Wallace's stretching of the southern lady concept continued even in the darkest chapter of her too-short life. While not an activist or a feminist, she played an important role in advancing female equality. By engaging in a concerted effort to keep the public informed about her health struggles, she became a powerful symbol of health equality, bringing yet another neglected social issue into the public square. In doing so, Wallace challenged the southern lady's prescriptions for passivity, weak-mindedness, and feminine beauty. While she was always careful to maintain the spousal aspects of the role, she challenged and expanded other characteristics. In short, she brought the southern lady into the twentieth century and provided an updated ideal that maintained wifely duty, but also enabled women to be smart, ambitious, and in control when it came to their own health.

As Stokes has observed, the Deep South in the 1960s contained "smaller, but important rhetorical stories that existed alongside the larger story of feminism's renaissance in the Northeast."²⁸⁶ Lurleen Wallace's evolution from first lady to candidate to active governor is one such story, and her finest hour may have been her final chapter, in which she showed women how to take command over their own health. As the third female governor in United States history, Lurleen traveled the path of gubernatorial surrogacy. She began her journey by reinforcing many of the region's conservative ideas about gender, she governed by transforming them, and she ended by challenging them. It's little wonder then that Alabamians remember her

²⁸⁶ Stokes, "Constituting Southern Feminists," 106.

as the personification of “not only crinoline and lace, but grits and bacon—both spheres of the best possible world.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Jules Loh, “Can Both Wallaces Run Alabama?,” Associated Press, n.d., Box 6, Dan T. Carter Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, GA.

AFTERWORD

In her 1973 biographical survey of American women in politics, Hope Chamberlin provided a brief summary of Congresswoman Mae Ella Nolan's career. She described Nolan as "a political accident—a widow whose claim to office was her late husband's name and reputation."¹ What Chamberlin neglected to mention was that this "accident" set a precedent that would shape two unique paths to public office and usher dozens of women into statewide and federal positions.

Nolan pioneered the path of congressional widowhood, a process through which a woman fills an electoral vacancy caused by the death of her spouse. While primarily employed by the wives of deceased congressmen, widowhood was the means by which at least one woman, Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming, became the governor of her state. Ross' gubernatorial victory was augmented by the efforts of other female candidates tied to office through matrimony. Through gubernatorial surrogacy, two more wives literally became their husband's electoral surrogate and ran in his place when term limits or other legal barriers prevented him from seeking re-election.

Ultimately, congressional widowhood and gubernatorial surrogacy proved to be powerful mechanisms for expanding the ranks of women in elective office. To date, forty-six women have directly succeeded their late husbands in Congress. Of the nearly three hundred women who have served in the U.S. House of Representatives

¹ Hope Chamberlin, *A Minority of Members* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 47.

or the U.S. Senate, one-fifth did so as a congressional widow.² Their ranks include Edith Nourse Rogers, the longest-serving woman in congressional history, and Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to win election to the U.S. Senate in her own right and the first woman to have her name placed in nomination for the presidency by either of the two major political parties. At the state level, widowhood was responsible for the election of the first female governor in U.S. history, and surrogacy gave us the first female governors of Texas and Alabama.

As evidenced by this study, congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates helped sustain women's progress during the doldrum decades. Their efforts drew upon and expanded the special status historically conferred upon women whose husbands were deceased or otherwise unable to participate in public life and political affairs. Much like earlier widows (real and imagined) and deputy husbands, congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates transformed a life experience into a rationale for greater public opportunity and activity—in this case, campaigning for and holding public office.³ In turn, their campaigns and tenures had important implications for women's history, gender ideology, our public vocabulary, and female agency.

² United States House of Representatives Office of the Historian, "Shared Experiences of Women in Congress," United States House of Representatives, accessed April 11, 2013, <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/Introduction/Shared-Experiences/>.

³ As discussed in Chapter One, women were granted a special status in early America if their marital circumstances did not conform to traditional expectations. They included widows, whose husbands had predeceased them, as well as women who were known as "deputy husbands" or "fictive widows." This second group of women had husbands who were still alive but, for one reason or another, were unable to fulfill their political and economic duties in the public sphere. For more information about deputy husbands, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 36. For information about "fictive widows," see Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 142.

DESTABILIZING THE DOLDRUMS: WOMEN'S PROGRESS WITHOUT A MASS MOVEMENT

First and foremost, the careers of the widows and surrogates covered by this study complicate and expand our understanding of women's history. Popular accounts tend to distill the women's movement into a narrative that highlights two key eras: the first wave, spanning from 1848 until 1920, and the second wave, which began in 1963 and lasted through the mid-1980s. According to this view of history, the first wave was a decades-long struggle for female equality that ultimately culminated in the right to vote. Following that victory, this logic suggests, the women's rights movement faded into obscurity and entered a period known as the "doldrums," during which conservative gender ideology prevailed, feminist consciousness was on the wane, and female progress was virtually non-existent. Popular accounts put the end of the doldrums somewhere in the 1960s, when a second wave of feminist activity crested and produced new victories.⁴

Recent scholarship has identified serious problems with this use of the wave metaphor.⁵ For the purposes of this study, the most notable problem is its failure to capture continuity in the march toward gender equality and greater female activity. The tendency to jump from the first wave to the second ignores the wide array of

⁴ Lelia J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6. Sara Evans opens her book, *Tidal Wave*, with a version of this account of history. See Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America At Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 1.

⁵ Among the problems with this use of the metaphor are its failure to account for women's progress pre-1848, its emphasis on suffrage at the exclusion of other concerns during the "first wave," and its failure to account for the intersection of gender with race, class, and sexuality. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Nancy A. Hewitt, "From Seneca Falls to Suffrage? Reimagining a 'Master' Narrative in U.S. Women's History," in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 16.

activities that sustained women's progress in the years in between. It is true that the doldrums lacked the energy and intensity that characterized the two waves bracketing it on either end. As a result, the period appears calm and still when observed from afar. But just as the water between waves is still in motion, women in the doldrums were still on the move. By investigating the period more closely, we can see the small group efforts and individual achievements that sustained and advanced women's progress. Through reform work, policy promotion, party development, and electoral activity, women subtly expanded their roles. In the process, they served as powerful examples and created potent rationales for greater activism and opportunity.

The female candidates that pioneered, traveled, and expanded matrimonial paths to office are an important part of that story. Their successful efforts to secure statewide elective offices are proof of women's uninterrupted march toward equality. Yet, their contributions weren't limited to elections won or "firsts" achieved. Through their public discourse, widows and surrogates also helped shape our ideas about gender and political power.

Challenging Gender Ideology and Shaping Public Vocabulary

When the Republican establishment recruited Mae Ella Nolan to complete her deceased husband's term, one supporter gave a frank assessment of their motives: "The Nolan name means victory."⁶ Widows and surrogates made good candidates in part because they were able to access their husbands' networks and circumvent the institutional barriers that typically confronted female candidacies. Women who pursued independent bids for office were often burdened by the lack of a robust mass

⁶ Chamberlin, *A Minority of Members*, 46.

movement, the failure of women to vote as a bloc, and the major parties' limitations on sex solidarity and female advancement. In contrast, women who ran as replacements or surrogates for their husbands enjoyed name recognition, ample funding, an established infrastructure, and grassroots support. In short, their candidacies were more likely to reflect the benefits of incumbency than the pitfalls of a first-time challenge.⁷

Furthermore, widows and surrogates did not attract the level of vitriol typically leveled at female partisans. Whereas women involved in policy-making or partisan politics feared being labeled a "politician," widows and surrogates were given the opportunity to change the face of politics without attracting as much controversy. Yet, they were often unable to escape gender-based attacks entirely. Margaret Chase Smith's opponents used smear sheets, speeches, and even their own wives to argue that Congress was no place for a woman.⁸ Lurleen Wallace's Republican challenger declared, "We don't want no skirt for governor."⁹ These gender-based attacks nevertheless were fewer in number and less effective in practice against widows and surrogates. Like the deputy husbands, fictive widows, and traditional widows that preceded them, congressional widows and gubernatorial surrogates occupied a liminal position defined by their relationships to men. They existed in the overlap of the public and the private. Their candidacies were

⁷ Chamberlin, *A Minority of Members*, 284.

⁸ Dorris A. Westall, "Four Maine GOP Candidates Oppose Margaret C. Smith," *Portland Sunday Telegram*, May 19, 1940, Scrapbook 10, MCS Papers; Doris Fleeson, "Mrs. Smith's Rugged Race," February 25, 1948, 1948 Election and Campaign Folder, MCS Papers.

⁹ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 290-291.

simultaneously personal and political. They were at once both trail-blazing candidates and traditional wives. This position allowed widows and surrogates to discursively craft nuanced identities that more commonly resisted gender-based attack and enabled them to move more seamlessly into elective positions.

The widows and surrogates included in the current study created a path to office for white, married, middle or upper-class women with political ties. Through their campaign discourse, they also subtly undermined the patriarchal structures that were part of traditional political practice. Specifically, as candidates and officeholders, they crafted discourses that drew upon prevailing gender ideology and recast it so that it was compatible with new contexts and activities. Underlying these efforts was a process that Kenneth Burke has called “casuistic stretching,” which adds new layers to old ideals even as it retains their existing characteristics.¹⁰ Like municipal housekeepers, partisan mothers, and suffragists who employed expediency-based advocacy, the widows and surrogates included in this study took old notions of femininity and put them to new use. They transformed conservative constructs that valued domesticity, submissiveness to one’s husband, spousal duty, and even maternal authority into a powerful rationale for campaigning and office holding. In the process, they simultaneously retained and reshaped the roles of wife, widow, and mother.

The discourses by and about surrogates and widows yielded rhetorical resources that future female candidates could draw upon. Kristy Maddux has noted that such resources are part of a culture’s public vocabulary, “a popularly contested,

¹⁰ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 229.

always shifting, cultural reservoir of ideology” that is both a “negotiated space of compromise but also the richest discursive resource bank offering the ground for public discourse.”¹¹ By observing changes in arguments, terms, or discursive themes, the rhetorical critic can trace shifts in the public vocabulary and, thus, ideology.¹² In the current study, this perspective enables us to see the discourses that invited and facilitated these candidates’ performances as well as the ways in which they reflected and contributed to the discursive forces of their time and place.

According to Burke, “a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category.”¹³ Observing the process by which terms are wrenched loose allows us to see changes in the public vocabulary as they unfold in practice. For the purposes of this study, the discursive themes of “wife,” “widow,” and “mother” are particularly important. Earlier female activists, reformers, and suffragists used these terms to craft rationales for lobbying, policy-making, and reform work. Through their discourse, they created what Estelle Freedman has called a “public female sphere,” which “redefin[ed] womanhood by the extension, rather than by the rejection of” traditional

¹¹ Kristy Maddux, “Feminism and Foreign Policy: Public Vocabularies and the Conditions of Emergence for First Lady Rosalynn Carter,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 31, no. 1 (2008): 32.

¹² For more information about the process of tracing these shifts, see E. Michele Ramsey, “Addressing Issues of Context in Historical Women’s Public Address,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 27 (Fall 2004): 354; and Celeste Michelle Condit, “Opposites in an Oppositional Practice: Rhetorical Criticism and Feminism,” in *Transforming Visions: Feminist Critiques in Communication Studies*, ed. Sheryl Perlmutter Bowen and Nancy Wyatt (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1993), 209.

¹³ Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 308.

femininity.¹⁴ At the local level, some women drew upon these expanded terms to create a rationale for office holding and politicking. The broad circulation of these discourses set the stage for the ideological work that widows and surrogates undertook. Through the rhetoric associated with their candidacies and tenures, they further expanded the public significance of the terms “wife,” “widow,” and “mother,” bringing them further out of the domestic private. The traditional characteristics associated with these roles were transformed into a rationale for campaigning and gubernatorial and congressional service.

Widowhood and Surrogacy as a Means for Advancing Female Equality

The discourses that widows and surrogates produced did more than help them secure office. They represented more than the transformation of one woman; they helped re-envision the way we see all women in their capacity as wives, mothers, and political actors. Discourses by and about widows and surrogates stretched—and sometimes directly challenged—our ideas about gender, elective office, and power. These efforts helped erode the patriarchal foundation of family and nation-state. They challenged limitations and revamped expectations for the political women that produced them. In the process, they helped alter the political landscape for future female candidates as well.

These female leaders’ performance in office and on the campaign trail also had important implications for female leadership and parity in partisan politics. In a sad and ironic twist of fate, female influence waned once suffrage was secured. Without a mass movement to mobilize them, women did not vote as a unified bloc.

¹⁴ Estelle Freedman, “Separatism As Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930,” *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (1979): 513, 518.

As a result, they were often not seen as a significant force in elections in the post-suffrage decades. The candidates in this study helped alter this trend by treating women as a bloc worthy of direct appeals. Miriam Ferguson spoke directly to female voters as wives and mothers. Margaret Chase Smith appealed to her fellow Mainers both as women and as citizens. In making such appeals, these candidates forced their male opponents to take the woman's vote seriously and enhanced women's sense of their own political efficacy and agency. They modeled representative government by expanding the faces and voices in positions of power. They helped constitute women as political leaders and political participants, encouraging them to go to the polls and make political choices.

The widows and surrogates included in this study also helped bring social issues into the public sphere and create new opportunities for women. Lurleen Wallace took concrete steps to improve Alabama's mental health facilities and brought much-needed attention to the gender inequities in women's health care. Margaret Chase Smith authored legislation that advanced female opportunity by granting women regular status in the military. Her presidential campaign helped pave the way for future efforts by Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Dole, Carol Moseley Braun, and Michele Bachmann.

Each candidate included in this study appealed to and stretched conservative gender constructs to secure office. Yet, once there, many became emboldened, empowered, and literally changed the face of political leadership. In the process, they helped build the bridge connecting the first and second waves of the women's movement. They provided distinct paths for future candidates to travel, and their very

presence helped reduce the anxiety surrounding changes in political representation. In short, these pioneers paved the way for women to enter office in greater numbers and participate in politics in expanded ways.

The Limitations of Matrimonial Connections and Casuistic Stretching

While gubernatorial surrogacy and congressional widowhood helped dozens of women achieve elective office, the paths were not uniformly liberating or empowering. Since they drew upon ideals and institutions that were bound by race, class, and marital status, many women were unable to access them as a means to achieve electoral office. The very foundation of a path dependent upon marital ties is a spousal partnership recognized by the government and enshrined in law. Therefore, unmarried women and lesbian women have been unable to use widowhood and surrogacy as a means to secure office. Moreover, marital paths to office were rooted in conservative notions of femininity. The very ideals that widows and surrogates stretched to expand their political agency were traditionally used to define the expectations and aspirations for white, middle or upper-class women. Each path's roots in this particular brand of femininity meant that working-class women and women of color would have had a hard time invoking them. Hence, these performances were not available to – and may have ultimately further marginalized – women whose identities fell outside of white, heterosexual, economically privileged womanhood.

Furthermore, casuistic stretching can be an effective rhetorical strategy, but there are limits to its capacity to alter gender ideology. Ashli Quesinberry Stokes observes that stretching the boundaries of prevailing constructs can “expand the idea

of womanhood,” but the progressive potential of such efforts is limited since they maintain fidelity to conservative characteristics.¹⁵ Moreover, as A. Cheree Carlson notes, old identities “can only ‘stretch’ so far before the guilt created by [the] violation of hierarchy becomes nearly intolerable” and our “flexible interpretations” snap back.¹⁶ Therefore, casuistic stretching always carries the risk that, by maintaining fidelity to traditional ideology, women will ultimately regress back to the status quo. In fact, for communities that are deeply rooted in tradition, like women, the strategy can be more detrimental than beneficial.¹⁷ This may, in part, explain why widowhood and surrogacy helped elect large numbers of women to public office, but failed to dismantle or completely upend structural inequality in electoral activity.

Despite these limitations, these paths served as important spaces for continued advancement in the “doldrums.” They helped women achieve elective office in greater numbers. They also laid the foundation for a future path to office and hinted at commonalities between American elected leaders and their counterparts in other countries.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY: CONTEMPORARY FORMS AND INTERNATIONAL INSTANCES

While surrogacy has passed out of common practice, widowhood continues to be a contemporary phenomenon. Most recently, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-

¹⁵ Ashli Quesinberry Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists: Women’s Liberation Newsletters in the South,” *Southern Communication Journal* 70, no. 2 (2005): 102.

¹⁶ A. Cheree Carlson, “Creative Casuistry and Feminist Consciousness: The Rhetoric of Moral Reform,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 29, 97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

CA), Senator Jean Carnahan (D-MO), Congresswoman Lois Capps (D-CA), and Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack (R-CA) have ascended to office upon becoming widows. A study of the campaigns and careers of the eighteen women who have ascended to office through widowhood since 1963 would make an important contribution to our understanding of this path and women's experience between the second wave and present day.

Future projects should also consider more contemporary forms of matrimonial ties. This history of widows and surrogates are key to understanding the context surrounding the campaigns and careers of some of the most prominent women in politics today. Many women now arrive in office through a process I call "spousal sequencing." Rather than running in place of their husband, many wives now fulfill the role of political spouse and then embark upon their own electoral career when their husband retires. Such is the case in the electoral efforts of Elizabeth Dole and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

As a contemporary form of the matrimonial connection, "spousal sequencing" is linked to widowhood and surrogacy and shares similar advantages and challenges. For example, in the same way that widows and surrogates have had trouble laying claim to their own legacy, "sequencers" have had a difficult time exerting their own agency in their campaigns. Hillary Clinton's campaign to represent the Democratic Party in the 2008 presidential election is indicative of this problem. During the primary, columnist Michelle Goldberg actually lamented the possibility of a Clinton candidacy. She claimed, "Clinton's rise ... isn't about a woman smashing through ceilings"; rather, it is about "the great man's wife ... promising to continue his

legacy.” She told readers that it would be “nice” to have a female president, but “there would be no way to escape how she got there.” Goldberg also criticized Clinton for laying claim to accomplishments and experiences amassed “as partner, helpmeet and sounding board” during her husband’s administration. In Goldberg’s telling, Clinton’s claims to such achievements bordered on the fraudulent. A Clinton victory would consequently be seen as a “tainted” milestone for women. Goldberg concluded that, “the idea of marriage as a qualification for elective office is a profoundly retrograde one.”¹⁸ Yet, the history of women in electoral politics actually indicates that it can be an empowering one. A greater understanding of matrimonial ties to office helps us see the unique challenges and opportunities confronting women like Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Dole and will yield a more nuanced analysis of the discourses by and about their efforts.

Such an understanding has important implications for our study of women in other countries as well. Matrimonial ties to political office or partisan positions have served as a path toward empowerment for women in several nations, including Guyana, Panama, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.¹⁹ Farida Jalalzai notes that marital ties tend to most frequently provide a route to power “in unstable and less institutionalized contexts” where the role of wife and mother are granted special status and political spouses “are typically viewed as dependents and therefore

¹⁸ Michelle Goldberg, “A Tainted Milestone,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2007, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/dec/03/taintedmilestone>.

¹⁹ Farida Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact? Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101.

appropriate inheritors of power.”²⁰ Such was the case in Argentina, where President Juan Domingo Peron appointed his wife Isabel Peron vice president in 1973, a year before his death. Her appointment was part of a deliberate succession plan that made her the caretaker of his administration. Upon his death, Isabel Peron became the first female president in the world.²¹ Similarly, when Khaleda Zia’s husband was assassinated while serving as president of Bangladesh in 1981, the political party he founded recruited her and eventually helped her become the nation’s first female prime minister.²² Violeta Chamorro became president of Nicaragua a decade after her husband’s assassination in 1978. According to Jalalzai, she was encouraged to run because “supporters hoped the widow of a political leader would unify competing blocs.”²³ Comparative studies of these widows and their American counterparts could help illuminate similarities and differences in the discourses by and about political widows around the world.

More recently, a trend sweeping Latin America appears to mirror Hillary Clinton’s career and presidential campaign. In Guatemala, Honduras, and Argentina, former “primeras damas” have sought to succeed their husbands in office.²⁴ In 2007,

²⁰ Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*, 94-95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

²² Guida M. Jackson, *Women Rulers Throughout the Ages* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1999), 433; Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*, 104.

²³ Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*, 96.

²⁴ Israel Navarro, “Pink Power: Latin American First Ladies Become Political Players,” *Campaigns & Elections*, April 1, 2011, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.campaignsandelections.com/print/175982/pink-power-latin-american-first-ladies-become-political-players.html>; Rory Carroll, “Latin America’s Former First Ladies Bid to Break Macho Presidential Mould,” *The Guardian*, June 7, 2011, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/07/guatemala-honduras-argentina-first-ladies>.

Cristina Fernandez succeeded her husband, Nestor Kirchner, becoming the second female president in Argentinean history.²⁵ Sandra Torres of Guatemala actually divorced her husband in the waning days of his administration, hoping to circumvent a constitutional provision that bans relatives from replacing incumbent officeholders. She told reporters and voters, “I am divorcing my husband but I am getting married to the people.” Fighting back the tears, Torres said, “I am not going to be the first or last woman who decides to get a divorce, but I am the only woman to get a divorce for her country.”²⁶ Jalalzai argues that the power of marital ties in Latin America stems from the gendered cultural construct of “marianismo, the feminine counterpoint to machismo.” Much like gender prescriptions in American history, this construct positions relationships to male relatives as central to female identity and highly values the roles of wife and mother.²⁷ Jalalzai observes that this construct enables women to secure a “political promotion to further their husbands’ political agendas” even if they would likely be unable to attain office on their own.²⁸ Such campaigns indicate spousal sequencing is not just a modern American phenomenon, but an international one as well. It remains a rich topic worthy of scholarly attention.

²⁵ Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*, 97.

²⁶ Monica Lenardo, “Is There Any Just Impediment to Sandra Torres Being Guatemalan President?,” *The Guardian*, May 23, 2011, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/may/23/guatemala-sandra-torres-divorce-president>.

²⁷ Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*, 97.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Flora Davis has noted that the “single greatest achievement” of the women’s movement was the transformation of “most people’s assumptions about what women were capable of and had a right to expect from life.”²⁹ The women who traveled the paths of widowhood and surrogacy accomplished that goal through their discourse, their performance, and their example. The female leaders who traveled these routes to office often used conservative arguments and predicated their candidacies upon their relationships with men. Yet, upon election, they gained a sense of political independence and forged their own political agendas, serving as independent leaders in their own right. Although their path to political leadership was tethered to their husband’s success and popularity, the spaces of politics as an agency of republicanism gave these women leaders an opportunity to forge a more independent identity and agenda.

As they pursued individual victories, widows and surrogates made important contributions to women’s history, gender ideology, and our public vocabulary. Their success on the campaign trail and in office provided examples of female empowerment and achievement during decades when the women’s movement’s lack of energy and intensity meant role models were in short supply. These women became much-needed symbols of female ability and agency. In the end, their discourses made important contributions to the public vocabulary that future female candidates could draw upon.

²⁹ Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 16.

In her 1970 appearance before the U.S House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, Gloria Steinem remarked upon the unique place that widows hold in American society. Steinem told the committee, "the only women allowed to be dominant and respectable at the same time are widows. You have to do what society wants you to do, have a husband who dies, and then have power thrust upon you through no fault of your own."³⁰ Steinem's testimony offered an important insight into the opportunity afforded not only to widows, but to all women who achieve public office through a matrimonial connection.

During the doldrums, dozens of women used that opportunity to advance female progress. Familial ties enabled them to achieve public office by stretching rather than directly challenging conservative notions of femininity. Able to transcend gender barriers in ways that traditional female candidates could not, widows and surrogates crossed through the coveted thresholds of congressional and gubernatorial office. Many then used their new authority to serve as powerful role models and secure legislative victories for women. In service to family and country, they sustained the cause of female equality during the doldrums.

³⁰ House Committee on Education and Labor, *Discrimination Against Women: Hearings on Section 805 of H.R. 16098*, 91st Congress, 2nd sess., 1970, 1057-1061.

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