

## Women and the War Effort: The Timing of the Federal Suffrage Amendment

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A question involved in the debate over women's enfranchisement was whether the right to vote should obligate the voter to military service.<sup>1</sup> A not uncommon argument during the Gilded Age that "the ballot is the inseparable concomitant of the bayonet . . . To introduce woman at the polls is to enroll her in the militia"<sup>2</sup> eventually metamorphosed into an argument that women should be advocates for peace.<sup>3</sup> Yet the advent of the Great War prompted the reverse question as to whether military service (albeit noncombatant) should qualify women for their enfranchisement. Woodrow Wilson eventually answered the latter question in the affirmative; however, he arrived at this conclusion in the context of war: the impact of U.S. mobilization against the Central Powers brought this issue to the fore. Wilson's reasons for endorsing the federal amendment were twofold. Not only did Wilson recognize that women had the potential to patriotically contribute to the war effort, he also strove to keep the Democratic Party in power by means of women's votes. The diplomatic National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was integral in swaying Wilson's convictions toward his active endorsement of the federal amendment for woman suffrage.

Women's political history naturally is the most applicable methodology in this endeavor. Although women's movements were forces to contend with, ultimately these movements have no real consequence unless they amend the Constitution. Hence this study stresses the importance of Wilson's active endorsement of the federal amendment toward the latter part of his presidency and shows him as the pivotal force in the suffrage movement to convince federal and state legislatures to accept this amendment.

In 1871 the suffragist Tennie C. Clafin published *Constitutional Equality: A Right of Woman*.<sup>4</sup> Clafin discussed the controversial question of whether to link military service to the right to vote in her chapter "Will Women Accept the Consequences of Equality?" She believed that she spoke for all women when she stated plainly, "Well, we have no objection."<sup>5</sup> Clafin did work through this rationale by saying that if only combatants should vote, then noncombatant men should not have that right.<sup>6</sup> Early in the Gilded Age, prominent men and women both believed that some sort of patriotic obligation should be inherent in the right to vote. The argument to link military service to women's enfranchisement was based on the fact that emancipated African-American men fought in the Civil War. A few male politicians and editors felt that African-American men earned the right to vote because they had made that ultimate sacrifice in war, unlike the "public tea-drinking" women suffragists.<sup>7</sup>

Yet women soldiers who served in male guises during the Civil War apparently were a well

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<sup>1</sup>Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Rights To Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill & Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998), 243-246.

<sup>2</sup>Senator Justin Smith Morrill, as cited in Kerber, 366.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, 245-246.

<sup>4</sup>Tennie C. Clafin, *Constitutional Equality: A Right of Woman* (New York: Woodhull, Clafin & Co., 1871), 44-46.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, 44.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>7</sup>Kerber, 243-244; editors of the *New York World*, as cited in Kerber, 243.

known fact by this time. Published accounts of disguised women soldiers were popular choices of literature for the reading public. The national director of the United States Sanitary Commission during the war, Mary Ashton Rice Livermore (1820-1905), published her memoir of her service in 1892. Livermore had personal contact with female soldiers. She did not know the exact number of women who served as soldiers; however, she disputed an approximate figure, that of nearly four hundred, as a gross underestimate.<sup>8</sup> Although she was a suffragist,<sup>9</sup> her stance on the military service obligation was emblematic of the shift toward positioning women as peace advocates. "Such service was not the noblest that women rendered the country during its four years' struggle for life, and no one can regret that these soldier women were exceptional and rare. It is better to heal a wound than to make one."<sup>10</sup>

Yet ten years earlier the editors of the *History of Woman Suffrage*, two of the more notable were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, honored women soldiers in their chapter "Woman's Patriotism In The War."<sup>11</sup> They gleaned newspaper reports of heroic women soldiers and provided a lengthy essay citing these accounts. Moreover, the editors explained singular instances in which Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis offered promotions to women who proved themselves on the battlefield. Stanton and Anthony believed that the Civil War was a catalyst for political change for women. The ideal was that "woman shall stand by man's side his recognized equal in rights as she is now in duties."<sup>12</sup>

Sara Emma Edmonds published her active role in the Civil War in *Memoirs Of A Soldier, Nurse And Spy: A Woman's Adventures In The Union Army*.<sup>13</sup> She fought in some of the major battles of the war as "Franklin Thompson." The publisher to the 1865 edition, which sold 175,000 copies, stated that her male guise that was implemented in order to fight in the war was from the "most praiseworthy patriotism." Nonetheless Edmonds's intent was to entertain the reader despite the fact that her account has been considered more or less a true rendering.<sup>14</sup>

General George West published his interpretive account of the diary of "Charles Hatfield," the former Mrs. E. J. Guerin, with her permission, after 1885. West had already known of her male guise when they served together as Unionists in the Civil War. In his account, he explained

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<sup>8</sup>Mary Livermore, *My Story Of The War: A Woman's Narrative Of Four Years Personal Experience*, "cheap edition" – minus the illustrative plates (Hartford: A. D. Worthington And Company, 1892), 119-120 (page citations are to the illustrated edition).

<sup>9</sup>Kerber, 86-87.

<sup>10</sup>Livermore, 120.

<sup>11</sup>Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 2 (New York: Fowler & Wells, Publishers, 1882; reprint, New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1969), 1.

<sup>12</sup>ibid., 18-23.

<sup>13</sup>Edmonds, Sara Emma, *Memoirs Of A Soldier, Nurse And Spy: A Woman's Adventures In The Union Army* (originally *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*), with an introduction by Elizabeth D. Leonard (Hartford, CT: Williams, 1865; reprint, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), xiii-266.

<sup>14</sup>ibid., xiii-xxviii.

the battle experiences of the “brave young heroine” and her promotion to Lieutenant Hatfield.<sup>15</sup> Observers and chroniclers of the war also made special note of the phenomenon of female soldiers. Frank Moore published in 1866 *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* which included women’s incognito military service<sup>16</sup> and Frazar Kirkland’s *Reminiscences of the Blue and the Gray*, published in the same year, mentioned that newspapers frequently reported the “valorous deeds of females fighting in the ranks.”<sup>17</sup> So popular published accounts of women soldiers disabused the public from the presumption that only men rendered combatant military service.

Women’s gallantry in war resonated over the next several decades. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Civil War occurred in the midst of the First World War. Hence the citizenry of the early twentieth century looked back to the Civil War and made comparisons. In April 1915, the *New York Times* included an article that glorified Civil War women soldiers after making an initial brief reference to women soldiers fighting in the Great War across the Atlantic. NAWSA might have influenced the publication of this article: by 1912, this organization successfully disseminated news articles to the general media.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, it may have been a factor in raising Woodrow Wilson’s awareness of women soldiers from the Civil War era.

James Kerney, who was the Director of American Information in 1918, knew Wilson personally and published a biography of him in 1926; however, this contemporary author barely addressed Wilson’s position on women’s rights.<sup>19</sup> In fact, unfortunately, recent biographies fare no better.<sup>20</sup> The reader must resort to biographical renderings from the time of the Johnson administration, albeit able interpretations, in order to find Wilson’s stance towards women’s equal rights. Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born in Virginia in 1856 and grew up in Georgia and “the Carolinas.” Wilson was “always thoroughly Southern in sentiment, and naturally adhered to the Calvinist philosophy.”<sup>21</sup> He went to Princeton in 1875 where he was interested in history and political science.<sup>22</sup> His negative sentiments towards women’s rights surfaced around this time: in 1876, he wrote in his diary that woman’s suffrage was “at the foundation of every evil in this

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<sup>15</sup>George West, “Mountain Charley: A Sequel,” in *Mountain Charley*, E.J. Guerin, new ed., with an introduction by Fred W. Mazzulla and William Kostka (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), x-xii; 79-112.

<sup>16</sup>Frank Moore, *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* (Hartford: S. S. Scranton, 1866), 17-19.

<sup>17</sup>Frazar Kirkland, *Reminiscences of the Blue and the Gray* (Chicago: Preston Publishing Co., 1866), 173.

<sup>18</sup>James D. Startt, *Woodrow Wilson And The Press: Prelude To The Presidency* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 191.

<sup>19</sup>James Kerney, *The Political Education Of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: The Century Co., 1926), vii-503.

<sup>20</sup>The most recent biography to this date, in reference to suffrage or women’s equal rights, only makes the briefest allusion to the Nineteenth Amendment. Please refer to Brands, H.W. *Woodrow Wilson. The American Presidents*, gen. ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. New York: Times Books, 2003.

<sup>21</sup>Kerney, 4.

<sup>22</sup>ibid., 3-5.

country.”<sup>23</sup> After attending law school at the University of Virginia in 1882 Wilson briefly practiced law. Disillusioned with the chicaneries of his peers in the legal profession, Wilson concluded, perhaps naively, that practicing law was incongruous with his developing aspirations for a dual career in politics and academics. So he began his graduate program in history and political science at Johns Hopkins University in 1883. Although he became a published author on governance and earned a fellowship at the university whilst he was a graduate student, Wilson chose not to pursue a doctorate at that time; a decision born out of his willful and independent-minded regard for studying, as remarked by the meticulous biographer George C. Osborn, “according to his own tastes and choosing” and not for “the necessary reading for a Ph.D.”<sup>24</sup> Afterwards he taught at a women’s college, Bryn Mawr, as well as at Johns Hopkins and Wesleyan. While at Bryn Mawr, Wilson seriously reconsidered the practical value of a Ph.D. in order to further his career; Johns Hopkins awarded Wilson his doctorate in 1886. In 1890 he taught jurisprudence at Princeton University and eventually became its President.<sup>25</sup>

Wilson’s stance towards his teaching post at Bryn Mawr illustrates an enigmatic Weltanschauung of women’s equal rights. Wilson would not marry Ellen Axson, whom he had met shortly prior to commencing his graduate studies, until he obtained gainful employment. At the end of his graduate career, the recently instituted Bryn Mawr College (founded by a trustee of Johns Hopkins University) needed administrative as well as professorial leadership. Dr. Adams, one of Wilson’s professors, recommended the young scholar. Wilson delighted in the opportunity of organizing the incipient stages of the history and political science departments. Also, not only did he have a light teaching schedule in order to pursue his own academic endeavors, but also the dean, Miss Carey Thomas, granted Wilson license to choose his own teaching methodology.<sup>26</sup> Ideologically, Wilson “had none of the objections to a girls’ school that he held for a coeducational institution.”<sup>27</sup> All the same, “he did prefer to teach young men, however, and if he found that Bryn Mawr stood in the way of his going to a man’s college, he would resign.”<sup>28</sup> Although Wilson viewed this opportunity at Bryn Mawr in a favorable light, his acceptance was not without misgivings.<sup>29</sup>

This juncture in Wilson’s life induced a spate of antipathy towards women who tread outside their own relegated sphere.<sup>30</sup> Again Osborn elucidates Wilson’s stand on this issue:

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<sup>23</sup>Woodrow Wilson, as cited in Christine A. Lunardini and Thomas J. Knock, “Woodrow Wilson and Woman Suffrage: A New Look,” *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (Winter 1980-81): 657.

<sup>24</sup>George C. Osborn, *Woodrow Wilson: The Early Years* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 51, 100, 103, 108, 119, 125.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.*, 154-155. Kerney, 3-5.

<sup>26</sup>*ibid.*, 125, 145.

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, 125.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, 125.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 103, 124, 125.

<sup>30</sup>Historiographers of women’s history have rendered the historiographical metaphor, the sphere, as a problematic trope in assessing women’s political and societal boundaries because of, for example, socio-economic fissures among women in aggregate. Please refer to Kerber, Linda K. “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History.” *Journal of American History* 75

His southern provincialism with its chivalrous and romantic attitude towards women kept him from having any sympathy with the movement to extend higher education to them. He recognized, as he wrote to his fiancée, that he was on the losing side of the issue. "The question of the higher education of women," he said, "is certain to be settled in the affirmative, in this country at least, whether my sympathy be enlisted or not." Wilson was not particularly pleased when he learned that the person who was to be in authority on the Bryn Mawr campus was a woman [Dean Thomas] who had a doctoral degree and who was actually younger than he. He talked the matter over with President Rhoads [President of Bryn Mawr], and assured Ellen [Wilson's fiancée]: "I would not be under a woman, so far as I can learn, but my own master, under Dr. Rhoads."<sup>31</sup>

Despite these disparaging remarks, however, Wilson gave his fiancée the final decision in the acceptance of his teaching post at Bryn Mawr.<sup>32</sup>

Historian Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, who wrote *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years*, also capably elaborated on the theme of Wilson's point of view of women in academia. Bragdon includes the students' perceptions of Wilson's teaching style at Bryn Mawr. Bragdon assesses the classroom dynamics: "The fundamental difficulty with Wilson's classes at Bryn Mawr was that many of the girls did not think he took them seriously. This was essentially true. He did not believe in higher education for women. . . . They should be adored for their sensibilities, but the serious work of the mind was not their province."<sup>33</sup> Bragdon quoted Wilson as saying, in 1887, "Lecturing to young women of the present generation on the history and principles of politics is about as appropriate and profitable as would be lecturing to stone masons on the evolution of fashion and dress."<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, Wilson seemed not to short-change his students. He had both a charismatic and explanatory teaching style. An alumna from Bryn Mawr reported:

He was the most interesting and inspiring college lecturer that I ever heard. . . . [He would] emphasize the main facts and conclusions, so clearly and closely connected, so logically developed that it was impossible to misunderstand or to forget the essential matter. Though serious in intent and solidly informing, every lesson was lighted up with touches of the most delightful humor.<sup>35</sup>

Yet his perception of women's professional capabilities is nuanced. Bragdon quotes another alumna, "He seemed to regard his students not as of a *lower* sort of intelligence, but as of a *different* sort from himself."<sup>36</sup> In sum, Bragdon finds that Wilson was concerned that women must retain

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(June 1988): 9-39. Nonetheless, in the context of Wilson's view of the proper social order between the genders, this analytical tool sufficiently applies in this instance.

<sup>31</sup> Osborn, 147; Wilson, as cited in Osborn, 147.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 147.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 150, 151.

<sup>34</sup> Wilson, as cited in Bragdon, 143.

<sup>35</sup> A Bryn Mawr alumna, as cited in Bragdon, 149, 150.

<sup>36</sup> A Bryn Mawr alumna, as cited in Bragdon, 151.

their femininity: by devolving outside their own sphere, they lose their iconic status.<sup>37</sup>

Both Osburn and Bragdon used an inductive approach to their monographs, hence, perhaps, the inclusion of Wilson's stance on the topic of women in the public world, a rare endeavor among the literature on Wilson. Based on the aforementioned illustrations of Wilson, he held a measured opinion of the proper role of women: iconically inert, they required chivalrous guardianship whilst they prepare the loving home that the family valued. His decision to teach at Bryn Mawr might not have been nonsensically incongruous with his ideology; he may have presumed that an "all-girls" school did not require the same academic rigor of women as that of a co-educational school. By evaluating his experiences at Bryn Mawr in comparison to his reaction to the suffrage movement during his presidency, one could see his drastic reconfiguring of women's role in society, a metamorphosis indicative of the changing expectations of women in the Progressive Era and the First World War.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, as a historian, Wilson, too, studied past administrations. Bragdon begins his monograph with a prescient quote from Wilson: alluding to Abraham Lincoln, Wilson believed that the student of history could only understand Lincoln by means of "a close and prolonged study of his life *before* [italics mine] he became President. The years of his Presidency were not years to form but rather years to test character."<sup>39</sup> Whether well-founded or otherwise, Wilson had displayed a resolute and scrupulous regard for his own integrity during the early stages of his life. Hence the question why Wilson redefined his position on women's rights during the pinnacle of his political career merits serious consideration.

The fundamental premise of the history of the suffrage movement hinges on the rights of citizenship.<sup>40</sup> Before women won full federal enfranchisement in 1920, women were not deemed citizens, but rather subjects. Moreover, married women suffered a "civil death"<sup>41</sup> according to common law: devoid of political rights, the wife depended on the husband to act as her proxy, who in turn reputedly voted in the best interest of his wife and family. According to the astute historian Nancy Isenberg, some activist antebellum women realized that before they could obtain their enfranchisement, they needed "to acquire a relationship with the state, a quid pro quo relationship that acknowledged their civil standing in return for civil support."<sup>42</sup> Naturally the question remains, what are the qualifiers for civic capacity? In 1816 Thomas Jefferson considered that taxpayer ability and military enlistment, along with property ownership, could possibly act as qualifiers for citizenship status. Nonetheless, these qualifiers constitute privileged rights, for people who had a vested stake in society, not natural rights, in which both men and women were born with equal rights, a discrepancy that was a divisive issue in the antebellum suffrage

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<sup>37</sup> Bragdon, 150-151.

<sup>38</sup>See Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920." *The American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 620-647. In her discussion of female political culture, Baker argues that the expanding definition of the home delved into the political arena, by means of women's social and moral reform movements, thus ultimately dissolving the two separate spheres.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, as cited in Bragdon, vii; Bragdon, vii.

<sup>40</sup>See Nancy Isenberg, *Sex & Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup>ibid., 7.

<sup>42</sup>ibid., 39.

movement.<sup>43</sup> So although the Nineteenth Amendment granted all women full enfranchisement as a consequence of women's war effort during the First World War, women's right to vote was premised on the principle of vested rights – women's non-combative participation in war rendered them as having a stake in society.

The woman's suffrage movement evolved over time. Historians argue over the impetus for the suffrage movement;<sup>44</sup> however, a basic timeline would provide the reader an understanding of the direction of the women's movement during the nineteenth century. Historians commonly cite the 1840 World's Antislavery Convention, held in London, as the stimulus of the suffrage movement.<sup>45</sup> This anti-slavery convention refused admittance to two American abolitionist attendees, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, because they were women. These women saw the irony in this situation. At the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, tentatively cited as the "birth of the movement for women's rights,"<sup>46</sup> Stanton and Mott were two of several women who devised a Women's Rights Convention in the state of New York. Obtaining enfranchisement for women, based on natural rights, was one of several resolutions that passed. Other conventions occurred: in 1850, the first National Woman's Rights Convention took place in Worcester, Massachusetts, which, in contrast, espoused a vested rights theory of enfranchisement.<sup>47</sup>

Yet the leaders of the women's rights movement, at first, were organizationally entwined with the abolitionist movement. Consequently the cause for abolitionism and the cause for women's rights each vied to be the forerunner for securing federal legislation. During Reconstruction, the abolitionists did not want woman's suffrage to impinge on the potential constitutional gains for the freedmen; activists with divided loyalties chose sides, and in 1869, Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the leading lights in the nineteenth century suffrage movement, formed the single-issue National Woman's Suffrage Association. This organization rivaled with other suffragists as to the method for obtaining woman suffrage. The National American Woman's Suffrage Association emerged in 1890, with Stanton as president.<sup>48</sup>

Consequently all three branches of government wrestled with the issue of woman's suffrage. In 1874, the Supreme Court ruled, in *Minor v. Happersett*, that women did not have the right to vote under the Fifteenth Amendment. Senator A. A. Sargeant introduced the federal amendment, otherwise known as the "Anthony Amendment," for the first time in 1878.<sup>49</sup> After the turn of the twentieth century, the fight for women's enfranchisement was ingrained in national issues

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 25, 37.

<sup>44</sup> See Isenberg as well as Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence Of An Independent Women's Movement In America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>45</sup> Historians commonly herald Eleanor Flexner's narrative, originally published in 1959, as the inaugural source of modern literature for the suffrage movement. Please refer to Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> See Flexner and Isenberg.

<sup>48</sup> See Flexner, DuBois, and Isenberg.

<sup>49</sup> Doris Weatherford, *A History of the American Suffragist Movement*, with a forward by Geraldine Ferraro (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 247. Flexner, 176.

during the entirety of Wilson's administration (1913-1921). Louis Brownlow, who was commissioner of the District of Columbia from 1915 to 1920 and also "an ardent advocate of votes for women,"<sup>50</sup> regularly communicated with the President regarding the suffrage militants and later published his autobiography in 1958. He observed that President Wilson initially was against a federal suffrage amendment: he believed that this issue belonged to the states themselves to determine.<sup>51</sup> As a cautionary note, author Linda G. Ford stated that in 1914, "all his supporters assumed that Wilson's states' rights position was an anti-suffrage position."<sup>52</sup> Brownlow asserts that "later, however, Mr. Wilson changed his mind and during the greater part of his presidency heartily favored the proposed amendment."<sup>53</sup>

An unresolved question looms as to how women won federal enfranchisement. Was it the woman suffrage movement or the government's opportunism in time of war that led to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment? Current authors argue over this question. Mary Katzenstein questions, "The U. S. Congress may have passed the suffrage amendment in part to undergird the war effort; but would it have done so in the absence of an organized women's movement?"<sup>54</sup> Linda G. Ford<sup>55</sup> and Sally Hunter Graham,<sup>56</sup> dispute Christine A. Lunardini and Thomas J. Knock, who assert that Wilson actively endorsed the amendment in order to positively acknowledge the contributions of women in the war effort.<sup>57</sup> Ford and Graham espouse the belief that persistent suffrage militancy pushed Wilson into lobbying for this amendment. Ford exclaims, "In light of NWP [National Woman's Party] activism, it is ludicrous to argue simply that Wilson 'gave' women the vote 'for their war services.' As E. P. Thompson has written regarding (male) workers, women in history are still often seen as passive; 'the degree to which they contributed, by conscious efforts, to making of history' is omitted."<sup>58</sup> Yet evidence proves that the women's war effort, at home and abroad, was initially integral to Wilson's change of mind

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<sup>50</sup>Louis Brownlow, *A Passion for Anonymity: The Autobiography of Louis Brownlow, second Half* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 74-75, 99.

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*, 74-75, 99.

<sup>52</sup>Linda G. Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party, 1912-1920* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1991), 61.

<sup>53</sup>Brownlow, 75.

<sup>54</sup>Mary Katzenstein, "Feminism and the Meaning of the Vote," *Signs* 10 (1984): 10-12.

<sup>55</sup>Ford, xi, 246.

<sup>56</sup>Sally Hunter Graham, "Woodrow Wilson, Alice Paul, and the Woman Suffrage Movement," *Political Science Quarterly* 98 (Winter 1983-84): 666.

<sup>57</sup>Christine A. Lunardini and Thomas J. Knock, "Woodrow Wilson and Woman Suffrage: A New Look," *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (Winter 1980-81): 655-671.

<sup>58</sup>Ford, 246. British historian E.P. Thompson wrote the 1964 *The Making of the English Working Class*. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. Ideas In Context, eds. Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, Quentin Skinner, and Wolf Lepenies. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).



toward the amendment. Wilson's letters and speeches elucidate the evolution of his approach toward woman suffrage. As the president of NAWSA, which was distinct from Alice Paul's militant National Woman's Party, Carrie Chapman Catt had a positive influence on altering Wilson's stance toward the federal amendment.

The suffrage movement during the Progressive Era, similar to that of the Gilded Age, was bitterly divided over the method of obtaining woman's enfranchisement. The two main rival suffrage organizations were NAWSA and the Woman's Party (formerly the Congressional Union). As reported by the historian Flexner, severe bias rendered the respective suffragists' records reliably problematic. In 1943, Stanton admitted to the potentially non-evidentiary status of their official histories. Flexner quotes Stanton, "I am inclined do think that the suffragists, who have written their own history, have not always known all the facts at the time of writing and perhaps they have not been free enough from prejudice to tell the whole truth."<sup>59</sup> Consequently the reader could accord Flexner's narrative a measure of objectivity because of her careful evaluation of these primary sources.

After decades of NAWSA plodding along in order to win suffrage at the state level, Alice Paul, while she was a member of NAWSA, galvanized the movement with her aggressive tactics and ideology that she had personally acquired from the women suffragists in Great Britain. In April 1913, she energetically rejuvenated the idea of winning women full enfranchisement by means of a federal amendment. When Dr. Anna Howard Shaw was president of NAWSA, Paul formed an internal organization, the Congressional Union; however, Paul's strategy of singular pressure on the executive and legislative branches to obtain enfranchisement alienated NAWSA in 1914, ultimately leading to Paul's termination of her position. The Congressional Union, along with Alice Paul, formed a separate entity, and adopted militant tactics in 1917 against the executive branch and its political party in order to win suffrage. Flexner credits the Congressional Union for the beginning stages of activity in the legislative branch on the suffrage amendment.<sup>60</sup>

Carrie Chapman Catt assumed presidency of NAWSA in 1915. In 1916, growing disenchanted with the state-by-state approach to woman suffrage, as proposed on the Democratic platform, Catt decided upon a serious pursuit of the federal amendment as well. Yet in contrast to Paul's methods, Catt's approach was to woo the president in a cordial manner. Winning Wilson over to woman's suffrage, was, according to Flexner's narrative of Catt, "... a matter of time and tactics, and that he must on no account be personally antagonized or challenged on this issue. . . . Above all, she kept the door of communication between the National [NAWSA] and the White House open."<sup>61</sup> Ironically, each organization's position on women's war effort was diametrically opposite of their methodology for gaining enfranchisement. Flexner relates of the NAWSA leader, "Realist that she was, Mrs. Catt knew that the ability of suffragists to plead their cause successfully would depend in some measure on whether they too had joined in the national war effort. . . .Not so the Woman's Party."<sup>62</sup>

So wartime opportunism may have played a factor; however, Wilson vigorously endorsed the amendment after the November 11, 1918 Armistice, as well as after the militant suffrage picketing ended, in late 1917. This fact suggests not only a genuine change of Wilson's moral conviction, but also it suggests an additional external factor that would prompt endorsement of the federal amendment. Although Wilson suffered a stroke which prevented him from a third term in office, he still eagerly wanted to keep the Democratic Party in power. The Nineteenth Amendment was enacted on August 26, 1920. Presidential elections of course were held in November, 1920. If the Democrats could win this political advancement for women, the Democratic Party could earn

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<sup>59</sup>Stanton, as cited in Flexner, 350; Flexner, 349, 350.

<sup>60</sup>ibid., chapters 20 and 21 .

<sup>61</sup>ibid., 288, 289.

<sup>62</sup>ibid., 294; chapters 20 and 21.

their loyalty. Woman suffrage initially as a war measure and eventually as a means for political expediency both negate the argument that Wilson begrudgingly gave in to the persistent militant suffragists.

Wilson's approach to woman suffrage changed over time. Several months before Wilson decided to make domestic and military preparations for war, he had met with "a Delegation of Democratic Women" in January 6, 1915. They had wanted him to support an "equal suffrage amendment" which the House of Representatives would vote on in six days. He commended the delegation's work toward suffrage; however, he stated that he believed this issue should be left to the states. "It is a long standing and deeply matured conviction on my part, and therefore, I would be without excuse to my own constitutional principles if I lent my support to this very important movement for an amendment to the Constitution of the United States."<sup>63</sup> The amendment did not pass the House: with 378 voting, there were 174 yeas and 204 nays.<sup>64</sup>

Wilson followed his credo when he traveled to his home state of New Jersey to vote for woman suffrage on October 19, 1915. Catt observed, "the higher class of men of both parties espoused suffrage."<sup>65</sup> The author David Morgan believes that Wilson voted for suffrage because he "was concerned with his re-election."<sup>66</sup> All the same, Democratic anti-suffrage men and women successfully worked against a favorable vote for suffrage in the state of New Jersey.<sup>67</sup>

The next year, 1916, was an election year. Women were able to vote in federal elections in twelve states. The connection between suffrage and military service resurfaced. At the Progressive Party national convention in June, the Progressives made a declaration that they "believe that the women of the country, who share with the men the burden of government in times of peace and make equal sacrifice in times of war, should be given the full political right of suffrage both by State and Federal action."<sup>68</sup> Apparently, this statement was premised on the idea that enfranchisement is a vested right.

Yet Wilson was particularly conscious that he should not suddenly change his stance and endorse the federal amendment out of fear that he would otherwise "seem to the country like nothing less than an angler of votes."<sup>69</sup> In August he explained to a friend and suffragist, Ellen Duane Davis, who wanted Wilson to endorse passage of the federal amendment, also known as

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<sup>63</sup>Wilson's Remarks to a Delegation of Democratic Women, 6 January 1915, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols., eds. Arthur S. Link et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-), 32:22 (hereafter cited as *PWW*).

<sup>64</sup>Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage And Politics: The Inner Story Of The Suffrage Movement* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 496.

<sup>65</sup>*ibid.*, 292.

<sup>66</sup>David Morgan, *Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America* (n.p.: Michigan State University Press, 1972), 81.

<sup>67</sup>Catt and Shuler, 292.

<sup>68</sup>Declaration of the Progressive political party, as cited in Ida Husted Harper, ed., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 5 (New York: J. J. Little & Ives Company, 1922; reprint, New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1969), 714.

<sup>69</sup>Wilson to Ellen Duane Davis, 5 August 1916, *PWW*, 37:529.

the Susan B. Anthony amendment, in Congress that year,<sup>70</sup> "I would a great deal rather have the respect of the women than their votes, and I am sure they would not respect me if I departed from my usual course and made such an extraordinarily humble bow to expediency."<sup>71</sup>

A few days later, Wilson wrote to the Jane Jefferson Club of Colorado, which was "the first woman's Democratic voters organization in America."<sup>72</sup> This letter, which was printed in the *New York Times*, expressed his desire not to entangle the country into war. At the same time, he delved into the subject that "the old notion . . . that suffrage and service go hand in hand is a sound one, and women may well appeal to it, though it has long been invoked against them."<sup>73</sup> He pointed out the arduous tasks that women have been undergoing in Europe after he stated, "The war in Europe has forever set at rest the notion that nations depend in times of stress wholly upon their men."<sup>74</sup> One could see the incipient transformation of Wilson's belief in endorsing a federal amendment because of women's patriotic contributions to the war effort, despite his expressions against endorsing it.

Catt, president of NAWSA, noted Wilson's genuine change in personal conviction toward woman suffrage, despite the actions of the militants, in September 1916 when he was speaking before NAWSA during its yearly National Convention. Catt observed, "It places the very hour when conversion to the principle became with him conversion to an obligation to join the campaign."<sup>75</sup> Emblematic of Wilson's stance toward his role in the suffrage movement at that particular time, he asserted, "I have come to fight not for you but with you, and in the end I think we shall not quarrel over the method."<sup>76</sup>

Wilson contradicted himself, however, according to an October 5, 1916 news report printed in the Omaha *World-Herald*. Presumably in Nebraska, a crowd of women expressed to him that they wished they were enfranchised so that they could vote for him. Pleased with this statement, Wilson said, "I wish they could . . . This is substantial evidence that you are going to vote for me."<sup>77</sup> Perhaps he merely made light of a serious personal conviction; however, this was for him a curious statement to make a month prior to federal elections.

On April 6, 1917, Wilson formally entered into war against Germany. Ten days later he gave a speech, "The American People Must Support The War."<sup>78</sup> He appealed to the country's civilians that they must do their part on the domestic front; "the things without which mere fighting would be fruitless."<sup>79</sup> These things include producing large quantities of food, manufacturing ships, mining for coal, and working the looms to make clothes for the soldiers. Wilson asserted that "the men and the women who devote their thought and their energy to these

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<sup>70</sup>Ellen Duane Davis to Wilson, 3 August 1916, *PWW*, 37:523.

<sup>71</sup>Wilson to Ellen Duane Davis, 5 August 1916, *PWW*, 37: 529.

<sup>72</sup>Wilson to the Jane Jefferson Club of Colorado, 7 August 1916, *PWW*, 37:536-537.

<sup>73</sup>*ibid.*.

<sup>74</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>75</sup>Catt and Shuler, 260.

<sup>76</sup>*ibid.*.

<sup>77</sup>News report (printed in the Omaha *World Herald*), 5 October 1916, *PWW*, 38:336.

<sup>78</sup>Albert Bushnell Hart, ed., *Selected Addresses And Public Papers Of Woodrow Wilson*, with an introduction by Albert Bushnell Hart (New York: Boni & Liveright, Inc., 1918), 197-201.

<sup>79</sup>*ibid.*, 197-201.

things will be serving their country . . .”<sup>80</sup> So Wilson acknowledged the important part women would play in the war effort. Wilson discussed an “Army bill” with the Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, Representative Dent, the next day.<sup>81</sup>

The Selective Services Act passed through Congress in May. Catt wrote to Wilson on May 7<sup>th</sup> to request that he endorse the federal amendment in order to boost women’s morale in their war effort. She wrestled with imposing this request on him during a time of war, “. . . however much we feel that it would add to our enthusiasm and usefulness during the war to be equipped with the ballot before we are placed on the firing line. We hoped that our willingness to serve our country even only half armed would appeal to the men with whom you and we must deal in Congress as good and sufficient reason for our enfranchisement – possibly as a war measure . . .”<sup>82</sup> Wilson responded the next day that he did not believe Congress would be receptive to considering the federal amendment because they were preoccupied with the war.<sup>83</sup> However, the important point is that Catt initiated to Wilson the idea of suffrage as a reward or compensation for women’s contributions to the war effort. Enfranchisement as a reward is antithetical to Ford’s interpretation that the Nineteenth Amendment passed because of suffrage militancy. To be sure, the National Woman’s Party “quite pointedly took no stand on the war issue”<sup>84</sup> and would not contribute to the war effort.<sup>85</sup>

On May 14, 1917, however, Wilson met with a delegation of “Woman’s,” along with other “liberal Parties,” regarding the federal amendment; they proclaimed that this amendment should be considered in Congress as part of the war program.<sup>86</sup> A week earlier, in a May 7<sup>th</sup> letter to Wilson, Catt emphasized that the National Woman’s Party, and not NAWSA, were to meet with him in this delegation.<sup>87</sup> Catt did not join in this delegation because she did not want to associate with the militants.<sup>88</sup> Wilson responded to the attending delegation that even though it was an inopportune time to consider their request, in light of the war he would reappraise the woman suffrage movement.<sup>89</sup>

Yet on that day Wilson wrote a letter to Edward William Pou, Chairman of the Rules Committee, stating that he would approve of a Committee on Woman Suffrage in the House of

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<sup>80</sup>ibid., 197-201.

<sup>81</sup>From the Diary of Thomas W. Brahany, a presidential assistant, 17 April 1917, *PWW*, 42:91.

<sup>82</sup>Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt to Wilson, 7 May 1917, *PWW*, 42:237.

<sup>83</sup>Wilson to Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt, second letter, 8 May 1917, *PWW*, 42:241.

<sup>84</sup>Barbara Steinson, *American Women’s Activism In World War I*, Modern American History: A Garland Series, ed. Frank Freidel (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), 241.

<sup>85</sup>Graham, 667.

<sup>86</sup>Ray Stannard Baker, ed., *Woodrow Wilson: Life And Letters*, vol. 6 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 67. Baker was a journalist during Wilson’s administration. See H.W. Brands’ *Woodrow Wilson*.

<sup>87</sup>Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt to Wilson, 7 May 1917, *PWW*, 42:237.

<sup>88</sup>Morgan, 118.

<sup>89</sup>Ray Stannard Baker, ed., vol. 6, 67.

Wilson agreed with the delegation and replied, “. . . just because we are quickened by the questions of this war, we ought to be quickened to give this question of woman suffrage our immediate consideration.”<sup>104</sup> He noted that the nation recently had been “depending upon the women . . . for suggestions of service, which have been rendered in abundance and with distinction and originality.”<sup>105</sup> This situation serves as another example of how Wilson is reminded of the need to endorse the federal amendment based on women’s contributions to the war effort.

Women obtained full enfranchisement in New York by an “immense majority.”<sup>106</sup> The suffragists believed that this victory eventually led the way to the passage of the federal amendment in the U.S. Congress. Moreover, they also believed that they won this majority in New York because of their contribution to the war effort. Not only was Wilson’s speech an influence on the male voters of New York, but also “the actual conscription of all women over sixteen years of age by the Governor, proved that not only were women capable of war service but liable for it.”<sup>107</sup>

NAWSA made significant strides in the advancement of the right to vote since the military preparedness measures; by 1918 New York state gained full women’s enfranchisement and six additional states obtained federal enfranchisement for women.<sup>108</sup> Yet from 1913 to 1919, the militant suffrage movement – the National Woman’s Party – aimed to make itself a thorn in Wilson’s side. It was “the first organized militant political action in America.”<sup>109</sup> Instead of using diplomacy, they picketed in front of the White House in order to force him to officially endorse the federal amendment. Wilson stated in a personal letter, “I fear that what these ladies are doing is doing [sic] a very great deal of damage to the cause they are trying to promote. That they are deeply mistaken I believe the whole country thinks, but that should not lead us to irregular action ourselves.”<sup>110</sup> In a November 9<sup>th</sup> letter to Wilson, the director of the Committee on Public Information, George Creel, advised the President against meeting with the militant suffragists to discuss the federal amendment. “May I advise against such an audience and if you agree with me will you suggest form of refusal. Mrs. Catt and Dr. Shaw [Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, former president of NAWSA] speak for equal suffrage in the nation, and the Congressional Union [also known as the National Woman’s Party] is without standing and deserves no recognition.”<sup>111</sup> This statement signifies the trust that the Wilson administration had developed with the more accommodating and diplomatic National American Woman’s Suffrage Association. Wilson followed Creel’s advice. Creel’s statement could also signify a political power struggle between the parties. While NAWSA was bipartisan,<sup>112</sup> the militant suffragists were partial to the

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<sup>104</sup> A Reply from Wilson, 25 October 1917, *PWW*, 44:442.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Harper, ed., xxiii.

<sup>107</sup> Harper, ed., 737.

<sup>108</sup> Weatherford, 249.

<sup>109</sup> Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1920; reprint, Salem, NH: Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1990), vii (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>110</sup> Wilson to Dee Richardson, a concerned federal civil servant who wrote to cabinet members frequently, 25 July 1917, *PWW*, 43:272, 273.

<sup>111</sup> George Creel to Wilson, with Enclosure, 9 November 1917, *PWW*, 44:551.

<sup>112</sup> Morgan, 90.

Republicans. Doris Stevens, who was a militant suffragist prisoner, wrote *Jailed for Freedom*, included a chapter, "Republican Congress Passes Amendment."<sup>113</sup> In this chapter she stated, "... our attack upon the party in power, which happened to be President Wilson's party, had been the most decisive factor in stimulating the opposition party to espouse our side."<sup>114</sup>

Yet according to the commissioner of the District of Columbia, Louis Brownlow, Wilson was adamant about not imprisoning the picketers. He wanted them to have as little publicity as possible. Other members of the administration wanted them arrested because, especially in reference to one occasion, they were deliberately embarrassing the President when he was receiving ambassadors from the Allied powers; the suffrage militants displayed a "Kaiser Wilson" banner.<sup>115</sup> Brownlow arrested them on July 15, 1917. According to Brownlow, "Mr. Wilson was highly indignant. He told me that we had made a fearful blunder, that we never ought to have indulged these women in their desire for arrest and martyrdom, and that he had pardoned them and wanted that to end it."<sup>116</sup> Brownlow continued to dispute Wilson as to his policy. Brownlow asserted that as commissioner he had to take responsibility for controlling the continuous activities of the picketers. After defending his reasons, Brownlow wrote of Wilson, "There were a few seconds of silence and then the President said, with more sorrow than anger in his voice, 'The blood be on your head!'"<sup>117</sup> According to a November 9 report of the prisoners by William Gwynn Gardiner, an attorney and a commissioner for the District of Columbia, while Alice Paul was in the District Jail, she claimed that she was a political prisoner. In order to maintain international recognition as a political prisoner, she had to go on a hunger strike. Yet Wilson did not seem worried about anything in this report.<sup>118</sup> He was probably concerned about the treatment of the prisoner and how it would reflect on his Democratic Party. Brownlow recorded that the National Woman's Party believed that its methods led to federal enfranchisement. Yet Brownlow claimed, "I am equally convinced that they are wrong and that women were given the vote because of the wise and statesmanlike leadership of Mrs. Catt, Dr. Shaw, Mrs. Park, Mrs. Gardener, and other leaders of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association."<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, Wilson's directions to prevent the occurrence of political martyrs might have been out of a wish to preserve the appearance of Democratic political party integrity.

According to Sally Hunter Graham, Alice Paul made a bargain with David Lawrence, assumed to be a White House envoy, in the third week of November, to end the picketing if Congress would pass the federal amendment by 1919. (The genuineness of this meeting was controvertible.) She was released from prison on November 28, 1917. In January Wilson officially announced his support for the federal amendment.<sup>120</sup> Graham implies that Wilson announced this endorsement as a direct result of this supposed bargain.

Yet economic issues came to the fore that may have been a factor in prompting Wilson to officially endorse the federal amendment. Royal Meeker of the Bureau of Labor Statistics wrote

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<sup>113</sup> Stevens, 341-343.

<sup>114</sup> Stevens, 342.

<sup>115</sup> Brownlow, 77-79.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Wilson to Joseph Patrick Tumulty, Wilson's private secretary, with Enclosure, circa 10 November 1917, *PWW*, 44:559-561, 562n.1; Enclosure: letter from William Gwynn Gardiner, 9 November 1917, *PWW*, 44:559-561, 562n.1.

<sup>119</sup> Brownlow, 81-82.

<sup>120</sup> Graham, 677-678.

to Wilson regarding the state of labor economics particularly in relation to the war effort, on November 27. He found it crucial to investigate the "extent and possibilities of the substitution of female labor for male labor in our principle industries."<sup>121</sup> He had been receiving questions from the general public as to policy on replacing men with women – businesses had been complaining about the low availability of labor. Meeker asserts, "The labor of fighting the Germans face to face is no whit more important than any other labor in the great industry of beating the Germans, though it is undoubtedly more dangerous. . . I feel if we are to win this war we must lay down a definite labor policy immediately and adhere to it rigorously."<sup>122</sup> This dilemma underscored the critical need for women's services in the war effort – again this would prompt the issue of the federal amendment for woman suffrage. Yet Wilson did not act upon Meeker's advice in his usual timely manner. He discussed Meeker's letter to the Secretary of Labor, William B. Wilson, on January 10, 1918, upon his return from a trip.<sup>123</sup> President Wilson already gave his announcement of his endorsement on the preceding day.

On January 9, Wilson met with "Democratic members of the Suffrage Committee of the House of Representatives."<sup>124</sup> This suffrage committee had been implemented by means of NAWSA's request to Wilson in May 1917. They discussed the suffrage question. Then Wilson wrote out a statement to be given to the press. The language represented his usual style of not appearing aggressively manipulative of congressional affairs. It read, "when we sought his advice he very frankly and earnestly advised us to vote for the amendment as an act of right and justice to the women of the country and of the world."<sup>125</sup> The next day Jeanette Rankin, the first female representative in Congress, began the debate in the House of Representatives to pass the amendment<sup>126</sup> (the date for the vote was determined in December.)<sup>127</sup> It passed with 274 ayes and 136 nays; it passed with an extremely narrow margin – by one vote. It only passed because five representatives who were ill had shown up to vote despite their physical pain.<sup>128</sup>

Wilson sent a message to the French Union for Woman Suffrage, by means of Catt, on June 7, 1918. He stated, "The war could not have been fought without them, or its sacrifices endured. It is high time that some part of our debt of gratitude to them should be acknowledged and paid, and the only acknowledgement they ask is their admission to the suffrage. . . ."<sup>129</sup> Again, this statement spells plainly his developing position on suffrage as a reward for women's war efforts as well as his trust in Catt in conveying this conviction.

On September 25, Creel suggested that Wilson give a speech before the Senate to endorse the federal amendment for the October 1 Senate vote. Creel stated, "I feel deeply that the passage of this Amendment is a war necessity for it will release the minds and energies of

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<sup>121</sup>Royal Meeker to Wilson, 27 November 1917, *PWW*, 45:132, 133.

<sup>122</sup>Royal Meeker to Wilson, 27 November 1917, *PWW*, 45:132, 133, 133n.1.

<sup>123</sup>Editors' discursive note to the correspondence from Royal Meeker to Wilson, 27 November 1917, *PWW*, 45:134n.3.

<sup>124</sup>A statement "written from Washington" that was printed in the January 10, 1918 *New York Times*, 9 January 1918, *PWW*, 45:545n.1.

<sup>125</sup>Ray Stannard Baker, ed., vol. 6, 458.

<sup>126</sup>Van Voris, 148.

<sup>127</sup>Catt and Shuler, 320.

<sup>128</sup>Van Voris, 148.

<sup>129</sup>Ray Stannard Baker, ed., vol. 7, 199.

thousands of women for war work and war enthusiasm."<sup>130</sup> Additionally, Creel divulged, "I feel deeply also that it is necessary to have the Administration receive full credit for its consistently courageous and friendly attitude."<sup>131</sup> Probably in order to placate the Republicans, in Wilson's address, he stated, "there is and can be no party issue involved in it."<sup>132</sup> Perhaps Creel wanted the Administration to receive the credit in order to divert the public's attention away from the suffrage militants as well as to point out the Democratic Party's espousal of the federal suffrage amendment.

On September 29, Catt wrote to Wilson. She was concerned that a few Senators did not view suffrage as a war measure. Catt exclaimed, "Our country is asking women to give their all, and upon their voluntary and free offering may depend the outcome of the war."<sup>133</sup> Catt related a conversation she had with a woman working in the Ordnance Department. The woman viewed suffrage as a war measure "Because it is an incentive to better and more work."<sup>134</sup>

The next day Wilson gave a speech to the Senate. Probably in reference to the suffrage militants, in order to deny that he was not succumbing to their pressure tactics, he pointedly stressed that "the voices of foolish and intemperate agitators do not reach me at all."<sup>135</sup> To continue, he eloquently states:

We have made partners of the women in this war; shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right? This war could not have been fought, either by the other nations engaged or by America, if it had not been for the services of the women, – services rendered in every sphere, – not merely in the fields of effort in which we have been accustomed to see them work, but wherever men have worked and upon the very skirts and edges of the battle itself. . . .

I propose it as I would propose to admit soldiers to the suffrage, the men fighting in the field of our liberties and the liberties of the world, were they excluded.<sup>136</sup>

Unfortunately the amendment did not pass the Senate; there were 62 yeas, "including pairs," and 34 nays.<sup>137</sup> Yet "those suffragists who knew just what the President was doing knew that he was not only sincere but using the full extent of his influence with his party."<sup>138</sup>

November 11, 1918 was Armistice Day, the end of the Great War. Yet Wilson continued to advocate for woman suffrage, not only as a reward for women's services in the war effort, but also with party survival in mind. On November 29, 1918 Wilson wrote to Senator John Sharp Williams. Wilson observed, ". . . our party is the party that is preventing the adoption of the Federal Amendment. . . . I am going to take the liberty of asking you if you think that it is at all possible for you to lend your aid to the passage of the amendment. . . . the matter is one of great

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<sup>130</sup>George Creel to Wilson, first letter, 25 September 1918, *PWW*, 51:117-118.

<sup>131</sup>*ibid.*, 51:118.

<sup>132</sup>Wilson's Address to the Senate, 30 September 1918, *PWW*, 51:158.

<sup>133</sup>Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt to Wilson, 29 September 1918, *PWW*, 51:155, 156, 157.

<sup>134</sup>*ibid.*, 51:155, 156, 157.

<sup>135</sup>Wilson's Address to the Senate, 30 September 1918, *PWW*, 51:158, 159, 160, 161.

<sup>136</sup>*ibid.*, 51:159, 160.

<sup>137</sup>Catt and Shuler, 496.

<sup>138</sup>Catt and Shuler, 325, 326.



anxiety to me."<sup>139</sup> Yet Wilson continued to commend women in the war effort. In the State of the Union Address on December 2, 1918, Wilson stated, "Their contribution to the great result is beyond appraisal. . . . The least tribute we can pay them is to make them the equals of men in political rights as they have proved themselves their equals . . ."<sup>140</sup> Wilson praises, and wishes to reward, what would have been called unfeminine by nineteenth century standards, women's participatory activities in the public realm.

Still there seemed to have been a race between the two major parties over which party could outvote the other party over the suffrage amendment. On January 11, 1919, Wilson's secretary, Joseph Patrick Tumulty, informed the President, "Best information Moses of New Hampshire will vote for suffrage. This makes one Democratic vote all the more necessary."<sup>141</sup> Wilson had been becoming increasingly distressed over the precarious status of the proposed federal amendment. The day before the February 10, 1919 vote in the Senate, Wilson sent a telegram to Lee Slater Overman and Senator Williams, "I hope that you will pardon me if I again express my deep anxiety about the vote on the Suffrage Amendment. It assumes a more important aspect every day, and the fortunes of our party are of such consequence at this particular turn in the world's events that I take great liberty of again urging upon you favorable action."<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, the amendment did not pass the Senate.<sup>143</sup> Yet the amendment did pass the House and Senate in May and June of that year respectively.<sup>144</sup> In a message to Congress on May 20, 1919, a day before the vote in the House of Representatives, Wilson expressed, "I, for one, covet for our country the distinction of being among the first to act in a great reform."<sup>145</sup> So Wilson continued to endorse the federal amendment even after the Armistice on November 11, 1918.

Not only did he endorse the federal amendment in Congress, he contacted the state governors and state legislators to endorse its ratification, actions contrary to his stance in the 1916 election year during which he would not make "such an extraordinarily humble bow to expediency."<sup>146</sup> On July 15, 1919, Wilson sent a telegram to Hugh Manson Dorsey, the Governor of Georgia, stating that "I believe that it is absolutely essential to the political future of the country that this Amendment should be passed, and absolutely essential to the fortunes of the Democratic Party that it should play a leading part in the support of this great reform."<sup>147</sup> On September 2, 1919, Wilson sent a telegram to James Campbell Cantrill, a Democratic Congressman from Kentucky, calling upon the State Convention to include a plank to vote on woman suffrage. Wilson asserted, "It would serve mankind and the party by doing so."<sup>148</sup> After recovering from his stroke, Wilson congratulated Catt for the eventual transformation of NAWSA into the League of Women Voters "to carry on the development of good citizenship

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<sup>139</sup>Wilson to John Sharp Williams, 29 November 1918, *PWW*, 53:244.

<sup>140</sup>Wilson's Annual Message on the State of the Union, 2 December 1918, *PWW*, 53:277.

<sup>141</sup>Joseph Patrick Tumulty to Wilson, 11 January, 1919, 1A.M., *PWW*, 53:717.

<sup>142</sup>Wilson to Lee Slater Overman, 9 February 1919, *PWW*, 55:37.

<sup>143</sup>Catt and Shuler, 496.

<sup>144</sup>*ibid.*, 496.

<sup>145</sup>Wilson's Special Message to Congress, 20 May 1919, *PWW*, 59:296, 289-297.

<sup>146</sup>Wilson to Ellen Duane Davis, 5 August 1916, *PWW*, 37:529.

<sup>147</sup>Wilson to Hugh Manson Dorsey, 15 July 1919, *PWW*, 61:480, 481.

<sup>148</sup>Wilson to James Campbell Cantrill, 2 September 1919, *PWW*, 62:615.

and real democracy.”<sup>149</sup> An editorial comment in *The Papers Of Woodrow Wilson* speculates that Wilson’s “fervor” probably was born out of New Jersey’s ratification of the federal amendment.<sup>150</sup>

Analyzing the personalities of the leading political and social leaders is integral to understanding the course of events that led to suffrage. Carrie Chapman Catt, nee Clinton Lane, was a non-partisan Midwesterner. She was born in 1859 in Ripon, Wisconsin and moved to Charles City, Iowa when she was seven years old. Her family did not seem to have a strong religious affiliation. As a strong-minded youth she had displayed interest not only in women’s rights but also in biological science. After high school she went to Oread Collegiate Institute (headed by Eli Thayer) in Worcester, Massachusetts and later obtained her B.S. in the General Science Course for Women at Iowa State Agricultural College.<sup>151</sup> Although her background differs from that of Wilson, they were both nearly the same age and obtained a high level of education. In fact, her bi-partisanship and lack of religious indoctrination probably made her more amenable than Alice Paul, a staunch anti-Democrat and a Quaker who headed her own newly formed political party, the National Woman’s Party,<sup>152</sup> to Wilson’s single-minded approach toward his own administration. Brownlow offered his own insight in his autobiography, “. . . the fact that the President worked so cordially and intimately with the leaders of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, Dr. Shaw, Mrs. Catt, Mrs. Park, and Mrs. Gardener, infuriated the leaders of the Woman’s party – Miss Paul and others. Miss Paul . . . had developed an appetite for jails and hunger strikes.”<sup>153</sup> For Catt, as president of NAWSA, to maintain a cordial communication with Wilson during the suffrage movement shows tact on her part. In a letter addressed to Catt on May 8, 1917, Wilson began, “You are always thoughtful and considerate, and I greatly value your generous attitude.”<sup>154</sup> In this instance, he was probably referring to Catt’s request to endorse the federal amendment while she was also expressing an understanding that discussion over this matter might be inopportune at that time considering the imminent demands of planning for U.S. entry into the war. Wilson, who responded in a timely manner, agreed it was an inopportune time, but his tone was friendly, responsive, and polite. He held similar feelings toward other members of NAWSA. Wilson paid a tribute to the late Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, former president of NAWSA, on August 8, 1919, “When the war came, I saw her in action and she won my sincere admiration and homage.”<sup>155</sup> In contrast, Wilson’s biographer, Kerney, in his penultimate chapter entitled “Party Disaster” describes Wilson’s approach to his administrative affairs.

With the coming of increased power, he had walled himself in and completely departed from the old practice of common counsel. He was utterly deficient in

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<sup>149</sup> Wilson to Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt, 10 February 1920, *PWW*, 64:396.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, 64:396, 396n.1.

<sup>151</sup> Van Voris, 4-7.

<sup>152</sup> Irwin, a historian, knew Paul personally. Inez Hayes Irwin, *The Story of Alice Paul and The National Woman’s Party* (Fairfax, VA: Delinger’s Publishers, LTD, 1977), 7, 152, 177.

<sup>153</sup> Brownlow, 76.

<sup>154</sup> Wilson to Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt, second letter, 8 May 1917, *PWW*, 42:241.

<sup>155</sup> Wilson to Justina Leavitt Wilson, corresponding secretary at NAWSA, 8 August 1919, *PWW*, 62:225, 225n.1.

gregarious instinct. "I rarely consult anybody," he said in an interview with Ida Tarbell published in "Collier's" on October 28, 1916. Thus isolated, he found it easy to convince himself that he had devised the correct pattern of human behavior, and that those who differed with him were "blind and ignorant." He had no patience with that part of the historical record that would seem to show that any progress that humanity has made through the ages has been painful and slow, and that progress of any permanent kind never comes at a gallop. No other leadership than his was permitted during his eight years in the White House. He had early made it plain that he was to do the guiding.<sup>156</sup>

After the war, the Democratic Party was concerned about the next presidential election. Wilson had suffered a near fatal cerebral stroke on October 4, 1919 and was not able to respond to his administrative duties for a period of time.<sup>157</sup> His wife, Mrs. Edith Wilson, despite her personal stance against woman suffrage, nonetheless continued Wilson's work on the ratification of the federal amendment that passed Congress earlier that summer.<sup>158</sup> Yet Kerney, who paid scant attention to the suffrage movement in his biography, said of Wilson, "his failure to follow through with a definite post-war domestic program, mired the Democracy."<sup>159</sup> The Republicans successfully instigated a war of propaganda toward the next presidential election. "There was never a political campaign more heavily laden with exaggeration. War-weary, and equally weary of the wrangling over peace, the voters swallowed the misstatements . . . and Cox [the 1920 Democratic presidential candidate] . . . was defeated by an electoral majority of 277 and a popular majority of more than seven millions."<sup>160</sup> Governor James Cox of Ohio supported the federal amendment.<sup>161</sup>

The last months before the thirty-sixth state's ratification of the amendment were rife with contention between the suffragists and the anti-suffragists. Anti-suffragist organizations had met in Tennessee. They warned the voting public that suffrage would ". . . add the undesirable, corrupt, and job hunting female politician to the ranks of the male . . ."<sup>162</sup> According to the Tennessee state constitution, the governor did not have the power to assemble the legislature. To the anti-suffragists' dismay, however, Governor Albert Houston Roberts did so on July 17, 1920. The president of the Tennessee Division of the Southern Women's League for the Rejection of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, Miss Josephine Pearson, exclaimed, "Mrs. Catt arrived. . . . Extra called session (sic) imminently by the Governor, our forces notified to gather at once."<sup>163</sup> (The National Woman's Party was present as well,<sup>164</sup> but the author Anne M. Benjamin does not indicate concern on the part of the anti-suffragists toward the National Woman's Party.) The Democratic Party was contestable terrain between the suffragists and the anti-suffragists. Both Mrs. James S. Pinckard, president of the Southern Women's League for the Rejection of the

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<sup>156</sup>Kerney, 452.

<sup>157</sup>ibid., 429, 433.

<sup>158</sup>Anne M. Benjamin, *A History Of The Anti-Suffrage Movement In The United States From 1895 to 1920* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 224.

<sup>159</sup>Kerney, 450-465, 450.

<sup>160</sup>ibid., 457.

<sup>161</sup>Benjamin, 312, 313.

<sup>162</sup>'protest,' as cited in Benjamin, 310.

<sup>163</sup>Miss Josephine Pearson, as cited in Benjamin, 311.

<sup>164</sup>Flexner, 335.

Susan B. Anthony Amendment, who was also the grand niece of John C. Calhoun, and Catt sent correspondences to the Democratic presidential candidate, Governor James Cox of Ohio, to safeguard their respective political positions. While Mrs. Pinckard wanted to prevent woman suffrage in order “to save the soul of the Democratic party and the White Civilization of Eleven Democratic States”<sup>165</sup> Catt was warning Cox about “outsiders” who were actively working against ratification.<sup>166</sup> The state Senate ratified the amendment on August 13, 1920. On that day, Wilson sent a telegram to Seth M. Walker, the speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, requesting that the state House “concur” with the amendment.<sup>167</sup> Walker sent a telegram the next day chastising Wilson for his intrusion, “You were too great to ask it and I do not believe that the men of Tennessee will surrender honest convictions for political expediency or harmony.”<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, on August 18, the amendment passed the state House by a vote of fifty to forty-six. On August 19, Governor Roberts sent a telegram to Wilson requesting he send to the state legislature a “congratulatory message” to ennoble the suffragists because Roberts wanted “to prevent reconsideration of vote of ratification.”<sup>169</sup> Walker was not able to garner enough support for a re-vote. Still, soon afterwards, anti-suffragists prevented Governor Roberts from certifying the ratification. Yet on August 24, the state Supreme Court nullified the order of the lower court, thus allowing Roberts to finally certify the ratification.<sup>170</sup> On August 26, 1920, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby signed the Proclamation.<sup>171</sup> Catt helped to ensure the safe standing of the Nineteenth Amendment in February 1922 “when the United States Supreme Court handed down the second of two decisions upholding the Nineteenth Amendment against further challenge.”<sup>172</sup>

So women gained the right to vote because they sought it during a time of war. These two factors combined were indispensable: the suffrage movement was weak during the Civil War because women focused solely on the war. By the Great War, however, women’s war efforts were rewarded with their enfranchisement by means of a diplomatic and effective suffrage movement on the part of NAWSA. The executive and legislative branches determined, with the conscientious prodding of the suffragists, that women were capable of having a vested stake in society; women deserved the privilege of the vote. Conversely, without the aggravating impact of a war, women probably could not have proven a strength in civic capacity that would be worthy of the vote. Yet in this context, the militant actions of the National Woman’s Party did not display a vested stake in society: on the contrary, their intent was to be as burdensome as possible. In contrast, Catt nicely articulated the connection between suffrage and the economic and political necessities of women’s war effort to an increasingly receptive wartime president. Isenberg’s discussion of antebellum citizenship corresponds to that of the early twentieth century: in alignment with the 1789 Constitution which recognizes enfranchisement as a vested right,<sup>173</sup> wartime recognition of the civic capacity for military service, or service in the war effort, behoves the “disabled caste”<sup>174</sup> to act accordingly – to obtain a relationship with the state.<sup>175</sup> In

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<sup>165</sup>Mrs. James S. Pinckard, as cited in Benjamin, 312.

<sup>166</sup>Catt, as cited in Benjamin, 312.

<sup>167</sup>Wilson to Seth M. Walker, 13 August 1920, *PWW*, 66:30, 30n.1.

<sup>168</sup>Seth M. Walker to Wilson, 14 August 1920, *PWW*, 66:35.

<sup>169</sup>Albert Houston Roberts to Wilson, 19 August 1920, *PWW*, 66:54, 54n.1.

<sup>170</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>171</sup>Catt and Shuler, 455.

<sup>172</sup>Flexner, 337.

<sup>173</sup>Isenberg, 35.

<sup>174</sup>*ibid.*

addition, the administration's need to keep the Democratic Party in power became another motive for Wilson to vigorously endorse the federal amendment, particularly after the war. Although Wilson's eventual endorsement of the federal amendment was in part opportunistic, the language of his speeches and letters, in light of his scrupulous regard for his own integrity, as displayed in his youth and tested during his presidency, suggest a genuine change of moral conviction toward woman suffrage.

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<sup>175</sup> See Isenberg, *Sex & Citizenship in Antebellum America*.