Woodrow Wilson's Conversion Experience: The President and the Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment

Beth Behn

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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WOODROW WILSON’S CONVERSION EXPERIENCE:

THE PRESIDENT AND THE FEDERAL WOMAN SUFFRAGE AMENDMENT

A Dissertation Presented

by

BETH A. BEHN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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BETH A. BEHN

Approved as to style and content by:

Joyce Avrech Berkman, Chair

Gerald Friedman, Member

David Glassberg, Member

Gerald McFarland, Member

Joye Bowman, Department Head
Department of History
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I would never have completed this dissertation without the generous support of a number of people. It is a privilege to finally be able to express my gratitude to many of them.

As a graduate student, I benefitted from work with a number of distinguished scholars at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Chief among them was my dissertation advisor and mentor, Joyce Avrech Berkman. Joyce encouraged me to write a master’s thesis and later assisted me in making the decision to expand that thesis into a dissertation. Along the way, she carefully reviewed drafts of chapters, always pushing me to refine my analysis and improve the clarity of my writing. Patient but exacting, compassionate but firm – Joyce was everything that one could want in a mentor. I will be forever indebted to her for teaching me the craft of history. I am also grateful for the feedback that I received from the other members of my dissertation committee – David Glassberg, Jerry Friedman, and Gerald McFarland. Besides my advisor and the other members of my committee, I want to thank two people – Bruce Laurie and Carlin Barton – for helping me build an entirely new set of mental muscles. I did doctoral fields with Bruce and Carlin and my challenging work with both of them significantly deepened and sharpened my thinking.

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My parents have always been a tremendous source of support for any project that I undertook and this dissertation was no exception. They cheered from the sidelines at every step along the way. My dad – to whom I credit my love of history – passed away just five days after my successful dissertation defense, but I had a chance to share the good news with him and I will be forever grateful for the fact that he lived long enough to help me celebrate this milestone.

During the eight years of my doctoral work, my family and I moved five times as a result of my being an active duty army officer – from Massachusetts to New York to Kansas to Iowa to Colorado and then back to New York. In addition to those five moves, I completed two tours of duty to Iraq. And my partner, Julie Shappy, gave birth to our two children, Parke and Twila. In between the moves, deployments and pregnancies, Julie managed to complete her PhD in Exercise Physiology. She is the most remarkable woman that I have ever met. Without Julie’s patient support and encouragement, I would never have finished this dissertation. I dedicate this work to her.
ABSTRACT

WOODROW WILSON’S CONVERSION EXPERIENCE: THE PRESIDENT AND THE FEDERAL WOMAN SUFFRAGE AMENDMENT

FEBRUARY 2012

BETH A. BEHN, B.S., UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Joyce Avrech Berkman

This study explores President Woodrow Wilson’s evolution between his 1912 presidential campaign and the mid-point of his second term from staunch opposition to a federal woman suffrage amendment to an active advocate for the cause. Besides clearly identifying the array of forces within and outside Congress that pressured Wilson and the extent to which he was, in turn, able to influence Congress and voters, this study more fully integrates the suffragists and anti-suffragists into American political history and situates the issue of woman suffrage in the broader context of Wilson’s two administrations. I argue that the National American Woman Suffrage Association, not the National Woman’s Party, was decisive in Wilson’s conversion to the cause of the federal amendment because its approach mirrored his own conservative vision of the appropriate method of reform: win a broad consensus, develop a legitimate rationale, and make the issue politically valuable. Additionally, I contend that Wilson did have a significant role to play in the successful congressional passage and national ratification of the 19th Amendment, though powerful currents of sectionalism, race, and economic interests sometimes limited the extent of his influence.
A deeper understanding of the final stages of the woman suffrage movement holds relevance for our understanding of both Progressive Era America and our present times. Observing Wilson treading the fragile line between executive interference and reasonable influence provides great insight into Progressive Era conceptions of separation of powers and presidential power and leadership. Furthermore, debates over woman suffrage contributed to the larger late-19th and early-20th century debates over the meaning of citizenship and the role of the state in an increasingly industrialized nation. Enfranchising one-half the population marked a significant moment in our nation’s history. This study deepens and enriches our understanding of the process by which that momentous event came to pass.
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As Woodrow Wilson traveled the 1912 presidential campaign trail, he confided to one of his staff members that he was “definitely and irreconcilably opposed to woman suffrage; woman’s place was in the home, and the type of woman who took an active part in the suffrage agitation was totally abhorrent to him.” Just six years later, though, halfway through his second term, he pleaded with the United States Senate to pass the federal woman suffrage amendment. In the midst of a world war and with significant mid-term elections looming just days away, Wilson took the unprecedented step of personally injecting his voice into the Senate debate over woman suffrage. The future direction of the nation rests on granting women the right to vote, he argued, because “we shall need their moral sense to preserve what is right and fine and worthy in our system of life as well as to discover just what it is that ought to be purified and reformed. Without their counselings we shall only be half wise.”

What had transpired during the first six years of his presidency to bring about such a dramatic change in Wilson’s position? How had the federal suffrage amendment been elevated to an issue of such importance that the president felt compelled to personally intervene with Congress on its behalf? Did Wilson’s support indicate a principled shift on the issue or was it mere political expediency? This study seeks to

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2 Congress, Senate, President Woodrow Wilson’s message to the U.S. Senate urging passage of the suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution. 65th Congress, 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* (30 September 1918), vol. 56, pt. 1, 10900-10901.
understand the array of forces that pressured Wilson and the extent to which he was, in turn, able to influence Congress and voters. Its aim is to more fully integrate the suffragists into American political history and to situate the issue of woman suffrage in the broader context of Wilson’s two administrations. In doing so, this study has the potential to enhance our understanding not just of Wilson and the woman suffrage movement, but also of the nature of legislative change in our representative system and of presidential power during the Progressive Era. Failure to fully understand the process by which one-half of the population attained the franchise will – to use Wilson’s words - leave us only “half wise.”

By focusing on Wilson’s relationship to woman suffrage, this study is designed to both fill voids in the existing scholarship and to weigh in on key historiographical debates. Historians of woman suffrage have devoted a great deal of attention to Wilson’s relationship to the 19th Amendment. Women who personally participated in the suffrage campaign authored the earliest histories, published in the decades immediately following passage of the federal amendment. The manner in which these accounts described Wilson’s role in securing the amendment depended on whether the authors had worked with the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) or with the smaller and more militant National Woman’s Party (NWP). Both groups agreed that Wilson eventually became an advocate and that his support helped secure the necessary votes in Congress and, later, in the state ratification campaigns. However, they disagreed sharply on the cause of his conversion.

Those affiliated with NAWSA insisted that Wilson was won over to the cause by their organization’s tireless campaigning along nonpartisan lines at both the state and
national level and by women’s home front service during World War I. In contrast, women affiliated with the NWP argued that, as a result of their campaign to “hold the party in power responsible” and the publicity-generating militant tactics they employed, Wilson recognized the urgency for passing the federal suffrage amendment under a Democratic administration. Furthermore, NWP activists adamantly believed that NAWSA abandoned the cause of suffrage during the war, focusing all of its efforts on war service and leaving the NWP to shoulder the brunt of the suffrage work.

As the field of Women’s History emerged and grew during the last half of the 20th century, a wide range of studies on the suffrage movement appeared. Most of these ground-breaking works wrestled in some way with the relative effectiveness of the NAWSA and NWP strategies. With the publication of Century of Struggle in 1959, Eleanor Flexner launched what was to become the traditional interpretation of the influence both the NWP and NAWSA had on the president. Flexner concludes that the real contribution of the NWP was to bring the federal amendment back to a central position in the suffrage movement through the work it performed between 1913 and

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4 The first full history of the NWP, published in 1921, was Inez Hayes Irwin, The Story of the Woman’s Party. It was republished in 1977 as Inez Hayes Irwin, The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party (Fairfax, Virginia: Denlinger's Publishers, Ltd, 1977). Additional first-hand NWP accounts include Doris Stevens, Jailed for Freedom (New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 1920), Caroline Katzenstein, Lifting the Curtain: The State and National Woman Suffrage Campaigns in Pennsylvania as I Saw them (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1955). Although these accounts make clear that the participants were aware that woman suffrage had become entangled with other political objectives like prohibition, progressive labor protection laws, and Southern voting qualifications designed to disenfranchise potential black voters, they rarely connect Wilson’s actions on woman suffrage to those other issues.
1916. Beginning in January, 1917, however, the party began to use militant tactics that included picketing in front of the White House, lighting bonfires in which Wilson’s speeches about democracy were burned, and conducting hunger strikes after they had been arrested. Flexner asserts that the militant phase of NWP activity probably did not help the cause and certainly did not endear suffragists to Wilson. She concludes that NAWSA, under the strict control of Carrie Chapman Catt and her moderate, nonpartisan approach, found the most effective path to win over the president and eventually gain the vote.\(^5\) With minor changes in points of emphasis, subsequent scholars adopted Flexner’s interpretation.\(^6\)

Importantly, Flexner notes that winning the support of the president was not the only challenge suffragists faced. Even with his support, the suffrage amendment was defeated twice in the Senate (first in October 1918 and again in February 1919) before finally passing by the slim margin of two votes in June 1919 under a Republican-controlled Congress. Flexner lists the multitude of other issues facing elected officials. Southern representatives had to contend with constituents fearful that woman suffrage threatened white supremacy. Select congressmen also faced pressure from the liquor and


\(^6\) See William L. O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1971) and Sidney R. Bland, "Techniques of Persuasion: The National Woman's Party and Woman Suffrage, 1913-1919" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1972). O’Neill argues that it was NAWSA’s gentler, persuasive approach that converted Wilson. He criticizes the NWP for its policy of “holding the party in power responsible” and damaging the cause through militant actions. O’Neill contends that the NWP was an embarrassment to both NAWSA and Wilson by continuing to focus its attacks on him after he had already come out in support of suffrage. In an exceptionally well-balanced study, Bland contends that the NWP increased enthusiasm for the federal amendment and paved the way for more moderate reform. He sides with Flexner, though, in arguing that the NWP’s period of greatest influence was from 1913-1916. Like O’Neill, Bland concludes that campaigning against all Democrats in 1914 and 1916 was politically foolhardy and that the NWP tactics after late-1917 were counterproductive.
textile industries that feared woman voters would support reformist legislation such as prohibition and protective child labor laws. In pointing out the influence of these outside factors on Congressmen, though, Flexner neglects to explicitly connect them to Wilson’s decision to withhold or exert executive influence.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the traditional interpretation was challenged by a number of new publications. This new generation of historians argued that the NWP had received short shrift in the existing scholarship. They offered a revisionist interpretation in which the political pressure wrought by the militant tactics of the NWP received credit not only for converting Wilson, but also for forcing Congress to pass the 19th Amendment. In their view, NAWSA’s nonpartisan, persuasive approach had been appropriate when women did not have any other tools available to them. But by 1914, more than four million women (mostly in western states) had been enfranchised by their states. As a result, a new approach was in order.

According to the revisionist version, the NWP rightly chose to use women’s voting power to convince politicians from both parties that they must accede to the suffragists’ demand for a federal amendment or face the consequences of inaction in future elections. Additionally, revisionists argue, the picketing, arrests, and harsh treatment suffered by NWP members at the hands of the Wilson Administration generated enormous publicity and public sympathy for the militant suffragists. The NWP was successful in pointing out the hypocrisy of a president committed to “making the world safe for democracy” while denying democratic rights to women in his own nation. While acknowledging a secondary role for the ongoing work of NAWSA, the revisionists

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assert that it was the NWP’s militance that eventually forced Wilson to support the federal amendment in order to avoid continued embarrassment to his administration and electoral damage for his party.\(^8\)

With the exception of some critical reviews, little new scholarship has appeared to either rebuke or temper the revisionist version.\(^9\) The heroic NWP narrative – in which women stop pleading with men to “give” them the vote and instead use women’s political power and militant tactics to “win” the right to vote – seemingly found a ready audience among post-Second Wave Feminism scholars. The revisionist interpretation even found its way into popular culture with the airing of a 2004 HBO film entitled “Iron Jawed Angels.” Starring popular actresses Hilary Swank as the young, vibrant Alice Paul and the older Angelica Huston as Carrie Chapman Catt, the film serves as a perfect dramatization of the heroic pro-NWP narrative.\(^10\) While providing a wide audience with

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\(^9\) In fact, recent suffrage scholarship tends to cite the revisionists without even acknowledging that the effectiveness of the competing NAWSA / NWP strategies is contested historiographical terrain. For example, see Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004). In her analysis of the 1914 mid-term elections, Mead relies heavily on Lunardini’s *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights*.

at least some knowledge of the obstacles faced by suffragists, the film is unabashedly biased toward the militants.\textsuperscript{11}

In both the traditional and revisionist interpretation, the bulk of the scholarly disagreement centers on the competing influence of NAWSA and the NWP on Wilson’s conversion. This analysis often comes at the expense of a more thorough examination of the competing pressures on the president from other progressive reform movements, Southerners determined to defend their entrenched racial hierarchy, and powerful business interests. One notable exception to this trend is David Morgan’s \textit{Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America}. Morgan carefully examines Wilson’s choices about when, where, and with whom to exert his influence in favor of the federal suffrage amendment. He methodically places Wilson’s actions in the context of sectional rivalries, economic realities, and party politics.\textsuperscript{12} Published in 1972, Morgan’s account does not enjoy the benefit of more recent scholarship on the goals of the suffrage leaders or on Wilson’s state of mind during his second term in office. Additionally, he wrongly discounts the importance of NAWSA’s active participation in war service on Wilson’s decision to serve as an advocate for the 19th Amendment. Still, \textit{Suffragists and Democrats} represents the most comprehensive \textit{political} history in the existing suffrage literature.

\textsuperscript{11} In a review of the film in the \textit{Journal of American History}, historian Carla Bittel laments, “Is this what it takes to attract new audiences to women’s history?” While acknowledging that the film may be useful for teaching students about history and popular culture, she concludes, “The challenge, then, remains to promote interest in women’s history and still teach about who we think the suffragists were, rather than who we want them to be.” See Carla Bittel, ”Review of \textit{Iron Jawed Angels},” \textit{Journal of American History} 91, no. 3 (December 2004): 1131-1132. For a film on woman suffrage that takes a more scholarly approach, see Ruth Pollak, \textit{One Woman One Vote} (Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1995).

While most suffrage historians have tended toward a myopic view of the Wilson Administration, Wilson scholars have erred in the other direction. They have paid relatively little attention to the way the suffrage campaign weighed in among the other issues of Wilson’s Administration. Sadly, one could browse through shelves of monographs on Wilson’s foreign and domestic policy and not realize that one-half of the nation’s population gained the right to vote during his administration. The presence of an organized suffrage movement of more than two million women, not to mention more than 700,000 organized anti-suffragists, is notably absent from these accounts.

Wilson’s primary biographer, Arthur S. Link, mentions the President’s interaction with suffragists only a few times in his five-volume history of Wilson’s two terms. His most extensive discussion concerns Wilson’s decision to vote in favor of the state suffrage referendum in New Jersey in 1915 – a pronouncement that Link contends was intimately tied to the President’s simultaneous choice to announce plans to remarry just a little more than a year after the death of his first wife. While Wilson’s affirmative vote in New Jersey was certainly significant, Link’s over-simplified explanation of the decision fails to connect this action to the president’s broader experience with the suffrage movement. Wilson’s later advocacy of the federal suffrage amendment is almost

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13 While the 19th Amendment was a significant step toward greater democracy, it is important to note that although it technically enfranchised all women, millions of African-American women living in southern states were excluded from voting for another fifty years as a result of state constitutions that prohibited almost all African-Americans – male and female - from exercising their voting rights.


entirely absent from Link’s account. Other biographies do not devote much more time to
the suffrage issue than does Link. 16

Much scholarly work has been done on Wilson’s relationship to progressive
legislation, but suffrage is usually excluded from those investigations in favor of a focus
on economic reforms. Historians and political scientists have thoroughly debated
Wilson’s move toward progressivism in advance of the 1916 presidential election. The
debate centers on whether Wilson was simply a political opportunist – pandering to the
labor movement and to progressive voters that he desperately needed in order win re-
election – or whether his shift indicated an actual transformation in his thinking about the
role of the federal government in an increasingly urban-industrial nation. 17

16 For example, see Kendrick Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* (Lawrence:
University Press of Kansas, 1992), Daniel D. Stid, *The President as Statesman: Woodrow Wilson and the
(New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978). More personal biographies such as A. Heckscher,
The Wilson White House* (New York: Scribner, 2001) mention Wilson’s wives’ distaste for women’s
political participation and, later, the actions of the NWP. However, neither author devotes more than a few
sentences to Wilson’s reaction to suffrage pressure. His interaction with Congress on the issue is
completely absent from these accounts. In two more recent biographies, the authors do specifically address
Wilson’s relationship to the woman suffrage campaign, but there is little analysis of his conversion. See
Cooper devotes only four pages of his 600 page biography to Wilson’s action on woman suffrage.

17 Link claims that the president’s newfound commitment to “advanced progressivism” was born
out of his belief that the Democrats must stay in power in order to guide the nation through the challenges
of industrialization and urbanization. According to Link, Wilson had “broad political principles” but was
not “an inflexible dogmatist.” In order to win re-election, he was willing to transform himself into “a new
political creature.” See Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York:
“advanced progressivism” to which Link refers includes Wilson’s nomination of Louis D. Brandeis to the
Supreme Court, his support of the rural credits, workmen’s compensation, and child labor bills, his backing
of the LaFollette Seaman’s Act, and support for the principle of woman suffrage. See Link, *Woodrow
Wilson and the Progressive Era*, 250. For accounts that portray Wilson as even more conservative, see
York: The Free Press, 1963), 205-211. , James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-
1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 162-166. Some scholars have challenged Link’s interpretation of
Wilson’s 1916 shift. The challengers argue that Wilson’s positions in 1912 showed an openness to the type
of legislation that he ultimately supported in 1916. Without denying the importance of electoral politics,
they assert that Wilson’s shift was more evolutionary than Link and his adherents allow. See Stephen B.
throughout this debate is the impact of the First World War and the role that Wilson
viewed for himself and for the United States in determining the nature of the post-war
world order.\footnote{N. Gordon Levin argues that Wilson’s domestic and foreign policies were
driven primarily by his desire to attain a “peaceful liberal capitalist world order under international law, safe both from
traditional imperialism and revolutionary socialism.” See N. Gordon Levin, Woodrow Wilson and World
from p. vii. The importance of the war to Wilson’s decision-making as early as 1915 is also emphasized by
Southern History 22, no. 4 (November 1956): 437. and, more recently, Alan Dawley, Changing the World:
American Progressives in War and Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 121-123.}

Despite this wealth of research and analysis on Wilson’s progressive shift,
particular consideration of his transformation on the issue of woman suffrage is largely
absent from these accounts.

One additional void in the existing scholarship is a thorough analysis of anti-
suffragists’ entreaties toward the president. A number of solid works on the anti-
suffragists received publication in the last two decades, contributing to both the existing
literature on women’s political activism at the turn of the century and to Progressive Era
politics and society, in general. With specific respect to the relationship of anti-
suffragists to Wilson, though, significant questions remain.\footnote{For the most comprehensive works on the anti-suffragists, see Anne M. Benjamin, A History of
the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895-1920: Women Against Equality (Lewiston,
Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1994), Jane
Jerome Camhi, Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920 (Brooklyn: Carlson
Publishing, 1994) and Susan E. Marshall, Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign
Against Women Suffrage (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). For a community study that
examines an earlier period of anti-suffrage activity, see Joyce C. Follet, "Gender and Community: Kenosha,
Wisconsin, 1835-1913" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991). Benjamin’s work is almost
entirely narrative with minimal analysis, but she does carefully chronicle Wilson’s slide toward the pro-
suffrage camp and suggests that this caused great frustration among the anti-suffragists. The three latter
works offer greater analysis of the anti-suffrage movement’s ideology, membership, strategy and tactics,
alliances, and impact. However, none offer a focused examination of the movement’s relationship to
One notable exception to the Wilson scholarship described above is a piece by Victoria Bissell Brown published in 2008 in a superb collection of essays entitled *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson*. Noting the same historiographical voids, Brown urges Wilson scholars in particular to take woman suffrage more seriously. She calls for recognition of the fact that the president’s evolving stance on this issue tells us a great deal about, “his leadership style, his negotiation of political principle and political practicality, his management of the South and race, and his identification with the social justice agenda of the era’s progressives – not to mention his assumptions about the female half of the human race and his relationships with the leaders of the divided woman suffrage movement.”

Brown’s brief but powerful essay is a call for a more integrated narrative of Wilson and woman suffrage – a call that the remainder of my work attempts to answer.

This study, then, is an attempt to at least partially fill the suffrage movement void in the existing Wilson scholarship while also providing a broader picture of Wilson’s political conversion to the body of suffrage history. It is designed to build on the foundation described above by incorporating both the suffrage and Wilson scholarship of

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20 Victoria Bissell Brown, “Did Woodrow Wilson's Gender Politics Matter?” in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), 126. Brown is refreshingly explicit about her aim: “The evidence here is intended to persuade those who spend their scholarly lives in the Wilson archives to cease avoiding woman suffrage as if it were a boyish case of sexual insincerity and, instead, pursue it as a serious example of Wilson’s evolution as a party leader, chief executive, and social justice progressive.” Quote from p. 130. Brown’s essay goes on to argue that Wilson converted to the principle of woman suffrage when his assumptions about the decline of society that might result from women crossing the boundary from private to public sphere were shattered by the *fact* of women’s increasing civic activism and the fact that this increase was not accompanied by some sort of social armageddon. While acknowledging that he did “play politics” with the issue – particularly during his first term – she argues that this is not evidence of his opposition to the principle of white women’s enfranchisement. Rather, his political maneuvering is evidence that, “he embraced the fact of white female suffrage and moved on to treat it like every other political fact; something to be leveraged, controlled, and exploited.” Quote from p. 154.
the last three decades. I argue that suffrage became an issue of tremendous political value during Wilson’s second term. Not out of a sense of justice or any wholesale feminist conversion, but out of knowledge of political reality, Wilson came to support the federal amendment. The degree to which he grew to personally regard women as deserving members of the franchise is difficult to discern.\textsuperscript{21} Regardless of the extent of his private conversion, though, his public support of the principle of suffrage was key in several crucial ways: 1) He lent assistance in various state referenda, thereby increasing the number of Congressmen from suffrage states and improving the chances of successful passage for the federal amendment; 2) He played a role in creating a separate House committee on woman suffrage that removed a large legislative hurdle for the suffragists; and 3) He secured the votes of several legislators through personal appeals, including the one crucial vote needed to push the federal amendment through the Senate in June 1919.

There were limits to Wilson’s capacity to influence events within his own party and in Congress as a whole. Included in this study is a thorough examination of his inability to secure the needed two votes in the Senate during the October 1918 and February 1919 Senate debates. I explain the manner in which the federal suffrage amendment created enemies among Southern Democrats, the liquor industry, and the

\textsuperscript{21} I am somewhat less convinced than Brown is of the extent of Wilson’s personal conversion. Still, comparing Wilson’s deep distaste for women in politics during his academic years and his early political career with the enormous level of support he gave to the suffrage movement during the final push for passage of the federal amendment, it certainly appears as if his experiences with women in the public sphere eroded his personal opposition to their participation in politics. For example, female social reformers such as Julia Lathrop and Grace Abbot of the Children’s Bureau and Florence Kelley of the National Consumers League petitioned Wilson on a range of reform issues. These women were also committed suffragists who most likely contributed to Wilson’s personal and political conversion on the issue of suffrage. Unfortunately, this connection is not explicit in any of the documents I encountered in my research. I have been unable to find any record of these reformers explicitly raising the issue of woman suffrage with Wilson as they advocated for other progressive reforms such as protective labor legislation for women or children. Still, even the absence of such evidence is intriguing and, warrants greater exploration and research.
textile industry. These enemies had an impact on the president. He was least willing to push those members of his own party whom he knew faced constituents panicked about threats to white supremacy. Wilson was also aware that some Congressmen could not vote in favor of suffrage without losing the support of industry leaders back home who feared that women voters would do just as many suffragists promised – end child labor, limit working hours, and usher in national prohibition. To see suffrage as one of many competing priorities on Wilson’s agenda to maintain party unity and retain Democratic control of the White House and Congress is to place it in a new light.

Alongside this exploration of the ability of the president to persuade Congress, I assess the impact of the various factions that pushed and pulled at Wilson over the suffrage issue. While crediting the NWP with revitalizing the campaign for the federal amendment, I develop the argument that ultimately the NAWSA strategy was infinitely more successful at gaining the president’s support than that of the NWP. In taking a more critical stand against the NWP than even historians of the traditional interpretation school, I explain why the policy of “holding the party in power” was ineffective in both the 1914 and 1916 elections. A close examination of Wilson’s correspondence reveals that his most-trusted advisors told him not to worry about women in the West becoming single-issue voters and abandoning the Democrats. The election results indicate that Wilson’s advisors were right.

Furthermore, the militant tactics employed by the NWP beginning in 1917 hurt the cause of suffrage more than they furthered it. By appearing to be disloyal during wartime, the militant pickets damaged the image of the suffrage movement just as the president was beginning to become more supportive of the cause. The argument made by
the NWP leaders was that the publicity they were generating would force the president to act. However, the overwhelming majority of the correspondence from NWP members all over the country back to the NWP headquarters indicates that publicity, if it existed at all, was mostly negative in local papers. A tiny minority of Americans protested the violation of the pickets’ civil rights. A vast majority, many of whom were ardent suffrage supporters, believed that attacking a president who was trying to conduct a war was reprehensible.

The NAWSA strategy, on the other hand, made the president an ally to the cause. Catt’s decision to remain nonpartisan and to support the war strengthened Wilson’s hand as he prevailed upon members of Congress and the general public to reward women’s war service and aid his goal of “making the world safe for democracy” by granting full democratic rights in the United States. NAWSA’s disavowal of the NWP and active campaign to distinguish itself from its more militant and partisan sisters succeeded in bringing the president and his cabinet more closely in line with the NAWSA leadership. Catt, in fact, fostered a personal and political relationship with Wilson that was vital to gaining his support for the federal amendment. The failure of NAWSA’s leaders to protest the violation of their fellow suffragists’ civil rights certainly needs to be recognized and condemned. Ultimately, though, NAWSA’s decision to distance itself from the NWP and to continue to work on winning state suffrage referenda in addition to pursuing the federal amendment paid big dividends with the president, members of Congress, and the general public.

This argument is a clear refutation of the revisionist interpretation. It may be disappointing to those who long for a more heroic narrative to accept the fact that the
NAWSA strategy was more effective than the NWP’s confrontational militance. But it is more important that we understand what actually happened than to bend the historical reality to fulfill a vision of what some would like the truth to be. With the nation at war and “100 percent Americanism” being the watchword, the pickets were viewed by most people as a detriment to their cause. Further, some opponents of suffrage in the Senate used the actions of the NWP as an excuse to continue to oppose the federal amendment. To deny these facts – as distasteful as they may be – is to do an injustice to the historical record.

In order to contextualize the final phase of the suffrage campaign during Wilson’s second term, the second chapter reviews key events leading up to and including Wilson’s first term in the White House. This review includes an examination of the evolution of Wilson’s stance on women in politics from his earliest days as a young professor at the all-female Bryn Mawr College to his years as America’s president. Wilson’s negative attitude toward teaching female students about politics and his disgruntlement at having to work under a woman, Bryn Mawr President M. Carey Thomas, help to show the depths of his opposition to an increased public role for women during that stage of his life. His attitude did not appear to change during his subsequent academic career, nor during his time as governor of New Jersey.

Additionally, this chapter places the suffrage movement into the broad spectrum of the women’s movement of the late-19th and early-20th century. It includes a thorough discussion of the divisions that existed within the women’s movement and how those divisions often spilled over into the suffrage movement. For example, during its 1896 national convention, NAWSA struggled mightily with developing an organizational
stance on Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s highly controversial *The Woman’s Bible*, eventually voting to disavow any responsibility for or association with the work. While a minority within NAWSA welcomed Stanton’s critique of organized religion’s role in subjugating women, a majority of suffragists feared alienating support for their cause by embracing Stanton’s radicalism. This type of controversy repeated itself over and over as suffragists attempted to deal with socialism, pacifism, nativism, prohibition, marriage reform, and perhaps most importantly, sectionalism. A desire to foster sectional reconciliation and to respect “states’ rights” is largely what explains NAWSA’s important decision in 1893 to focus on state referenda rather than a federal amendment. Therefore, along with its detailing of the ethnocentrism and social class biases of many suffragists, this chapter includes a discussion of the racism of white suffragists and the manner in which they, more often than not, sacrificed the principle of universal suffrage for the expedient attainment of white woman suffrage.

The third chapter recounts the gradual growth in the number of suffrage states. Regional differences figure prominently. By the end of 1914, almost every western state and territory had enfranchised women, but suffragists in the East and South were yet to win a single victory. This chapter explains the regional nature of both support and opposition to suffrage. One of the results of the regional opposition to a federal suffrage amendment was the introduction of the confusing and controversial Shafroth-Palmer Amendment in March 1914. Simultaneously supporting the original federal suffrage

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22 For coverage of this specific controversy, see Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States*, 212.

23 The Shafroth-Palmer Amendment required that if eight percent of voters in any state signed an initiative petition requesting a referendum on woman suffrage, the state then must submit the question of suffrage to the voters. This new variation offered relief from two major problems facing suffragists. First, it held the potential to force a vote in states that had so far managed to defeat campaigns for state referenda.
amendment and the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment up until December 1915 led NAWSA into confusion and disarray that was not resolved until Catt assumed the presidency in December 1915. This coincided with the emergence of a militant insurgency within NAWSA, led by Alice Paul. Paul and her co-chair of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee, Lucy Burns, represented a younger generation of suffragists, frustrated with the conservatism of the National and intent on making passage of the federal amendment the organization’s singular focus. Disagreements between traditional NAWSA leaders and Paul’s insurgents culminated with the definitive split between NAWSA and the NWP in late 1914. An exploration of this divide and its impact on the 1914 mid-term elections makes up the final section of the second chapter.

Wilson’s conversion from a states’ rights supporter to an advocate of the federal amendment occurred between the Democratic National Convention in June 1916 and the vote on the amendment in the House in January 1918. The significant events that took place in between serve as the basis of the analysis in chapters three, four, and five. Chapter three charts Wilson’s actions with regard to woman suffrage in advance of his 1916 re-election campaign. Additionally, it analyzes the diverse strategies employed by NAWSA and the NWP as they followed divergent paths toward attaining the federal suffrage amendment. Chapter four focuses specifically on the 1916 campaign and election, to include a comparative analysis of Wilson’s changed stance on child labor and 8-hour day legislation. Heading into the election, Wilson recognized the need to make a bow toward progressive voters whom he had offended during the previous two years. His opposition to rural credits, refusal to grant the AFL immunity from the Sherman Act, 

Secondly, it could gain the support of Senators who opposed suffrage on the principle of states’ rights because it contained no provisions for federal enforcement and the voters of each individual state would still make the decision on suffrage.
approval of racial segregation in federal service, and refusal to support the Palmer Child Labor bill had alienated progressives of every stripe and from every section of the country. Wilson’s need to win back some of those voters played a major role in his decision to appear both pro-suffrage and pro-labor in the months leading up to the November 1916 election. Yet, he also needed to stay true to the conservatives within his own party, particularly those from the South. This chapter reveals the president treading carefully through a re-election campaign. Catt astutely recognized Wilson’s dilemma. She crafted a strategy designed to win presidential support that took his difficult political position into full account. NAWSA, the NWP, and the Wilson Administration all developed different interpretations of the 1916 election results. A discussion of this post-election analysis – and its impact on the strategies adopted by each group for 1917 - comprises the final portion of chapter four.

The aftermath of the 1916 election, to include the NWP’s decision to launch more militant tactics and the NAWSA decision to distance itself from the NWP and work in support of the war effort, serves as the focus of the fifth chapter. The president’s primary focus during 1917 was U.S. entry into the war. Suffrage histories sometimes miscalculate the relative importance of their subject. Wilson’s attitude toward suffrage during 1917 will be placed into context with the larger issues he faced – issues that had the potential to affect the entire world. To the extent that he did involve himself with suffragists, he usually did so in concert with Catt’s vision for securing the federal amendment and in spite of the hostile actions of the NWP. Wilson and Catt’s vision for the proper suffrage strategy changed over the course of 1917 as events unfolded, but their vision evolved together, through constant and careful correspondence. Chapter five
illuminates the process by which Catt and Wilson developed a joint vision for a suffrage victory.

The sixth chapter outlines the opponents of woman suffrage. It examines the basis of opposition and the lobbying strategies of the cotton textile and liquor industry representatives, with particular attention to their attempts to influence Wilson. Many southern white supremacists opposed a federal suffrage amendment for fear that it would re-open the question of voter eligibility in the South. In the two decades surrounding the turn of the century, almost every southern state had succeeded in amending its state constitution in order to disenfranchise black citizens. A federal woman suffrage amendment, which would include enforcement provisions, threatened to overturn white political supremacy in the South. Sadly, southern suffragists chose to defend their movement from racist attacks by claiming that black women could be disenfranchised just as easily as black men. Part of chapter six examines the nature of this debate in the South. This section also explains the ideology, membership, strategy and tactics, alliances, and impact of the anti-suffragists, with particular attention to how they attempted to stop the president’s slide toward the suffrage camp and his response to their entreaties. Additionally, I chart the impact of the Catholic Church’s opposition to suffrage and the methods employed by anti-suffragists to utilize prominent clergy members as part of their campaign strategy.

From January 1918 until its final passage in the Senate in June 1919, Wilson actively campaigned for the federal amendment. Chapter seven examines his specific actions and the reaction of those he tried to influence. It explores the manner in which suffrage

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24 My use of the term “anti-suffragists” refers specifically to women who joined organizations and campaigned to block any measure designed to extend the franchise to women.
competed with other political priorities and played a critical role in the Republican victories in the 1918 mid-term elections. Additionally, it explains why Wilson was unable to obtain the two votes necessary to shepherd the amendment through the Senate while Congress was still controlled by his party – a party whose Southern members privileged maintenance of white supremacy above the pleas of their party’s leader.

The ratification process lasted from June 1919 to August 1920. It became, in many ways, a race between the two political parties to see which one could claim they had helped the cause the most, thereby winning the votes of women in the 1920 Presidential and Congressional elections. Although Wilson was actively involved in trying to speed ratification, his was but one voice among many as suffragists battled local interests and prejudices in each individual state. Further, the fight for ratification largely coincided with the period in which a stroke left the president severely impaired and largely absent from active governing for more than six months. In that this study is principally concerned with Wilson’s ability to influence Congress, the ratification process is only briefly examined.

The concluding chapter reiterates the arguments made here – that Wilson did have a significant role to play in the successful passage of the 19th Amendment, but that more powerful currents like sectionalism, race, and economic interests sometimes limited the extent of his influence. Ultimately, Wilson was won over to the cause of the federal amendment by NAWSA because its approach mirrored his own conservative vision of the appropriate method of reform: win a broad consensus, develop a legitimate rationale, and make the issue politically valuable.
A deeper understanding of the final stages of the woman suffrage movement holds relevance for our understanding of both Progressive Era America and our present times. Observing Wilson treading the fragile line between executive interference and reasonable influence provides us with great insight to Progressive Era conceptions of separation of powers and presidential power and leadership. Debates over woman suffrage contributed to the larger late-19th and early-20th century debates over the meaning of citizenship and the role of the state in an increasingly industrialized nation. Enfranchising one-half of the population marked a significant moment in our nation’s history. It is important that we fully and accurately understand the process by which that momentous event came to pass. In our contemporary political environment, when politicians accused of “flip-flopping” are routinely crucified by their political opponents, understanding the ability of past political figures to change their stance on an issue seems even more pressing. Furthermore, there are groups of Americans today still seeking full citizenship and access to the fruits of liberty. For them, this study has the potential to serve as a template for how a group of their predecessors learned to operate within the political system and achieve victory for a noble cause.
CHAPTER 2
WILSON’S FIRST TERM

Near the end of a long session of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Woman Suffrage in December 1915, NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt testified to the committee, “I have discovered that when a man believes in woman suffrage it is a national question and when he does not believe in it he says it is a question for the states.”\(^{25}\) At the time of Catt’s testimony, President Woodrow Wilson represented the non-believers. He supported woman suffrage only as an issue to be decided by the voters of each state. On the same day that Catt testified to the House Committee, President Wilson gave an interview to the *New York Times* in which he restated his position on the issue. Pointing to the fact that he voted in favor of the state amendment in his home state in New Jersey in October of that year, Wilson said he believed suffrage was an issue to be decided by the voters of each state. He conceded, however, that he would take the idea of a federal amendment into consideration.\(^{26}\) This concession was a significant step forward for a man who had expressed strong opposition to woman suffrage in any form only a few years before.

This chapter outlines Wilson’s early evolution on the question of woman suffrage. It explains how and why his position softened when he transitioned from a state governor to a national political figure and charts the evasive tactics he employed during his first


two years in office. Also included in this chapter is a report on the volatile state of the suffrage movement as Wilson assumed the presidency.

As early as 1885, Wilson wrote to his soon-to-be wife, Ellen Axson, that he did not approve of the notions floating around society that women should be liberated from the bonds of family to lead independent lives or become involved in the public sphere. Wilson believed that family was the bedrock of society and that increased political rights for women would alter the precious balance within families. Ellen totally supported his ideas about women’s place in the home and in society.\(^{27}\) Having been raised in a traditional, southern family in which gender roles were clearly defined and differentiated, Wilson developed similarly traditional views on the ideal of womanhood. Upon his mother’s death in 1888, he remembered her in a letter to his wife: “My mother, with her sweet womanliness, her purity, her intelligence, prepared me for a wife . . . love of the best womanhood came to me and entered my heart through her apron-strings.”\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\) Levin, Edith and Woodrow: The Wilson White House, 26.; and Ray Stannard Baker, Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, 1939), 240-241. Hereafter referred to as Life and Letters. See also Arthur S. Link, Wilson: The Road to the White House (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947), 2. Wilson’s second wife, Edith Bolling Galt, also held very traditional views of women’s inferior intellectual and political status. Within Wilson’s familial circle, two of his daughters developed a more progressive view. His eldest daughter, Margaret, served as the chair of NAWSA’s Honorary Committee during preparations for the 1915 National Convention and was given a seat of honor on the platform at the convention’s final session. Additionally, she was a guest of honor at the February 1917 NAWSA Conference at which the organization took an affirmative stand on the President’s war position. See HWS, Vol. 5, 440, 459, and 724. Jessie Wilson was also sympathetic to the suffrage cause, lending her support to the campaign for state suffrage referendum in New Jersey in 1915. See “Conversations with Alice Paul: Woman Suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment,” Interview by Amelia Fry (Suffragists Oral History Project, University of California, Berkeley, 1976), 91-92. There is no evidence that Margaret and Jessie’s suffrage activity caused a rift between them and their father. On the contrary, Wilson remained close to all three of his daughters throughout their lives. See Heckscher, Woodrow Wilson and the memoirs of Wilson’s youngest daughter, Eleanor Wilson McAdoo, The Woodrow Wilsons (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1937).

\(^{28}\) Woodrow Wilson to Ellen Wilson (April 18, 1888), The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, ed. Arthur S. Link, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986. Hereafter referred to as LWWP. While some scholars have argued for a psychoanalytical approach to understanding Wilson’s views on a number of issues, to include the appropriate role for women, most historians reject this approach. See Edwin A.
After completing graduate work at John Hopkins University in 1885, Wilson began his first teaching assignment at Bryn Mawr College, a recently founded women’s college in Pennsylvania. The college president, M. Carey Thomas, was an ardent supporter of women’s rights and increased educational opportunities for women. Ellen was troubled that Wilson had to answer to a woman, and Wilson confided to a friend that Thomas represented to him that which he most detested – “advanced women.” Nonetheless, Wilson needed a job. His first choice for employment – Princeton – did not have any open positions. Plus, his primary goal was to write, and he believed the Bryn Mawr position would allow him time to work on his own scholarship.

Wilson’s years at Bryn Mawr were difficult for him and for those with whom he worked precisely because of his view that higher education was largely wasted on the minds of young women. As the head of the History Department, Wilson taught courses on Ancient Greece and Rome as well as on European History and American politics. He also gave informal talks on current affairs and constitutional development. The young professor was extremely popular among the undergraduate students who attended his

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lectures, but the feelings were not mutual. Wilson confided his sentiments about the students to his diary, writing “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 in dress.”

Wilson was assigned a graduate fellow for each of his three years on the Bryn Mawr faculty. Writing to a Wilson biographer in 1926, one of his graduate students recalled that Wilson was ill-suited for teaching women because he assumed that their minds were somehow different than men’s. She thought it was unfortunate for both Wilson and his students that he never made an effort to find out whether his assumptions were true. Regardless, Wilson abruptly left Bryn Mawr in 1888 after a contract dispute with the college. He accepted a position at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, confiding to a friend, “I have long been hungry for a class of men.”

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31 For an excellent summary of Wilson’s years at Bryn Mawr, see Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 143-161. See also Walworth, Woodrow Wilson, 47. Both of these historians support the conventional wisdom that Wilson was unhappy at Bryn Mawr because he was not particularly engaged by teaching women and because he resented Thomas. John Milton Cooper, Jr., though, argues that it was solely the conflict with Thomas that soured Wilson on Bryn Mawr. According to Cooper, Wilson was a supporter of women’s higher education, despite his wife’s disapproval. See John Milton Cooper Jr., The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), 373. Cooper’s support for this argument – the fact that Wilson encouraged his daughters and some female cousins to attend college – does not overturn the very clear evidence from Wilson’s diary entries and correspondence at the time indicating his distaste for teaching political science and history to young women.

32 Woodrow Wilson, Diary Entry (October 20, 1887), Woodrow Wilson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter referred to as PWW)

33 Bragdon, Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years, 152. The graduate student who provided this account was Lucy Maynard Salmon who, after leaving Bryn Mawr, taught history at Vassar College for nearly forty years. Salmon was also a staunch suffragist who later served as an advisor to the NWP. See Ford, Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party, 1912-1920, 54.

34 Bragdon, Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years, 162.
His views on the inappropriateness of women’s interest in politics changed little over the next two decades. He ran for governor of New Jersey in 1910 at the behest of the state’s Democratic Party bosses, but quickly established his independence from those same bosses once he attained the party’s nomination. In a direct challenge to the machine politicians, he campaigned on a platform centered on progressive change to include increased regulation of railroads and public utilities, a stringent corrupt practices act, and direct nomination of candidates. New Jersey was a state that, according to Link, was “ruled by an oligarchical alliance of corporations and politicians and completely dominated by big business and bossism.”

But even New Jersey could not escape the tidal wave of progressivism that swept across the nation in the early 20th century. The temper of the state’s voters was clearly in line with the reform sentiments Wilson expressed. He won the election by 50,000 votes in a state that had elected a Republican by more than 80,000 votes just two years before. True to his progressive promises, Wilson threw his weight behind a number of reform bills in his first year in office to include direct nomination of candidates for office, clean elections, workmen’s compensation, and public utility regulation. He did not, however, support the fledgling woman suffrage movement in his state.

As Governor-elect, Wilson offered no reply to a January 1911 letter from the New Jersey Woman’s Suffrage Association. The association’s leaders complimented him on the “fearless and courageous manner” in which he was handling the state’s problems. They explained to Wilson that they did not ask for the vote in order to cure all “existing


evils.” Rather, “We ask it simply in the name of right and justice.”

The new governor did respond, however, to a letter from a Vermont newspaper editor who asked his position on equal suffrage. Wilson wrote, “I must say very frankly that my personal judgment is strongly against it. I believe that the social changes it would involve would not justify the gains that would be accomplished by it.”

This was the last time Wilson offered such a concrete statement of his personal opinion. With an eye on running for the White House, his position began to soften as he faced a national audience.

Over the next year and a half, Wilson developed a two-pronged strategy for dealing with the question of woman suffrage. First, he argued that – as a presidential candidate - he did not need to address the issue because it was not a national question. Rather, it was a question for the voters of each state to decide. Secondly, he altered his personal opinion from complete opposition to undecided. This newly-refined stance allowed him to simultaneously placate women voters in the West and to avoid offending the staunch states’ rights southern Democrats who comprised his political base. As the 1912 election drew closer, he articulated this new position to the Democratic Governor of Massachusetts who wrote to solicit Wilson’s opinion on woman suffrage. Since this newly-refined stance would remain Wilson’s position for most of his first term in office, his letter to Governor Foss is worth quoting at length:

I am very much obliged to you for your considerate and candid letter of yesterday. I may say to you very frankly that I do not think that it would be best to bring the woman suffrage question into the national campaign, so far as we are concerned. It is not a national question but a state question. So far as it is a state question, I am heartily in favor of its

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37 Clara Schlee Laddey (President, New Jersey Woman Suffrage Association) and Mary Loring Colvin (Corresponding Secretary) to Wilson (January 2, 1911), *LWWP*.

38 Wilson to Mr. Witter Bynner (June 20, 1911), *LWWP*. 
thorough discussion and shall never be jealous of its submission to a popular vote. My own judgment in the matter is in an uncertain balance, I mean my judgment as a voting citizen.39

In one form or another, Wilson repeated this position to anyone who sought to know his stance during the 1912 campaign.40

Popular opinion was not with the suffragists in New Jersey or any other states east of the Mississippi in 1912, but Wilson did spend time in western states where women had been enfranchised via state constitutional amendments. According to Frank Stockbridge, the director of publicity for Wilson’s 1912 presidential campaign, the future president was horrified by the idea of women voters. As Stockbridge reported in a 1924 reminiscence, Wilson “was definitely and irreconcilably opposed to woman suffrage; woman’s place was in the home, and the type of woman who took an active part in the suffrage agitation was totally abhorrent to him.”41 However, Wilson could not escape the question as he campaigned in the West. Stockbridge explained that Wilson decided to adopt a states’ rights stance during the campaign in order to effectively “dodge the issue.”

The refined position that Wilson adopted as a presidential candidate reflected his political acumen. The base of the Democratic Party was the South. In the two decades preceding the 1912 campaign, southern Democrats had completed their campaign to disenfranchise black voters via state constitutional amendments that effectively made the

39 Wilson to Governor Eugene Noble Foss (August 17, 1912), LWWP.

40 See Wilson to Edith M. Whitmore (February 8, 1912), Excerpts from An Address at the Academy of Music in Brooklyn (October 19, 1912), and News Report about Wilson’s Arrival in Pittsburgh (April 11, 1912), LWWP.

41 Frank Parker Stockbridge, "How Woodrow Wilson Won His Nomination," Current History 20 (1924): 567. Stockbridge’s report paints a much different picture that we get from Wilson’s own letter to Governor Foss of Massachusetts. Given the fact that Foss and Wilson were political allies and this letter was presumably private correspondence, it seems reasonable to conclude that Wilson was actually in an “uncertain balance” about the principle of woman suffrage and that Stockbridge’s portrayal of Wilson being “horrified” by women voters is somewhat exaggerated.
15th Amendment null and void. The same Southern Democrats who led the charge for black disenfranchisement were also the most outspoken opponents of a federal woman suffrage amendment. For them, such an amendment posed a threat to the racial and political hierarchy they had worked so hard to create. They opposed anything that might involve federal regulation of who was or – more importantly – who was not allowed to vote in the South. Wilson’s states’ rights stance was designed to please his political base. However, he recognized that the southern wing of the party alone could not propel him to victory.

The second part of Wilson’s refined stance – claiming that he was personally undecided on the issue – allowed him to reach out to pro-suffrage voters in the North and the West. This became even more important when both the Bull Moose Progressive Party under Theodore Roosevelt and the Socialist Party under Eugene Debs came out in support of woman suffrage. At an August 1912 meeting with the prominent journalist Oswald Garrison Villard, Wilson confessed that he knew Roosevelt’s support for woman suffrage would aid his opponent in the suffrage states. However, he expressed his belief to Villard that Roosevelt had taken up this position merely to win votes – a move that


44 For an account of how the Progressive Party and Socialist Party developed their 1912 platforms, see James Chace, 1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft and Debs - the Election that Changed the Country (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 162-163 and 186.
Wilson was not willing to make. He explained, “You certainly cannot change now unless you are converted, without putting yourself in Roosevelt’s class.”

In a theme that was to repeat itself in the 1916 campaign, Wilson’s advisors gave him reason to believe that he did not need to pander on the suffrage issue in order to win the support of women voters. His campaign manager, William McCombs, wrote to him in August to report on a meeting with Mrs. J. Borden Harriman – a prominent New York reformer and suffragist. According to McAdoo, Harriman had committed herself to Wilson’s campaign, despite the Democratic candidate’s failure to endorse woman suffrage. The campaign manager informed his boss, “I send you this [news] as an indication that the ladies are falling in line for you as well.”

So, the candidate headed into the 1912 election with the belief that he had placated his base in the South by adopting a states’ rights stance. He was convinced, too, that by softening his personal position on the issue, he had not alienated pro-suffrage women.

Wilson’s victory in 1912 was dominant in terms of the electoral vote. He won 435 electoral votes as compared with 88 votes for Roosevelt, and eight votes for the incumbent Republican William Taft. The ascension of a Democratic president was accompanied by the election of a Democratic House and Senate. The popular vote, however, revealed that Wilson did not have the mandate that the electoral vote indicated. Wilson received just over six million votes while Roosevelt garnered more than four million, Taft secured nearly three and half million, and the Socialist candidate, Eugene V.

45 From the Diary of Oswald Garrison Villard (August 14, 1912), LWWP. Villard later wrote to a leading suffragist in Boston to relay the disappointing news that Wilson would not support woman suffrage in the 1912 campaign. While frustrated with Wilson’s stance, Villard did admit, “I respect him for his consistency and honesty however sorry I am to differ from him.” See Oswald Garrison Villard to Susan Walker Fitzgerald (August 14, 1912), LWWP.

46 McCombs to Wilson (August 10, 1912), LWWP.
Debs, captured another 900,000. All together, the other candidates received three million 
more popular votes than Wilson. The president-elect recognized that the Democrats were 
not the dominant party in the nation and that they were only guaranteed a two-year hold 
on the House of Representatives. His first term, then, had to be focused on those issues 
he considered key provisions of his “New Freedom” campaign platform – tariff and 
currency reform. Changes in the status of the woman suffrage campaign over the next 
several years would also force the new President to alter his position for the 1916 
election.

The two decades preceding Wilson’s first term had been extremely difficult for 
the suffrage movement. Almost no progress had been made on securing a federal 
amendment, and, despite numerous state campaigns, only nine states had granted women 
the right to vote by the end of 1913. Under the guidance of Susan B. Anthony during the 
early 1890s, NAWSA had focused its efforts on securing a constitutional amendment that 
would grant suffrage at the national level. In 1893, however, the organization decided 
instead to seek amendments of state constitutions. In effect, the movement for a federal 
amendment was abandoned.

One of the chief reasons for this shift in focus was the issue of race in southern 
states. As discussed above, between 1890 and 1910, all twelve southern states succeeded 
in disenfranchising black male voters who had been granted suffrage through the 15th 
Amendment to the U.S. Constitution at the end of the Civil War. They completed this 
task through an elaborate set of literacy and property qualifications and use of a poll tax.


When those tools also resulted in the exclusion of many poor, white voters, southern politicians created flimsy loopholes about “good character” and “understanding” that allowed whites to vote, but still excluded blacks. White supremacy was guaranteed in the South so long as the states were allowed to establish electoral qualifications and conduct elections.49

A federal woman suffrage amendment threatened this system because it granted Congress power to enforce the provisions of the amendment. To white southerners, the enforcement clause of the amendment evoked negative memories of Reconstruction when federal troops were stationed in the South in order to enforce the voting rights of black men. The fact that black women could just as handily be disenfranchised as black men did little to assuage their fears. The specter of federal intervention into voting practices in the South made discussion of a federal amendment impossible for southern politicians.50 Using “states’ rights” as a thinly veiled disguise for preserving white supremacy, they eschewed any association with suffrage sympathies. The only hope, or so it seemed to NAWSA at the dawn of the twentieth century, was to work for state referenda.

It is important to take a moment here to review the records of both NAWSA and the NWP on the issue of black voting rights. The record is less than complimentary for either organization. As numerous historians have pointed out, time and time again white suffragists from both national organizations abandoned their black counterparts if a coalition of the two groups threatened the chances for white women gaining the right to


vote.\textsuperscript{51} Often, suffrage leaders found themselves in the awkward position of promising southern white men that enfranchising women would not threaten white political supremacy because black women could be barred from the polls in the same manner that black men had been disenfranchised.

On the extreme were women like Kate Gordon of Louisiana who was as much of a white supremacist as any of her male counterparts. Gordon, an ardent states’ rights suffragist, broke with NAWSA when Catt began to focus the organization on the federal amendment.\textsuperscript{52} During the ratification campaign, she went so far as to join forces with the anti-suffragists and work to prevent ratification in Louisiana and Mississippi.\textsuperscript{53} Fortunately, few southern suffragists followed Gordon into the ranks of the “anti’s.”


\textsuperscript{52} In 1913, Gordon founded the Southern States Woman Suffrage Conference (SSWC) – an organization devoted to pursuing state constitutional amendments and in opposition to the federal amendment. She defended her rationale in NAWSA’s official journal, \textit{Woman's Journal and Suffrage News}, in January 1914. Gordon characterized the SSWC as a flank movement: “Unquestionably the greatest resistance to the National Amendment will come from a solid Southern delegation. Unquestionably the strongest opposition to forcing the amendment will come from a hesitancy on the part of the other States to repeat another coercive amendment upon a section that resists it. Herein lies the usefulness of the Southern Conference – to educate the Democratic party, in control of the political situation in the South, that woman suffrage is no longer a theory to be debated but a condition to be met.” See “Kate Gordon on State Rights; Southern Leaders Wants to Make Flank Movement Before Trying Federal Amendment,” \textit{Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News}, January 3, 1914.

\textsuperscript{53} Kenneth R. Johnson, "Kate Gordon and the Woman-Suffrage Movement in the South," \textit{The Journal of Southern History} 38, no. 3 (August 1972): 392. Lebsock convincingly argues that the aggressive racism of the anti-suffragists “constrained the options available to all the other players.” See {{29 Lebsock,S. 1993/s64-66;}}
Historian Suzanne Lebsock, in a case study of Virginia suffragists, argues that Gordon is actually atypical of white southern suffragists. Lebsock asserts that white women who became involved in the suffrage movement were not primarily motivated by a desire to preserve the racial hierarchy in the South. She concedes that most southern suffragists failed to disavow white supremacy, but goes on to demonstrate that they also did not embrace that ideology.\(^5^4\) Still, even those that remained within NAWSA and the NWP took an accommodationist position on the issue of black voting rights in the South.

In addition to divisions over race, the unity of the suffrage movement was also fractured by the nativist tendencies and social class biases of many of its leaders. Historians have shown that suffrage leaders were drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of the middle and upper classes of American society.\(^5^5\) In a study focused on NAWSA’s evolution from the late 19th century to the final suffrage victory in 1920, Sara Hunter Graham explains how the organization transformed itself from a radical group to one representing middle-class respectability. According to Graham, Catt led the charge during the first decade of the 20th century to bring elite women into the organization:


\(^5^5\) See Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, 44,53,125, and 261. , Flexner and Fitzpatrick, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States, 266. O'Neill, Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America, 72. One exception to this near-consensus among historians regarding the elitism of the suffragists is Linda Ford’s Iron-Jawed Angels. Ford contends that the NWP does not fit the pattern of elite control often used to describe both NAWSA and the NWP. Rather, the NWP leaders – who were admittedly drawn from the middle and upper class – were able to move beyond their own class interests toward “a collective sensibility with all women.” As evidence, Ford points to the NWP’s attempts to reach out to a broad section of American women, to include Socialists and working women. Ford does concede, however, that Paul and her lieutenants often took an equivocal stand on matters of race and class when it came to recruiting efforts. See Ford, Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party, 1912-1920, 91-113.
Suffrage leaders recognized the problem of diverse ideologies housed under one shaky roof, and they endeavored to maintain unity at the expense of principle. In a period of low membership totals and financial woes, association leaders chose a path of moderation in an effort to boost the organization’s numbers without an ideological split. Elite women had the resources and prestige to rescue the movement from oblivion; if principle was to be the cost of salvation, then many suffragists were willing to pay the price.56

While critical of many aspects of NAWSA’s transformation into an “eminently safe program for middle-class club meetings,” Graham does point out that – in terms of membership numbers – the strategy worked. NAWSA increased its membership from 12,000 in 1906 to 117,000 by 1910.57

Not all women were willing to stand by and watch as NAWSA became an organization dominated by white, native-born, middle-class clubwomen. Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of suffrage pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was one who rejected and resented Catt’s strategy. Blatch founded a number of parallel suffrage organizations in New York whose goal it was to bridge the gap between working class and professional women. The most notable of these organizations was the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women. Founded in 1907, the Equality League courted any woman who earned her own living – whether that living was earned by an immigrant woman on the factory floor or by a native-born, college-educated professional woman.58 The Equality League achieved many of its aims, but its impact was primarily limited to New York

56 Graham, Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy, 32.
57 Ibid., 51-52.
58 Ellen C. DuBois, Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 94-100. DuBois notes that while Blatch led the way in bringing working-class women into the suffrage movement, she simultaneously reached out to women of great wealth. Like Catt, Blatch knew that political victory would be impossible without the resources – both material and symbolic – that upper-class women could bring to the campaign. See p. 106.
State. On the national scale, the movement by 1910 was largely dominated by relatively conservative, elite women who argued for the vote both in terms of natural rights and in terms of how woman suffrage would benefit society. This fact was to have important implications for the eventual NAWSA / NWP split.

With NAWSA’s new focus on state campaigns beginning in 1893, women had been granted full suffrage in four western states by 1896. However, between 1896 and 1910, NAWSA failed to win any new suffrage states. In that 14-year span, only six state referenda were held. Between 1910 and 1913, six more states granted women full suffrage, but the cumulative electoral votes of all nine suffrage states only totaled 74 out of a possible 531. As a result of this slow rate of progress a rift had developed within NAWSA over the appropriate strategy to secure woman suffrage. In 1912, two young women, recently returned from working with the militant suffragists in England, asked NAWSA President Dr. Anna Howard Shaw to appoint them to NAWSA’s Congressional Committee. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns hoped to revive the defunct committee whose purpose it was to press for a federal amendment. Rather than fighting the suffrage battle state-by-state, Paul and Burns hoped to win one sweeping victory at the national level.

Alice Paul was born into a Quaker family in Moorestown, New Jersey in 1885. She graduated from Swarthmore College in 1905, received an MA at the University of Pennsylvania two years later, and a Ph.D. from the same in 1912. Between her MA and Ph.D. work in America, Paul spent more than two years in England as a graduate student in sociology and economics at the University of London. During her time in England,
she became involved with the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) of London and also met Lucy Burns, another American studying abroad.59

Burns, the fourth of eight children born into an Irish-Catholic family in Brooklyn, was a 1902 graduate of Vassar College. She briefly worked as a high school teacher before beginning graduate work at Yale. In 1906, she moved to Germany to intensively study foreign languages at the University of Berlin and, later, at the University of Bonn. After three years in Germany, Burns transferred to Oxford University in England for additional graduate work and became involved in the English militant suffrage movement.60

Both women participated in British suffrage activity, were arrested for their actions, and served time in British jails. They became familiar with militant tactics such as showing up to protest and heckle members of Parliament at different speaking engagements, organizing suffrage parades, and participating in hunger strikes while in jail. They also became familiar with the political strategy employed by the WSPU of “holding the party in power responsible” for passing suffrage legislation.61

Under the British parliamentary system, one party could be held responsible and ousted from power for failure to pass specific legislation. Although the American system of government differed, Paul and Burns came to believe that since the Democrats held the

59 Irwin, The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 7-9. For additional information on Paul’s formative years, see Adams and Keene, Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign.

60 Stevens, Jailed for Freedom, 356. See also Sidney R. Bland, "'Never quite as Committed as we'd Like': The Suffrage Militancy of Lucy Burns," The Journal of Long Island History (Summer/Fall 1981): 4-23.

presidency and a majority in Congress, that party should push through a federal suffrage amendment. If it failed to do so, it should have to face the consequences of being campaigned against by the suffragists in states where women had secured the right to vote.

Paul was appointed chair of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee when she was just 27 years old. She brought her experience from England, youthful energy, tremendous organizational skills, and persuasive powers to the task of securing a federal amendment. Prior to her arrival, the Congressional Committee was in a stagnant state. As a result of the lack of emphasis from the NAWSA leadership, the federal amendment had never been voted on in the House and had only been voted on once by the Senate in 1887. It had not had a committee report since 1896 and had not been debated in Congress since 1887.62 Paul also brought the immense talents, experience, and energy of Lucy Burns who was appointed as her vice-chair.63 These two women immediately infused the campaign with a sense of purpose and direction never seen before. Their first major accomplishment was planning, organizing, and executing a suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. on the day before Wilson’s inauguration in March 1913.

Nearly 8,000 women from all over the country participated in the parade that moved from the Capitol, up Pennsylvania Avenue, and ended at the Hall of the Daughters of the

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63 During Paul’s tenure with NAWSA’s Congressional Committee, the Congressional Union, and the NWP, Burns served as her second-in-command. The manner in which they divided up leadership responsibilities is an area in need of further research, but both the secondary scholarship and the existing NWP records suggests that Paul was the political visionary and Burns served as a workhorse ensuring Paul’s visions were carried out. This is not to say that Burns lacked vision or that Paul spent all her time making plans without becoming involved in their execution. There seems to have been an enormous amount of overlap in their duties. Burns often answered mail addressed to Paul if the latter was incommunicado for one reason or another. For the most thorough description of their working relationship, see Irwin, *The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party*, 14-18, Bland, ‘Never quite as Committed as we’d Like’: The Suffrage Militancy of Lucy Burns, 8-9.
American Revolution. Toward the end of the parade route, rowdy members of the crowd began to press forward and some physically attacked the marchers. Marchers had their suffrage banners ripped from their hands. Several were knocked to the ground and trampled by the crowd. The police failed to intervene in a timely manner, and a detachment of soldiers from nearby Fort Meyers had to be dispatched to settle the disturbance. Two days after the parade, the Senate passed two resolutions demanding an investigation into the police department’s failure to safeguard the marchers.\(^{64}\) Paul’s suffrage parade, coupled with the intense lobbying of members of Congress that she initiated, abruptly awakened politicians from both sides of the aisle to NAWSA’s desire for a federal amendment.

Shortly after her appointment as chair of the Congressional Committee, Paul formed a parallel organization called the Congressional Union (CU) to support the activities of the Committee. The CU was primarily designed to aid the Committee with fundraising, although by November it was publishing its own journal – *The Suffragist* – and beginning to chart an independent course toward attaining the federal amendment. Eventually, this parallel organization would bring Paul into conflict with some of NAWSA’s older leaders. In early 1913, though, conflict did not appear inevitable. In fact, the work that Paul’s Congressional Committee performed in 1913 seemed to be well received by most NAWSA leaders and members.

\(^{64}\) Irwin, *The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party*, 30. See also “Parade Protest Arouses Senate,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1913. For an interesting analysis of the 1913 suffrage parade that places it in context with other marches in the nation’s capital, see Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Barber contends that the suffragists paved the way for future marchers: “Emerging from the testimony and press interviews was a sense that demonstrators who had permits in Washington had inalienable rights to march with protection.” Quote from p. 71.
The editor of the NAWSA organ *Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News*, Alice Stone Blackwell, repeatedly praised the Committee’s work throughout 1913. In reporting on the preparations for the March 1913 parade, Blackwell opined, “Too much cannot be said of [Paul’s] spirit and ability.”65 At year’s end, Blackwell featured Paul’s organization on the journal’s front page under the headline, “Congressional Union Makes Fine Showing.” The article went on to say that when the CU presented its report to NAWSA’s annual convention, “the convention received the report with enthusiastic applause, giving three cheers while the whole Convention rose to its feet to show its appreciation.”66 Based on Blackwell’s reporting, relations between the CU and NAWSA appeared to be good. Tensions were brewing, though.

Accepted only as an auxiliary to NAWSA but under the direction of a NAWSA officer (Paul), the CU took actions that seemingly violated fundamental tenets of the National’s policy. These actions led to sharp dissension within NAWSA and eventually to a split among the organization’s members. As Catt explained in an article written three years after the split, “A break with the National occurred because [Paul and the CU] refused to accede to certain established rules of the Association.”67 She went on to list the infractions which included using NAWSA funds for CU activities, conducting work in individual states without coordinating with NAWSA state officers, and campaigning


against Democratic candidates in western states. The conflict came to a head at the end of the December 1913 NAWSA convention where the charges were debated at length. Following the convention, NAWSA’s executive council demanded that Paul eliminate any conflicts of interest by resigning her position as head of the Congressional Union. When she refused, they requested her resignation as chair of the Congressional Committee, which she provided.

Historians and historical actors alike disagree over some of the underlying causes of the rift. Alice Paul biographer Christine Lunardini argues that the NAWSA leadership generally accepted Paul’s melding of Congressional Committee and Congressional Union funds. The real source of the conflict, she contends, was Catt’s jealousy of Paul’s status as a rising star coupled with disagreement over tactics. The CU plan to “hold the party in power responsible” – outlined by Lucy Burns during the December 1913 NAWSA Convention – smacked of partisan politics and upset many of NAWSA’s old guard.68 Historian Linda Ford takes Lunardini’s argument one step further. Rather than a fight over money or membership, Ford asserts that the conflict was really about competing versions of feminism: “The CU stood for a militancy, an aggressive unapologetically egalitarian, feminist style, which NAWSA members could not countenance.”69 Given, the work that Catt and others had done over the preceding two decades to make the suffrage movement acceptable to mainstream American society, Ford is undoubtedly correct that NAWSA leaders worried that the CU’s militance would damage NAWSA’s

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68 Lunardini, From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party, 1910-1928, 43-44. For an account of Burns’ speech to the December 1913 NAWSA Convention, see Stevens, Jailed for Freedom, 26.

carefully cultivated image. The correspondence among the suffrage leaders also supports the idea that issues deeper than financial record-keeping were at the heart of the dispute.

Paul denied most of the charges Catt levied in her 1916 “The Winning Policy” article. In an extensive set of correspondence through intermediaries, Catt and Paul argued over minute details such as what type of stationary the CU used to raise funds and whether or not CU officials cooperated or worked independently with NAWSA officials in various states during 1913. Their letters suggest that financial and administrative concerns may have been a cover for deeper philosophical and generational issues. While Catt’s 1916 article focuses on the lack of political wisdom in Paul’s “holding the party in power responsible” plan, an interesting letter from Harriet Stanton Blatch suggests that the generational issue may have been even more important than political strategy.

Like the dynamic duo leading the Congressional Union, Blatch was also a veteran of the British suffrage campaign. She had assisted Paul and Burns with their preparation for the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. and generally supported their enthusiastic work for the federal amendment. After the tumultuous 1913 NAWSA convention, Blatch wrote to Burns, “I was distressed, but not amazed, to read the news in regard to the action of the National Association, in reference to Miss Paul’s chairmanship . . . I say I was not surprised because again and again I have seen vigorous young women come forward, only to be rapped on the head by the so-called leaders of our movement.” Clearly, the rift between NAWSA and the CU was at least in part a turf war between suffrage veterans and younger women with less patience for the long haul of state campaigns.

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70 See Dora Lewis to Alice Paul (July 14, 1916) and Paul to Lewis (July 25, 1916) National Woman’s Party Papers, Microfilm Edition, Reel 1. (Hereafter referred to as NWPP)

71 Blatch to Burns (December 22, 1913), NWPP, Reel 1.
Whatever the reasons for the split, nothing could heal the growing divide. In the first few months of 1914, representatives of the Congressional Union met with NAWSA leaders in an attempt to keep the groups from developing into rival organizations, but disagreements over strategy prevented any such rapprochement. Blackwell ran an editorial in the May 14th edition of the *Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News* pleading for cooperation between the two organizations. Her efforts were in vain. The Congressional Union, in flagrant violation of NAWSA’s non-partisan policy, campaigned against all Democratic candidates in the western states during the midterm elections of 1914 and announced their plans to campaign against Wilson and the national Democratic slate in the elections of 1916. After one final failed attempt at reconciliation in December 1915, the two organizations severed all ties.

Paul’s replacement as head of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee, Ruth Hanna McCormick, further muddled the already cloudy suffrage picture by bringing about the introduction of an additional suffrage-related amendment to the Constitution in March 1914. An experienced suffragist from Illinois, McCormick discerned that gaining suffrage by the state initiative method was much more palatable to the majority of Congressmen than a federal amendment. Working with Senator William Shafroth of Colorado and Representative A. Mitchell Palmer of Pennsylvania, McCormick and her committee tried to meet the tastes of the majority of Congressmen by developing a new suffrage constitutional amendment.

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The Shafroth-Palmer Amendment required that if eight percent of voters in any state signed an initiative petition requesting a referendum on woman suffrage, the state then must submit the question of suffrage to the voters. This new variation offered relief from two major problems facing suffragists. First, it held the potential to force a vote in states that had so far managed to defeat campaigns for state referenda. Secondly, it could gain the support of Senators who opposed suffrage on the principle of states’ rights because it contained no provisions for federal enforcement and the voters of each individual state would still make the decision on suffrage.\(^75\)

Opponents of the new amendment believed the measure was difficult to understand and only prolonged an already difficult process. Even if the bill passed both houses of Congress and was ratified by three-fourths of the states, a battle to win state referenda would still have to be fought in each non-suffrage state. Shaw was flooded with angry letters from NAWSA members all over the country after the new amendment was introduced. She responded with a blanket letter to all NAWSA members that indicated just how directionless NAWSA was in the final years of her presidency. She wrote, “The National Association is not abandoning the old Constitutional amendment. It worked for it all this winter until it was voted down by a majority, which showed there was no hope whatever of passing it . . . While we are pushing the new amendment we are also pushing the old amendment, and it is hoped that the new one will help the old one and it was introduced for that purpose.”\(^76\) She went on to blame the Congressional Union


\(^76\) Shaw to Ellen Douglas Hoge (April 11, 1914), *NWPP*, Reel 1.
for any confusion over the matter, claiming that the CU was trying to gain support for their organization by giving “the impression that we have forsaken the old amendment, which is absolutely false.”

For the remainder of that year and well into the next, NAWSA simultaneously supported the traditional federal amendment and the Shafroth-Palmer amendment. It was not until the December 1915 NAWSA convention that the latter was officially disavowed, although little work had been done on its behalf for the last half of that year. The confusion within the National’s ranks only fueled the fire of the CU as they headed west to campaign against Democrats in the 1914 mid-term elections. As Burns explained to Blatch, “It seems to me foolish to propose that we should undertake the tremendous labor of getting the Constitution of the United States amended and, at the end of that work, have gained nothing except the right to submit the question to the electors, which, by a little intelligent and concentrated labor, we can do already. The procedure combines all the difficulties of state and national work in one.”

The CU campaigned against all Democrats, suffrage supporters or not, in Western states during 1914. They urged enfranchised women to withdraw their support from the Democratic Party until it complied with their demands to enfranchise all women through support of a federal amendment. Their frustration with the Democrats was understandable. As previously described, Wilson’s two major goals during his first term were reducing tariffs and reforming the banking system. The legislative sessions of 1913 were devoted to these causes and, using all the tools of persuasion available to his office,

77 Ibid.

78 Burns to Blatch (March 12, 1914), NWPP, Reel 1.
Wilson was able to pull together the support of western and southern Democrats to pass both measures.\(^79\) Woman suffrage was an issue that he continuously avoided in 1913 by claiming that his administration was too busy with New Freedom legislation to give the matter serious consideration.

Wilson could not completely ignore the suffragists, though. Throughout 1913, Paul was relentless in bringing deputations of women to ask for his support of the federal amendment. Just days after his inauguration, Paul led a group of five women to meet with the new President. In a blatant lie, he told the women that he had never given the issue of woman suffrage much thought. He went on to say that there were too many other pressing issues for him to concern himself with woman suffrage, but asked that the suffragists not think that he was against them just because he could not presently take up their cause.\(^80\) Undaunted, Paul arranged for two more deputations to visit Wilson in March 1913. She also applied pressure on the Democrat-controlled Congress. Through the aggressive efforts of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee under Paul’s leadership, the amendment was reported out of the committee in the Senate in June 1913 for the first time since 1896, although Senate Democrats blocked an actual vote on the measure. It was reported with a favorable majority again in 1914 and was headed to a vote in the full Senate when the Democrats caucused in February. The Senate Democrats published their position that suffrage was an issue to be decided by individual states – a position that


\(^{80}\) For accounts of this first meeting between Paul and Wilson, see “Suffragists See Wilson,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1913, 2; and “President Talks to Deputation,” *Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News*, March 22, 1913.
Wilson supported. When the vote came in the Senate on March 19, the amendment was defeated by a count of 35 in favor and 34 opposed (11 votes short of the required two-thirds). Democrats cast the majority of negative votes.

Paul continued to pressure Wilson. She arranged for a delegation of women from Wilson’s home state of New Jersey to meet with the President in November to ask him to announce his support for the federal amendment during his annual message to Congress in December. Wilson’s refusal to even mention suffrage in his address was enough to draw the ire of the usually patient NAWSA leaders. NAWSA President Anna Howard Shaw demanded a meeting with the President in the days following his address. In a rather confrontational meeting by NAWSA standards, Shaw rejected Wilson’s assertion that he could not stand up for suffrage because he was the spokesman of a party that was not in favor of the measure. She pointed out to the President that he should be the spokesman for his country, rather than for his party. She also highlighted the number of states controlled by Democratic legislatures in which suffrage measures had passed.

The President’s evasive tactics continued into the following year. He told a deputation of working women in February 1914 that – although his personal opinion was still undecided – he was bound by the will of his party. When leaders of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs presented him with their organization’s resolution in favor

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82 The exact party breakdown is as follows: Republicans – 21 for and 12 against; Democrats – 14 for and 22 against. “Suffrage Loses in Senate Vote,” New York Times, March 20, 1914, 1.


of woman suffrage in June 1914, he again refused to support a constitutional amendment
and instead encouraged the women to take their fight to the states.85

Armed with ample evidence of Democratic obstruction and presidential inaction,
the CU attempted to raise the consciousness of women voters in the West during the 1914
mid-terms. They sent at least two organizers to each state in which women had won the
vote. In these states, the CU organizers educated women voters about the federal
amendment and the failures of the Democrats. They urged women voters to vote against
all Democrats, regardless of the candidate’s individual position on woman suffrage.
Central to their campaign was the belief that women would behave as single-issue voters.
As the election results showed, however, this was a faulty assumption. Democrats
maintained control of both the House and the Senate, although their majorities were
significantly reduced.

Despite CU claims to the contrary, this reduction was not related to suffrage
agitation. Most election analysts agreed that the chief cause of Democratic setbacks was
the decline of the Progressive Party and the return of many former members to the
Republican Party. Setbacks notwithstanding, White House spokesmen released
statements claiming victory for the Democratic Party because they had increased their
strength in the Midwest and Pacific Coast in a year during which they had enacted
unpopular tariff reform.86


86 Link, Wilson: The New Freedom, 468. See also “White House Blames Tariff for Loss in House;
Says Result is Really an ‘Off-Year’ Victory,” New York Times, November 5, 1914,
So what was the net effect of the CU activity in the 1914 elections? There is no evidence that CU agitators were, in fact, able to swing a significant number of women voters against the Democrats. They did succeed in angering western Democratic candidates – particularly those who were pro-suffrage and still found suffragists campaigning against them.\(^87\) To their credit, though, this anger may have had some positive outcomes. Their small presence, if somewhat ineffective in swinging votes in 1914, forced the Democrats to consider what angry suffragists might be able to do to the party in 1916, given two more years to organize.\(^88\) Nonetheless, there were drawbacks to the CU strategy. Their agitation may have contributed to the defeat of several key state suffrage campaigns in 1914.

Seven states voted on woman suffrage in 1914, but only the Montana and Nevada campaigns were successful. At the same time and in the same places that NAWSA State Associations urged voters from all parties to support the suffrage referendum, CU members actively worked against all Democrats and labeled that party an enemy to suffrage. NAWSA members openly blamed the CU for their defeat in North Dakota and Nebraska.\(^89\) The president of the Ohio State Woman Suffrage Association, who generally supported the work of the CU, wrote to Paul three times during the first week

\(^{87}\) For example, Democrat Representative Carl Hayden of Arizona delivered a tirade against the CU on the floor of Congress. See *Congressional Record*, Vol. 51, Part 17, 1228-1229.

\(^{88}\) This is the argument most frequently used by historians favorable to the militant suffragists. Their evidence for this comes from the pressure that the western wing of the Democratic Party placed on Wilson and the southern wing of the party to soften their position on woman suffrage in advance of the 1916 election. This evidence will be reviewed in the subsequent chapter. For the argument that the CU campaign in 1914 was effective in bringing publicity to the federal amendment and forcing Democrats to become more responsive, see Mead, *How the Vote was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914*, 166-167. Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party, 1912-1920*, 64. Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*, 67. Adams and Keene, *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign*, 147-148.

\(^{89}\) Morgan, *Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America*, 95.
of October to indicate the amount of damage being done in her state by CU activity in the West. She provided Paul with direct quotes from the Mayor and Postmaster of Cleveland who had withdrawn their support for suffrage in Ohio because of the CU and warned, “I honestly and truly think that your campaign against the Democratic party in the enfranchised states is hurting the Ohio campaign.”90 Ohio was one of the five state referenda to fail during 1914.

Furthermore, the CU campaigns infuriated NAWSA leaders and a significant portion of the rank and file. One of the underlying premises of the CU was that the NAWSA political approach was too passive. This premise offended NAWSA leaders who continually argued that Paul and her followers failed to take into account the wider view that NAWSA took on the 1914 elections. As explained above, the National’s state organizations were fighting to win referenda in seven different states in 1914. NAWSA had engaged in careful planning for these campaigns for years in some cases. Additionally, NAWSA was not as politically passive on a national scale as CU leaders charged. Just two months before the 1914 election, Shaw published NAWSA’s “Black List.” It contained the names of nine senators and nine congressmen – Republicans and Democrats - picked by the organization for defeat as a result of their unwavering opposition to the federal amendment. In a statement accompanying the release of the list, NAWSA appealed to all suffragists to “concentrate their influence to defeat for re-election the men named.”91

90 Harriet Taylor Upton to Paul (October 5, 1914), NWPP, Reel 1. See also Upton’s letters of October 3rd and 6th.

Worried about the negative impact of the CU, Shaw sent a letter to pro-suffrage Senator Charles Thomas of Colorado disowning Paul and the CU. Per Shaw’s request, Thomas read the letter on the floor of the Senate. It stated, in part:

As I wrote to you some time since, the National Congressional Union, under the direction of Miss Paul, does not in any way represent the National Suffrage Association. There is no relation whatever between the two groups . . . While I fully recognize that individual women and local societies have an equal right with all others to be heard, I also feel it my duty to state that none of these represent the organized suffragists of the country. So that whenever any individual or any representative of the Congressional Union in Washington makes any appeal to the Senate, or to yourself as chairman of the Senate committee, it is not to be understood as an appeal from the organized suffragists of the nation. Nor when any threat is made of an attack upon the Democratic party is it to be considered as coming from the organized suffragists of the nation.”

From her perch as NAWSA’s lead editorialist, Blackwell tried to remain open to the CU strategy in her coverage of the 1914 elections, although she was convinced that NAWSA’s continued focus on state campaigns was essential to eventually securing a federal amendment. After the 1914 election, she completely rejected the policy of holding the party in power responsible. Likewise, the general NAWSA membership demonstrated its displeasure with the CU strategy by adopting the following resolution at NAWSA’s December 1914 convention: “Be it resolved that [NAWSA] be absolutely opposed to holding any political party responsible for the opinions and acts of its

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92 Shaw to Thomas (March 7, 1914), Reprinted as part of “Dr. Shaw Writes to Senator Thomas,” Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News, March 21, 1914.

individual members, or holding any individual responsible for the majority action of his party on suffrage.”

An impartial observer of the woman suffrage movement from 1914-1915 would find the situation greatly confusing. Two different groups that seemed to be working in exact opposite directions represented the movement. The larger of the two groups, NAWSA, was simultaneously supporting the traditional federal suffrage amendment and the cumbersome Shafroth-Palmer bill, while still trying to win victories in a number of state referenda campaigns. Meanwhile, the CU was urging the abandonment of state campaigns, pouring all its energies into the traditional federal amendment, and campaigning against all western Democrats (even those who supported suffrage) in order to “hold the party in power responsible.” Political leaders from both parties could, and did, play the groups off one another and used the confusion of the movement as an excuse to not take a definitive stand on the issue. This was clearly the case with the President.

Wilson could safely hide behind the party position on a federal amendment for most of 1913 and 1914, but events of the following year made it clear that his position would have to be slightly amended if he hoped to win the support of progressives in the 1916 election. As the next chapter details, the fall and winter of 1915 were critical months for both Wilson and the suffrage movement. The President found himself in need of progressive support heading into the 1916 election and the suffrage movement, still divided over the NAWSA/CU rift and the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment, faced referenda campaigns in four key states – New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Between October and December, the movement experienced a roller-coaster effect.

Suffragists lost all four of the state campaigns, but won more votes than many people expected in several of the states. Furthermore, they secured crucial support when Wilson voted in favor of the amendment as a private citizen of the state of New Jersey. Most importantly, NAWSA’s path took a decisive turn when it met in convention in December 1915, dropped the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment, and elected Carrie Chapman Catt as the new president.
CHAPTER 3
PRELUDE TO THE 1916 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In his 1913 inaugural address, President Wilson raised the hopes and expectations of progressive reformers across the nation. While heralding America’s industrial achievements, he also acknowledged the associated human costs of massive and rapid industrialization. In words that resonated with proponents of reform, he advocated perfecting “the means by which government may be put at the service of humanity, in safeguarding the health of the nation.” Yet little in the first two and a half years of Wilson’s presidency lived up to this soaring rhetoric. Despite legislative victories with tariff and banking reform, the president’s opposition to rural credits, refusal to grant the American Federation of Labor immunity from the Sherman Act, approval of racial segregation in federal service, and refusal to support the Palmer Child Labor bill had disappointed and alienated progressives of every stripe and from every section of the country.

95 Throughout this chapter and the next, I use the term “progressives” with a lowercase “p” to refer to the broad group of Americans who in the late 19th and early 20th century were either actively involved in or supported the various reform movements for social justice in an increasingly industrialized and urban nation. Fully recognizing that the elasticity of this term sometimes makes it meaningless, I am following the lead of Wilson and most of his contemporaries who used this term on a regular basis. I use the term “Progressives” with an uppercase “P” to refer specifically to those Americans who belonged to the Progressive Party. For a discussion of the historical problems associated with the concept of “progressivism,” see Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for the "Progressive Movement"," American Quarterly 22, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 20-34.

96 An Inaugural Address (March 4, 1913), LWWP.

97 For a detailed account of Wilson’s legislative record in his two years in office, see Cooper, Woodrow Wilson: A Biography, Chapter 11 and 12. For the reaction of progressives to Wilson’s early legislative record, see Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 224. Rural credits were part of a progressive proposal to ease the burden on small farmers by providing low-interest credit through financial institutions, thus enabling farmers to break out of the lock-in mechanisms of the existing private credit system.
These next two chapters serve as an in-depth examination of Wilson’s 1916 re-election strategy – a strategy based largely on winning back progressive voters and that, ultimately, led to his victory over the Republican challenger, Charles Evan Hughes. This first chapter charts Wilson’s actions with regard to woman suffrage in advance of his 1916 re-election campaign. Additionally, it analyzes the diverse strategies employed by NAWSA and the NWP as they followed differing paths toward attaining the federal suffrage amendment. In turn, chapter four places Wilson’s actions with regards to woman suffrage into the broader context of the 1916 campaign.

One of the first actions that Wilson took to win back progressive voters was to vote in favor of the suffrage referendum in his home state of New Jersey in October 1915. The vote in New Jersey became a battleground for pro and anti-suffragists as each side hoped to use the president’s decision to its advantage in the public relations war. The White House was flooded with letters from both sides of the debate imploring him to support the cause in their favor. A letter from Caroline Cruvey just a few weeks before the vote typifies the more than 100 letters Wilson received from anti-suffragists in New Jersey alone, not to mention the correspondence from interested parties throughout the country. Cruvey wrote:

As one of the majority, (as I believe), of women opposed to Female Suffrage, I beg you will not cast your vote with its great influence, on the affirmative side of “votes for women”. I can see no adequate gain coming from the admission of women into the political arena compensating for the added expense which will follow, and for the loss of interest in home and family life which will surely result . . . There are no “rights” to be advanced by our votes, for the laws are in our favor as regards our persons and property. The emotional nature of our sex sadly unfits us for participation in politics and its hot-bed of passions. Won’t you, by your vote, leave us a little longer in the quiet of our homes where most of us
love to be, with time to rear our children well, and care for our husbands and grown sons with undivided interest?98

Despite this compelling appeal and hundreds like it, Wilson announced his decision to vote in favor of the amendment on October 6, 1915.

In a statement issued to the press, he explained the rationale behind his decision. The statement demonstrated the tentative nature of his support for women’s voting rights. He insisted that he was voting as a private citizen of New Jersey and not as the leader of the Democratic Party. Furthermore, he reiterated his opposition to a federal suffrage amendment saying, “I believe that [suffrage] should be settled by the States and not by the National Government and that in no circumstances should it be made a party question, and my view has grown stronger at every turn of the agitation.”99

The motivation behind Wilson’s affirmative vote in New Jersey has been an issue of debate among historians. Link contends that events in Wilson’s personal life contributed to his decision. When Wilson’s first wife died in August 1914, he was nearly overcome with grief.100 Seven months later, however, he met Edith Bolling Galt who was to become his second wife. Link asserts that women voters in the Western states were upset about Wilson’s quick courtship with Galt so soon after his wife’s death and that Wilson’s affirmative vote in New Jersey was an attempt to pacify those indignant women voters who would play a significant role in the 1916 election.101

98 Caroline A. Cruvey to Woodrow Wilson (October 5, 1915), PWW, Box 89, Reel 208.
100 Ellen Axson Wilson died of complications from Bright’s disease, a condition that erodes kidney function. For details of her death and its impact on Wilson, see Cooper, Woodrow Wilson: A Biography, 260-261.
Link’s analysis of the significance of Wilson’s impending marriage on his decision to vote for suffrage in New Jersey is overstated.\footnote{In rejecting Link’s explanation, I join with Victoria Bissell Brown who adroitly dismisses Link by saying, “To argue that Wilson would endorse suffrage as a legitimate activity for half the nation’s citizenry simply to gain goodwill for his marriage to his second antisuffrage wife is to trivialize the cause of woman suffrage and rather seriously underestimate the ideological significance of his conversion to the logic of that cause. By late 1915, . . . Wilson had come to see that he could hold on to his sentiments about women’s distinct role in life without defending an outmoded suffrage boundary that was doomed to collapse anyway.” See Brown, \textit{Did Woodrow Wilson's Gender Politics Matter?}, 142.} The memoirs of Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, reveal that many senior Democratic leaders were indeed worried about offending women voters in the West if the President married Galt before the 1916 election. Available evidence, though, indicates that the President did not share their concerns. Daniels was asked by a number of Democrats to approach the President and warn him of the political liabilities of a hasty remarriage. His negative response to the request is worth quoting in full:

Having been called [to the post of Secretary of the Navy] by President Wilson I did not feel inclined to exchange it for the difficult and, perhaps, dangerous high and exalted position of Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Cupid on a mission in which neither my heart nor my head was enlisted and in the performance of which my official head might suffer decapitation . . . Wilson was not warned. They were married before Christmas and two things followed: (1) Wilson was reelected, proving that political prognosticators are not always right; and (2) they lived happily together and Mrs. Wilson’s charm and sound wisdom made her greatly beloved and admired.\footnote{Josephus Daniels, \textit{The Wilson Era: Years of Peace, 1910-1917} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 452-454.}

While many may take issue with Daniels’ characterization of Galt as charming and wise, his account of this episode erodes support for Link’s theory that Wilson’s advisors were willing to broach the topic of the political ramifications of remarriage with their boss. Daniels’ contention that women voters were not put off by the president’s remarriage is

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well supported by both the election results (Wilson swept the West in 1916) and Galt’s memoirs of the same time period.

Galt recalled tremendous support from people all over the country after Wilson announced their marriage plans. The couple immediately began to receive congratulatory telegrams from friends and strangers. They received a standing ovation when they were announced to the crowd at a Red Sox-Phillies baseball game the day after their engagement announcement and another ovation the following month when they attended the annual Army-Navy football game. Galt further recalled that she and the President received a large nugget of gold from the people of California – a state that had granted women full suffrage in 1911- as an engagement gift.104 Daniels’ and Galt’s testimony indicate that the president’s decision to vote for suffrage in New Jersey was not likely connected to fear of his remarriage offending women voters in the Western states.

Additional contrary evidence from contemporary sources comes from Alice Stone Blackwell. In the pages of the Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News, Blackwell asserted that “the President’s conversion was not due to the influence of [his engagement to] Mrs. Galt.” Blackwell cited an interview between Wilson and Nevada suffragist Anne Martin in December 1914, during which the president congratulated Martin on the success of the Nevada suffrage referendum. According to Martin, Wilson implied that he favored woman suffrage – so long as it was attained by the state method. Blackwell pointed out that this conversation took place almost ten months before his engagement to Galt.105

104 Edith B. Wilson, My Memoir (New York: The Bobbs-Merill Company, 1938), 81-83. Further, the Los Angeles Times’ coverage of the President’s engagement and wedding plans contained no mention of a backlash from women voters. See “President Engaged,” Los Angeles Times, October 7, 1915, 11.

Wilson had been hinting to the suffragists that he would support their cause in New Jersey for nearly a year before the actual referendum. In fact, he and his personal secretary, Joseph Tumulty, strung suffrage leaders along throughout 1915. NAWSA President Anna Howard Shaw met with the President in January 1915 – shortly after the vote on the federal amendment in the House of Representatives. Shaw reported that, “The President gave no expression of opinion to the women, but the delegation came away with the distinct belief that he would very shortly come out with a favorable statement.”\textsuperscript{106} Her prediction of an early commitment from Wilson was misplaced. In May, Tumulty told two suffrage leaders from Pennsylvania that the President would announce his position on the New Jersey referendum in time for it to have its effect in the elections in the four states where suffrage was to be voted on in the fall.\textsuperscript{107} Suffragists were still patiently waiting in July when Tumulty released another statement regarding the President’s position. This time, Wilson’s secretary told suffragists to expect a public announcement by the President “within the next few weeks.”\textsuperscript{108} In fact, Wilson made no such announcement until October 6\textsuperscript{th} – a mere 13 days before the New Jersey vote and only a month before the elections in Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts.

It is not entirely clear why Wilson chose to wait until the last minute to announce his support for suffrage in New Jersey. However, the evidence suggests that he chose to use most of 1915 to test the waters of public opinion and reaction within his own party. The January 1915 House vote on the federal amendment demonstrated that Democrats


\textsuperscript{107}“Wilson to Tell Stand in Time,” \textit{Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News}, May 15, 1915. The four states with pending suffrage referenda were New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York.

\textsuperscript{108}“President Will Take Stand Soon,” \textit{Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News}, July 24, 1915.
opposed suffrage – at least in the form of a federal amendment – by a margin of two to one.\textsuperscript{109} Furthermore, polls from New Jersey indicated that – claims of the suffragists notwithstanding - the measure did not have widespread support in the state and would probably fail. So there was some political risk involved for the president as he contemplated what action to take in his home state.

Ultimately, Wilson’s affirmative vote on the New Jersey referendum reflected a mix of his shifting personal position and political expedience.\textsuperscript{110} The potentially negative impact of his engagement announcement was a minor concern, at best, compared to his need to attract progressive voters. His vote was a move aimed to please suffragists in the East and women voters in the West, as well as progressive elements of the electorate from across the country that had been alienated by some of his actions in 1914 and 1915. It had the additional advantage of not alienating southern Democrats because it in no way committed Wilson to support the dreaded federal amendment. In fact, as his statement to the press reveals, he went out of his way to make it clear that his vote in New Jersey only reaffirmed his support of a states’ rights approach to voter qualifications.

Despite their long wait, suffragists were elated upon hearing the announcement that the president would vote in favor of suffrage. From her post as the Chair of the Empire State Suffrage Campaign in New York, Catt immediately sent a telegram to the White House on the day of his announcement saying, “On behalf of a million women in

\textsuperscript{109} In the House, 171 Democrats voted against the federal amendment while only 86 voted in favor. See “Suffrage Meets Defeat in House,” \textit{The Washington Post}, January 13, 1915, 1.

\textsuperscript{110} Documentary evidence of Wilson’s personal shift is scant. His private correspondence from this time period reveals little about his shifting attitude on suffrage. Publicly, though, he stated that he was voting in favor of the state suffrage referendum “because I believe that the time has come to extend that privilege and responsibility to the women of the State.” For Wilson’s full press release, see “Wilson Indorses Woman Suffrage,” \textit{New York Times}, October 7, 1915, 1.
New York State who have declared they want the ballot, please accept my gratitude for
your announcement that you will vote for the woman suffrage amendment in New
Jersey.”¹¹¹ Catt hoped that the president’s actions in New Jersey would positively
influence voters in New York – a hope that went unfulfilled in the 1915 suffrage
campaign in the Empire State.

The New Jersey referendum was defeated by a count of 184,400 to 133,200 – a
margin of almost 3 to 2.¹¹² Wilson’s vote did not push suffrage to victory in
Pennsylvania or Massachusetts, either. Still, it was symbolically important for the
movement. NAWSA never failed from that day forward to point out that the president
supported suffrage, at least in principle, because of his affirmative vote in New Jersey.
His endorsement aided them in their ongoing fight with anti-suffragists who – up to that
point – had claimed Wilson as an ally to their cause.¹¹³

The Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News featured pictures and stories of
Wilson’s actions for three weeks in October 1915. In addition to trumpeting Wilson’s
support, the journal also listed all of the members of Wilson’s cabinet who announced
plans to support suffrage referenda in the upcoming elections.¹¹⁴ Similarly, The Woman

¹¹¹ Catt to Wilson (October 7, 1915), PWW, Box 89, Reel 208.


¹¹³ The anti-suffragists had worked hard to convince the President to resist the New Jersey
referendum. The President of the New Jersey Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage wrote to Wilson in
January 1915, pleading with him to oppose the measure. See Letter from Mary Scudder Jamieson to
President Wilson, quoted in “Suffrage in the President’s State,” The Woman’s Protest (Feb. 1915), 16. For
more on the anti-suffragists’ activities, see chapter six.

¹¹⁴ For coverage of Wilson’s announcement and vote, see the October 9, October 16, and October
23 editions of the Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News. With the exception of Secretary of State Robert
Lansing of New York, all of Wilson’s cabinet members who were from states facing suffrage referenda
announced that they would vote in favor of suffrage. The other cabinet members include Tumulty and
Secretary of War Lindley Garrison of New Jersey, Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo and
Voter, a journal published by the NAWSA-affiliated Woman Suffrage Party of New York, attempted to use the president’s vote in New Jersey as an endorsement for the upcoming referendum in New York. Woman Suffrage Party Chairman Mary Garrett Hay wrote to the voters of her state, “If you do not judge our movement upon its merits, judge it by its friends. The President of the United States and members of his Cabinet will vote for suffrage in their respective campaign states.”

Not all suffrage journals celebrated the president’s actions, though. The CU – totally focused on the federal amendment – saw little use for Wilson’s states’ rights support for suffrage. By fall of the following year, it was using the president’s vote in New Jersey as a weapon against him in his 1916 re-election campaign. The front page of the CU journal, The Suffragist, declared:

Woodrow Wilson, a private citizen cast one vote for woman suffrage in New Jersey where its defeat was certain. The Vote of Mr. Wilson of Princeton did not bring woman suffrage one step nearer. New Jersey went against suffrage. Mr. Wilson’s precinct went against suffrage. [He] has used all his power to defeat national woman suffrage. In Congress, where the chances for the success of woman suffrage were good he opposed it with the whole power of his party machine. Mr. Wilson knows it is well nigh impossible to amend more than twenty state constitutions. He knows that the state-by-state method of obtaining suffrage is a virtual denial of suffrage. Women voters – Do not send to the White House a man who opposes political freedom for women. Vote against President Wilson and the Democratic candidates for Congress.

Despite the negative CU reaction and the loss of all four suffrage referenda in 1915, NAWSA leaders saw a number of silver linings.


“Victory is Certain,” The Woman Voter VI, no. 11 (November 1915), 9.

Taking a longer view than their counterparts in the CU, Catt and company found the results in Pennsylvania encouraging. With the exception of Philadelphia, suffrage had won a majority in all the large industrial areas. The margin of defeat was only seven percent, with 80% of the opposition votes coming from Philadelphia. However, both New Jersey and Pennsylvania had state constitutions that mandated a five-year waiting period for resubmission of defeated amendments, so near-term hopes in both states were diminished despite the close election returns.\(^{117}\)

Massachusetts, home of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, only gained 35.5 percent of the total vote in favor of the amendment. New York, though, showed the most promise for a future near-term victory. Despite the suffrage amendment losing by nearly 200,000 votes, voters in many industrial areas had begun to support suffrage, and the state’s suffrage leaders were confident that they could win the next time around. New York required a two-year wait between amendment votes, but suffrage leaders announced the start of their 1917 campaign on the night of their 1915 defeat.\(^{118}\)

NAWSA’s fortunes took another positive turn when the organization met in convention in December 1915 and elected Catt as its new leader. Catt’s election as President of NAWSA was actually the second time that she assumed that post. It marked another milestone in her life, which had largely been devoted to increasing women’s rights since her initial engagement with the suffrage movement in Iowa in 1885. Born in Ripon, Wisconsin in 1859, Catt moved with her family to Charles City, Iowa in 1866. She was one of seven women to enter Iowa State Agricultural College (now Iowa State


\(^{118}\) Ibid., 264.
University) in 1877. Following her graduation in 1880, she taught high school in Mason City for three years before being promoted to the position of Superintendent of Schools in 1883.\(^{119}\)

Following her marriage to Leo Chapman in 1885, Catt resigned her position as school superintendent and served as her husband’s co-editor of the Mason City newspaper. Leo Chapman died from typhoid fever in 1886 just a few months after the couple had moved from Iowa to San Francisco. At the age of 27, Catt was widowed, unemployed, and living alone in a new city. She took up free-lance journalism for a few years before returning to Iowa in 1887 and beginning work as a public lecturer. Shortly after her return to her home state, she rejoined the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association, becoming a paid lecturer in 1889.

In a move that surprised many of her suffrage comrades, Carrie married George Catt in 1890. The couple had first met at Iowa State during their undergraduate years and became reacquainted during Carrie’s time in San Francisco. George Catt was an engineer who spent a great deal of his time at work sites in Washington state and California. To the immense pleasure of the Iowa suffragists, Carrie’s marriage did not end her work for their movement. She and her new husband made an agreement that he would work and earn money to support them and that she would continue with her reform work, even if that meant they would have to spend a great deal of time apart from one another.\(^{120}\)


\(^{120}\) For Catt’s account of this agreement, see Van Voris, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life*, 14. , Fowler, *Carrie Catt: Feminist Politician*, 15.
In the same year that she remarried, Catt first entered into the limelight of NAWSA by giving a speech at the National Convention. She impressed the leaders of the National, including Susan B. Anthony, who later hand-picked her to lead the successful 1893 state suffrage campaign in Colorado, to serve as Chair of the Organization Committee from 1895-1899, and to succeed her as NAWSA’s president in 1900. Catt subsequently served four one-year terms. Her tenure was marked positively by the formation of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), but negatively by repeated failure to secure any victories in state suffrage campaigns. Frustrated by the lack of progress, increasingly interested in her work with the IWSA, and concerned about George Catt’s failing health, Carrie Catt resigned the NAWSA presidency in 1904.\(^{121}\)

Following George’s death in 1905, Catt immersed herself in work with IWSA. Her longtime lieutenant from their early NAWSA days, Mary (Mollie) Garret Hay, came to live with her and join in international suffrage work. For the remainder of Hay’s life, she and Catt lived and worked together.\(^{122}\) From 1905-1913, the bulk of Catt’s energy was devoted to work with IWSA. Following a major suffrage victory in Illinois in 1913, however, she agreed to serve as chair of the Empire State Campaign Committee in New York. As explained above, NAWSA leaders hoped to capitalize on the momentum of the Illinois win by gaining victories in several Eastern states in 1915. For the next two years, Catt worked tirelessly on the New York state suffrage campaign. Although unsuccessful in winning the referendum, Catt’s popularity and prestige within NAWSA soared as a

\(^{121}\) Van Voris, Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life, 55-59.

\(^{122}\) Hay died 19 years before Catt. However, when Catt died in 1947 she left instructions that she was to be buried next to her long-time partner. Shortly after Hay’s death, Catt had a monument erected over their burial plot in New Rochelle, New York. The monument reads, “Here lie two, united in friendship for thirty-eight years through constant service to a great cause.” Ibid., 219.
result of her leadership of the campaign. It was in the wake of the New York defeat that she reluctantly agreed to serve again as NAWSA’s president.\textsuperscript{123}

Catt faced a daunting task as she accepted the reigns of NAWSA in December 1915. The organization was deeply divided over the decision to simultaneously pursue the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment and the traditional federal suffrage amendment. Despite the silver linings described above, suffragists’ spirits were dampened by their failure to win any of the four state referenda in 1915. Furthermore, Catt’s predecessor, Anna Howard Shaw, was an amazing orator, but a poor administrator. Dissent within the organization ran high.\textsuperscript{124} Finally, the CU insurgency presented a serious problem for NAWSA as it attempted to maintain its nonpartisan status and to continue to pursue action at both the state and federal level.

Catt knew that the organization needed a clear focus and direction that included educating the public and key politicians alike about the differences between the National and the CU. While still at her post as chair of the New York suffrage campaign she was sensitive to the need for distance from the CU. She wrote to Jane Addams in January 1915 expressing her desire to steer clear of any organization that involved the CU because she did not want her name or NAWSA linked with that group. Addams had requested that she attend a conference in Washington, D.C. with several other women’s groups to discuss the formation of a peace organization. Initially, Catt agreed to attend –


\textsuperscript{124} On a number of occasions, Shaw faced a near-mutiny. For example, at the 1914 NAWSA Convention, 109 delegates from 18 different states, signed a petition asking Shaw to “accept their nomination for the position of President Emeritus; so that she may hereafter be relieved of the heavy burden of executive routine, and may be at liberty to give her whole time from end to end of our country to making her magnificent pleas in the cause of equal suffrage – a service to mankind in which she has no peer.” See “The Petition to Dr. Shaw,” \textit{Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News}, November 21, 1914.
only later discovering that the CU was hosting the conference. She immediately wrote to Addams, reneging on her agreement to attend the conference.

She explained in the letter that she held no personal animosity toward the CU, but its leaders continued to pursue an anti-Democratic campaign when the suffrage amendment was pending in eleven states and depended for success on Democratic votes. Catt told Addams, “As Chairman of the New York Campaign Committee, I must not allow myself to be placed where I seem to sanction that policy.”\(^{125}\) Even as a state level representative of NAWSA, Catt recognized the potential damage her association with the CU could have for the National. She carried that level of recognition with her into the NAWSA front office.

The historical record indicates that her fears about public confusion were well founded. Not even the president, a fairly astute and informed political player, was able to match suffrage leaders’ names with the organizations they represented. In July 1916, Catt and Mrs. Frank M. Roessing, chair of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee, requested to meet with Wilson. The President’s personal secretary, Joseph Tumulty, communicated the request to him via a memorandum. In a hand-written note at the bottom of the memo, Wilson asked, “Are these ladies of the ‘Congressional Union’ variety?”\(^{126}\) Tumulty replied with a note explaining the difference between the two groups, pointing out that Roessing and Catt represented the more “conservative” organization that did not approve of the anti-Democrat stance of the CU. He also

\(^{125}\) Catt to Addams (January 4, 1915), *Carrie Chapman Catt Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 4, Reel 3. (Hereafter referred to as *CLOC*). Addams eventually persuaded Catt to attend the conference by promising that her presence would not compromise her position within the suffrage movement. See O’Neill, *Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*, 174-175.

\(^{126}\) Tumulty to Wilson (July 27, 1916), *PWW*, Box 89, Reel 209.
informed the president that Catt was scheduled to address the Democratic State Convention in West Virginia the following week, which helped to distinguish her from the rival organization.\textsuperscript{127}

After reading Tumulty’s explanation, Wilson, satisfied that he was not meeting with the enemy, wrote on the memorandum, “Okay Tuesday at 2 pm – office.”\textsuperscript{128} It is significant to note Wilson’s confusion in mid-1916. Clearly he was aware of the CU’s agitation against his party and was reluctant to grant leaders of that organization an audience. If his ability to distinguish between the two groups were not changed, he might have continued to associate the federal amendment only with the CU. Over the next several months, Catt initiated a public relations campaign that left no doubt in the president’s mind that NAWSA, too, supported the federal amendment but would pursue it in a manner that did not threaten him or the Democratic Party.

Paul and her comrades in the CU took a markedly different approach to the President. In the first few months of 1916, the CU solidified its strategy for making suffrage an issue in the fall election. In February, Blatch expressed optimism to Paul that the threat of women voters abandoning the Democrats in the West was forcing the Democratic leadership to be more responsive to the issue. She explained that she had written to the heads of both political parties in all the Western states requesting a hearing with them on behalf of the CU. To Paul she confided, “I think it is interesting that the Democratic Committees are replying so much more readily. Evidently, the

\textsuperscript{127} Tumulty to Wilson (undated), \textit{PWW}, Box 89, Reel 209.

\textsuperscript{128} Tumulty to Wilson (July 27, 1916), \textit{PWW}, Box 89, Reel 209.
Congressional Union has filled them with some fear.”129 Fueled by this sort of optimism, Paul called a meeting of the CU National Advisory Council in early April to focus efforts in the West and make the threat of women voters even more credible.

In a memo written at the meeting’s conclusion, the chair of the Advisory Council summarized the proceedings. She explained that the council had decided to form a National Woman’s Party (NWP). The basis of this new party would be to place suffrage above allegiance to any other political party. Enfranchised women of the West would be urged to join the NWP and use their voting power to press for immediate passage of the federal amendment. The council also decided to hold a formal founding convention for the new party in Chicago in June 1916 to coincide with both the Republican and Progressive Party National Conventions.130 Paul sent letters to CU leaders in each of the Western states reiterating the new strategy and urging them to attend the convention in Chicago. She used the letters to amplify her strategy, reasoning, “We hope that if the political leaders see the women voters are forming an independent party they will regard the suffrage question as a more serious one than they have considered it in the past.”131

One of Paul’s lieutenants, Mary Beard, attempted to explain the CU strategy to suffragists in New York by publishing an article in The Woman Voter. Her article provides further insight into the political thinking of CU leaders. Beard derided state suffrage campaigns and insisted that suffrage organizations (namely NAWSA) that tried to engage in both state and federal work would always be ineffective. She wrote:

129 Blatch to Paul (February 23, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
130 Memo by Elizabeth Selden Rogers (April 9, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
131 Paul to Cuthbert (April 14, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
Each successive failure to win in a campaign state increases the obstacles in the way of a Federal amendment. State work does not, therefore, inevitably promote a Federal amendment. Of course, in the future, victorious states would help the Federal amendment, but Federal work in that case always waits for state success to precede it and does not accompany state work. An organization that believes that more states are essential to the securing of a National amendment can work but half-heartedly for that amendment.  

Beard went on to contrast the NAWSA approach of asking for the vote with the NWP’s strategy of using the votes of women to demand full suffrage: “Disenfranchised women do not have to argue, plead or cajole if enfranchised women will but vote under the slogan: ‘SUFFRAGE FIRST!’” This concluding phrase became the NWP’s mantra in the 1916 campaign.

On June 7, Blatch gave the keynote speech at the Chicago convention. She demanded that the enfranchised women of the nation take a stand against the Democrats unless they passed the federal amendment:

I know that we have never had a greater instance of the control over legislation by the Party in power than at the present time. I know that the Party in power today, the dominant Party - my Party – controls the White House, controls the Senate, and controls the House of Representatives; and you know what that means. They control every committee in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. They determine legislation. Now you and I are voters in the Suffrage states, controlling ninety-one of the electoral votes, controlling one-fourth of the United States Senate and one-sixth of the House of Representatives. Are we going to sleep? Are we going to sentimentalize? Are we going to run after this Party or that Party? Or are we going to stand for the biggest principle that any group of enfranchised people have ever been called upon to stand for? 


Blatch went on to claim that the Woman’s Party would deliver 500,000 votes against the Democratic Party in the 1916 election unless it pledged its support to the federal amendment.

In the days that followed, the Progressives and Republicans held their national conventions. Suffrage was an issue of debate for both parties. In the end, the rapidly shrinking and increasingly politically insignificant Progressive Party endorsed the federal amendment. The Republicans took a more moderate stance, urging the extension of suffrage but recognizing the right of each state to settle the question for itself. In his acceptance of the Republican Presidential nomination in August, Charles Evan Hughes went a step further, offering his personal endorsement of the federal suffrage amendment. Nevertheless, in early June it appeared that the Progressives favored a federal amendment while Republicans only supported a states’ rights version of suffrage. The attention of all suffragists then turned to the Democratic National Convention in St. Louis, which was held the following week (June 14-16).

When the Democrats adopted a plank similar to the Republicans, endorsing suffrage only as an issue to be decided by the states, the NWP earnestly began campaigning against all Democrats in the western states.\(^{134}\) An overwhelming amount of evidence points to the conclusion that this strategy was based on three faulty assumptions and that it did little to further the cause of suffrage. The first major assumption that failed the Woman’s Party was that women would behave as single-issue voters, willing to place

\(^{134}\) For the rationale of the NWP leaders in launching a second “boycott” of Democrats, see Adams and Keene, *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign*, 150-151. Adams and Keene note that the NWP strategy of campaigning against all Democrats, regardless of their stance on suffrage, drew more objection from outside groups in 1914 than it did in 1916. Even Alice Paul’s mother wrote to her in the summer of 1916, asking her to stop “annoying the President.” Letter from T.P. Paul to Alice Paul, quoted in Ibid., 152.
suffrage for women in other parts of the country above any other concerns. Secondly, they falsely believed that women voters would view Wilson as anti-suffrage because he was the head of the Democratic Party and a federal amendment had not been passed during his first term. Finally, they were overly confident that a majority of people would understand their strategy of campaigning against all Democrats even if individual Democratic candidates supported suffrage.

In reality, women voters were concerned with a wide range of issues in the 1916 election. Wilson’s affirmative vote in New Jersey and willingness at the St. Louis Convention to support the suffrage plank, limited though it was, convinced many voters that he was actually an advocate for the cause. A tiny minority abandoned their traditional party allegiance to join the Woman’s Party, while a vast majority, suffragists and anti-suffragists alike, were convinced that the campaign against all Democrats damaged the suffrage movement.

One of the best illustrations of women’s refusal to behave as single-issue voters comes from a set of correspondence between Alva Belmont and a number of western women voters. Belmont served as the Chairman of the NWP’s Campaign Fund Committee during the 1916 election year. In September, she sent a letter to 20,000 women voters asking them to donate money in an attempt to raise $500,000 for the upcoming campaign. Her letter explained that the NWP needed additional funds because, “Mr. Wilson and his party have steadfastly opposed the woman suffrage amendment in Congress. The Woman’s Party is campaigning, therefore, in the states where women vote, against Mr. Wilson and the Democratic Congressional candidates.”135 She received

135 Belmont to Fellow-Member (September 13, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
hundreds of responses, overwhelmingly negative. A snapshot of the letters back to Belmont illustrates the posture of women in the West.

A woman in Kansas responded that knowing that the Republican candidate supported a federal suffrage amendment was not enough to cause her to vote for him. She wrote, “The women of Kansas have the suffrage and it is valuable to them only as it is used to gain for themselves or humanity the things most desired. We are anxious to know [Hughes’] attitude on a number of questions; vis: Child Labor law, Universal compulsory military service, taxes on income, inheritances and munitions.”\(^{136}\) She went on to express skepticism that Hughes’ interest in suffrage extended beyond his near-term desire to be elected. She questioned Belmont, “Has all this enthusiasm for woman suffrage been awakened merely to get votes – women’s votes – to help make himself President . . . His election would in no way advance the suffrage cause and on the other hand defeat much very necessary legislation.\(^{137}\)

A woman who described herself as an “earnest advocate of women’s suffrage” sent a similar response to Belmont. She was even more specific about Wilson’s appeal over Hughes. In refusing to donate any funds to the NWP, she explained that Wilson “had done so much for our country. A man who has stood by the wage earning people. I think the woman’s suffrage party in campaigning against Mr. Wilson is all wrong. And you will find in the end that you have gained nothing.”\(^{138}\) She further added her belief that Wilson’s support of the states’ rights stance of the Democratic Party did not mean

\(^{136}\) Mrs. J.E. Drennan to Belmont (September 27, 1916), *NWPP*, Reel 1.
\(^{137}\) Ibid.
\(^{138}\) Nannie T. Daniel to Belmont (September 1916), *NWPP*, Reel 1.
that he personally did not support a federal amendment. This letter indicates two important points. First, it demonstrates that the writer believed Wilson’s support of workers was more significant than his party’s failure to secure a federal suffrage amendment – further proof that the belief in suffrage as an issue women would weigh more heavily than all others was false. Secondly, it shows that Wilson had successfully used his party’s adherence to states’ rights as a protective barrier for his personal views. Despite the fact that he had never wavered from the party’s position that suffrage was an issue to be decided by the states, many women remained hopeful that because he was in favor of the principle of suffrage, he was not personally opposed to a federal amendment.

A respondent from Oregon blasted Belmont and the NWP for their strategy, echoing the belief that Hughes only supported the federal amendment in order to gain votes and that he knew the bill would first have to gain the support of two-thirds of Congress before he would ever have to deal with it. She pointed out that the suffrage amendment had lingered in Congress for twenty years under Republican administrations and that the amendment had come further under Wilson than any of his Republican predecessors. In a sharp rebuke of the entire NWP strategy, she wrote,

In this state the majority of the women are standing for Wilson and the suffrage cause has lost many of its best workers because of the foolishness of the congressional union [sic] and the woman’s party in trying to throw the Oregon women’s vote to Hughes. You are definitely injuring the cause of suffrage among Oregon women. We will never again work together as we did before the split which you and your followers have forced upon us. You are causing the same split in other states and therefore you have given suffrage the greatest setback that it could be given. It will take at least ten years of hard work by the saner women to overcome the blow you have given suffrage in trying to force your candidate for president upon us.”

139 Respondent from Multnomah, Oregon to Belmont (September 30, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
This woman represented the views of those who not only continued to support Wilson but also were distraught over the damage being caused by the NWP’s assault on the Democratic Party.

In an almost identical letter, Mrs. W.F. LeSueur from Arizona contradicted all three of the assumptions on which the NWP’s strategy was based. She wrote, “President Wilson can and will get suffrage for women quicker, than would his opponent. In my opinion he has accomplished more in the last three and half years than has the Republicans in twenty years [sic]. I do not think that Mr. Hughes would be equal to the big questions now confronting, and that will confront our nation.”140 LeSueur’s letter demonstrates that the “big questions” facing the United States weighed more heavily on the minds of many voters than did suffrage. Additionally, her response indicates the belief held by many that Wilson was actually an advocate for suffrage and to campaign against him and the other Democrats would only hurt the movement.

The fact that so many women in the West credited Wilson with progress on the federal amendment while deriding the efforts of the CU is ironic. In reality, the CU was largely responsible for reinvigorating the movement for a federal amendment. The work it performed while still affiliated with NAWSA’s Congressional Committee in 1913 and later as an independent organization in 1914-1915 brought attention and action on the amendment in Congress. Still, perception proved more powerful than reality. In 1916, it cannot be denied that many women voters perceived Wilson to be an advocate for the federal amendment. Further, they failed to see the ways in which the CU’s work had helped the cause.

140 LeSueur to Belmont (September 25, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
The replies to Belmont’s request for financial aid are not the only sources of evidence that an overwhelming majority of western women rejected the NWP’s strategy, although their actual words are perhaps the strongest testimony. Subsequent correspondence suggests that Belmont’s September 1916 plea for donations to the cause went largely unanswered. Less than four months after her call for funds, she was forced to send another letter to previous contributors asking for financial assistance. She wrote, “Our treasury is empty and our work is seriously crippled for lack of funds.” The women she had solicited in September apparently spoke with both their pens and their checkbooks. The NWP’s membership numbers are even more compelling. In early 1917, the number of women from suffrage states that had joined the Woman’s Party was only 14,277 – a far cry from the 500,000 voters that Blatch had promised in June 1916.

Part of the problem for the NWP resided with the fact that Paul’s strategy, though defensible if given proper scrutiny and full hearing, seemed counterintuitive to most voters who quickly dismissed it without a full hearing. Paul’s explanation of the strategy to one of the leaders of the Woman’s Party in Colorado, illustrates this point. She wrote, “Our interest, of course, is in securing the passage of the amendment and not in securing the election of Hughes, but it is vital to the success of the amendment, I think, that we secure the defeat of Wilson and the election of Hughes.” Paul had a hard time convincing people that she was not interested in electing Hughes – only defeating Wilson; with only a subtle difference in purpose, the propositions were one and the same.

141 Belmont to Anderson (January 26, 1916), NWPP, Reel 2.

142 Report of the National Woman’s Party Membership Committee (March 3, 1917), NWPP, Reel 1.

143 Paul to Cuthbert (August 23, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
Additionally, Paul’s method of measuring the success of the movement differed from that of most people who believed supporters should be won over rather than coerced. She went on in the same letter to the supporter in Colorado to justify her methods:

It seems to us that we gain more publicity by our campaign of opposition than we could by one of support. In Colorado two years ago . . . we succeeded in making such an impression upon the campaign and obtaining so much publicity for our fight against [U.S. Senator] Thomas that even now, two years later, he is still making speeches in the United States Senate denouncing our campaign against him. Had [NWP members] simply gone in as speakers supporting Mr. Thomas’ opponent, they could not possibly, I believe, have created the furore in the state in which they did by their policy of attacking Thomas and pointing out the reasons for not having him returned to Washington.\(^{144}\)

The problem with Paul’s assessment is that Thomas was a pro-suffrage Senator who had worked to secure suffrage for women in Colorado and voted in favor of the federal amendment repeatedly in the U.S. Senate. Paul considered the NWP’s campaign against Thomas a success, despite the fact that they had been working against a long-time suffrage supporter and that he was re-elected despite their efforts to defeat him. This type of “success” was not attractive to the vast majority of voters.

In some ways, the NWP’s 1916 campaign strategy only made the suffrage battle more difficult. After Wilson was re-elected and the Democrats maintained control of the House and Senate, the Republicans owed the NWP nothing since the women’s vote had not carried them to victory. Furthermore, many Democratic suffrage supporters backed away from the cause because they were made to feel as if it conflicted with their party loyalty. Most importantly, much-needed Democratic support in Congress had been alienated by the NWP’s campaigns in the West. NWP member Maud Younger reported

\(^{144}\) Ibid.
in January 1917 that Representative Hayden of Arizona, a long-time suffrage supporter in the House, had rejected her request to delay a vote on the federal amendment that would surely end in its defeat. Hayden had told her that if the NWP was in favor of delaying the vote, then he was in favor of rushing it, even if it meant defeat for the amendment. He explained that he was in favor of anything the NWP opposed because they had fought against him in his last campaign.\textsuperscript{145} If this was the type of response the NWP generated from Congressmen who supported suffrage, they stood little chance of winning the votes of those who opposed the amendment.

NAWSA activities in 1916 reflected the beliefs of its leader, Catt, just as much as the CU/NWP activities reflected the leadership of Alice Paul. The four major tenets of Catt’s strategy in 1916 were increased organization, a renewed focus on the federal amendment, remaining steadfast to the policy of nonpartisanship, and distinguishing NAWSA from the CU. All of this was part of Catt’s long-term vision: win more states in order to increase the number of Congressmen from suffrage states, thereby enhancing the prospects for passing the federal amendment and for achieving a quick ratification. She recognized that this strategy meant several more years of work for the suffrage movement, as opposed to the quick fix promised by the western strategy of the NWP. She explained to NAWSA members:

\begin{quote}
But let me implore you not to imagine a Federal Amendment an easy process of enfranchisement. There is no quick, short cut to our liberty. The federal amendment means a simultaneous campaign in 48 states. It demands organization in every precinct; activity, agitation, education in every corner . . . Nothing less than this nation-wide, vigilant, unceasing campaigning will win the ratification.\textsuperscript{146}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} Interview by Maud Younger (January 13, 1917), \textit{NWPP}, Reel 2.
To Catt, the NWP promises were a mirage. Throughout 1916, she hammered away at NAWSA’s state associations to improve their internal organization in preparation for state referenda and, later, the ratification fight.

During her opening comments as the newly elected President of NAWSA, Catt told the assembled representatives that the watchword for 1916 would be organization: “Whether for Congressional or State work, the only solid foundation is organization; and if you have in your State a thorough and far-reaching organization, you can switch it on short notice to any piece of work, State or Federal, that needs to be done.”147 Just a few months later, she announced the formation of NAWSA’s Department of Organization. The new Department’s mission was to “give lessons in organization” to state associations so that “every state which has not already done so shall transform its plan of organization into that which makes the political unit the basis of organization.”148

To fully understand Catt’s emphasis on and use of the term “organization,” one must have a sense of Catt’s experience as a suffragist over the preceding two decades. In the absence of a strong national headquarters and a coordinated national plan, each state association had followed its own path. State leaders often ignored the advice of the NAWSA Executive Council, either squandering resources in campaigns that were doomed to fail or failing to capitalize on opportunities in states where concerted campaigns might have resulted in victory. Further, some state leaders were reluctant to

146 “Convention Key-Notes from Mrs. Catt’s Address,” The Woman Voter VII, no. 10 (October 1916), 22.


move beyond voter education to voter mobilization. Having spent time at both the national and state level, Catt was painfully aware of the need for a stronger central authority in NAWSA. As a corollary, she demanded that all state associations bow to the dictates of that central authority, even if that meant seeing funds raised in their states used for a campaign in another state or agreeing to abandon their state campaigns if the national leaders determined their states did not have much chance of success.\textsuperscript{149}

Alongside this increased focus on organization, Catt placed additional emphasis on the plan for attaining the federal amendment. Although her own political calculations may have eventually led her to independently make this transition, the activity of the CU / NWP certainly hastened her journey. Early in 1916, she confided to another NAWSA leader, “It seems to me that the National Association is losing its Federal Amendment zealots to the Congressional Union merely because we do not work on that job hard enough . . . If [NAWSA] should once do it, there is no knowing what might happen.”\textsuperscript{150} Propelled to greater action by its rival organization and the increased chance of success because of new suffrage states, NAWSA, under Catt’s leadership, worked harder for the federal amendment than it had since the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{151} In the mind of most NAWSA leaders, a key to winning the federal amendment and ratification would be the maintenance of NAWSA’s nonpartisan status.

\textsuperscript{149} Van Voris, \textit{Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life}, 132-135.

\textsuperscript{150} Catt to Maud Wood Park (January 18, 1916) and Catt to Park (January 27, 1916), \textit{NAWSA Records}, Reel 15.

\textsuperscript{151} NAWSA’s renewed focus on the Federal Amendment was reflected in the pages of both the \textit{Headquarters News Letter} and the \textit{Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News}. Beginning in January 1916, both publications provided a status report on the federal amendment in every issue. Furthermore, the articles and editorials included more even coverage of state and congressional activity.
In the first years of her presidency, Catt found herself not only defending the policy of non-partisanship to the public, but also fending off partisan overtures from close friends and members of her own organization. So what was it about NAWSA’s traditional policy that drove Catt to defend it with such vehemence? She answered that question in numerous articles, letters, and interviews by claiming that holding the party in power responsible simply would not work to secure suffrage for all women.\footnote{For example, see the following articles authored by Catt: “The Suffrage Platform,” \textit{Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News}, June 12, 1915; “Woman Suffrage and Prohibition,” \textit{The Woman Voter} VI, no. 11 (November 1915), 13;}

Despite what seemed blatantly obvious to Catt as the correct path for NAWSA, women whom she respected and worked with occasionally challenged the National’s traditional policy. In July 1916, Catt received a letter from the President of Bryn Mawr College, M. Cary Thomas. Thomas, an active suffragist and a long-time national leader of the battle for greater educational opportunities for women, wrote only a few weeks after both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions had adopted a suffrage plank for their party platforms, but during which neither endorsed the federal amendment. Thomas suggested that Catt meet with the Republican presidential candidate, Charles Evan Hughes, and urge him to publicly support the federal amendment and promise to try and get Congress to pass it if he were elected. NAWSA should offer their pledge of
support to Hughes in the upcoming election unless the Democrats passed a federal amendment in the final session of the 1916 Congress.

Thomas went on to suggest that Catt then meet with President Wilson and explain her plan to support Hughes in the upcoming election unless the Democrats pushed the federal amendment through in the next two months. She felt that the fear of losing the election in the fall would force Wilson to rally his party and push the amendment through Congress. Even if it did not, all the nation’s suffragists (CU, NAWSA, Progressives) would be united in their support of Hughes and the Republican ticket, and, following their election to office, “the federal amendment will at last be passed especially as the Republican congressmen who have been campaigned for by women will feel a sense of obligation to them such as they have never yet felt.”

Even after Hughes was convinced by the CU to come out in support of national suffrage in his July 15, 1916 nomination acceptance speech, Catt refused to give him NAWSA’s endorsement. She continued to speak of suffrage as inevitable because of its bipartisan appeal. In an article written after Hughes’ announcement in July but before the November elections, she reiterated her non-partisan approach, assuring voters that no national party opposed suffrage: “The two dominant parties in their suffrage planks recommended that the question should be settled by the States, but neither declared

153 Thomas to Catt (July 4, 1916), CLOC, Box 29, Reel 19. Interestingly, this letter contradicts the account of Thomas’ relationship to the suffrage movement offered in H. L. Horowitz, The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994). Horowitz asserts that Thomas’ interest and participation ended after the death of her companion, Mary Garrett, in April 1915. According to Horowitz, Thomas’ last suffrage activity was her attendance of the December 1915 NAWSA National Convention (p. 435). This letter from July 1916 suggests that Thomas remained interested and at least marginally engaged with the suffrage movement beyond that point.
against the Federal method. Mr. Charles E. Hughes, the Republican candidate, has openly declared for the Federal Amendment. Mr. Wilson, at this time, does not yet endorse it, but many democrats in Congress have not only spoken and voted for it, but are earnest advocates of it.”¹⁵⁴ Wilson’s later actions in his second term indicated that by refusing to endorse Hughes over Wilson, Catt endeared herself and NAWSA to the president.

Thomas was not the only one urging Catt to reconsider her non-partisan path. At the NAWSA Atlantic City Convention in September 1916, one of the delegates made a motion that NAWSA support only those candidates who had spoken out in favor of the federal amendment – namely Hughes. The motion attracted many of the women who were frustrated with the slow rate of progress and saw a partisan approach leading to quicker victory. Catt spoke in opposition to the proposal and was supported by her predecessor, Dr. Anna Howard Shaw. After two hours of debate, the motion was defeated, and the delegates passed a subsequent resolution to initiate a vigorous publicity campaign to make clear the association had indeed decided to maintain its non-partisan policy.¹⁵⁵

Despite challenges from within and outside the organization, Catt navigated NAWSA through the tempting waters of partisan politics. President Wilson’s reaction to her dedication to this principle can be measured by his increasing responsiveness to her requests for support. After his successful re-election in the fall of 1916 by a close margin of 276 electoral votes against 255 for Hughes, Catt was able to repeatedly call on the


President for support in state campaigns as well as the federal amendment campaign – a
dynamic to be explored in-depth in the following chapters.

Catt’s other main 1916 goal – distinguishing NAWSA from the CU – was a focal
point of the emergency NAWSA National Convention she called in Atlantic City, New
Jersey in September 1916. At the convention, she revealed her “Winning Plan” for
securing the federal amendment. In her presidential address, she informed the audience
that the suffrage movement was in a state of crisis. Arguing the futility of securing
suffrage for all women of the country by the state method and the necessity of the federal
amendment, she exhorted NAWSA to continue to campaign for state suffrage in states
likely to accept an amendment, but not to waste efforts in states with an obstinate
electorate or constitutional constructions that made securing amendments almost
impossible. In all cases, the organization would work to influence legislators to vote in
favor of the federal amendment. Repeatedly, she stressed organizational efficiency and
unity of effort.156

The beauty of Catt’s “Winning Plan” is two-fold. First, it recognized the
necessity of winning more state referenda in order to eventually secure a federal
amendment. Catt was well aware that congressmen were more apt to vote for a federal
amendment if they came from suffrage states. The results of the 1915 vote on the federal
amendment in the House of Representatives proved this point. The roll call showed that
96% of congressmen from suffrage states voted in favor of the amendment, as compared

(September, 1916), NAWSA Records, Box 82, Reel 59.
to 37% from non-suffrage states. To abandon the campaign in states with large congressional delegations such as New York would not only erase the years of work that had been poured into those campaigns, but also spell defeat for the federal amendment. Additionally, keeping state suffrage organizations alive would provide the framework necessary for the eventual ratification campaign that would have to be fought once the federal amendment passed Congress.

Shortly after issuing her call to NAWSA members to attend the Atlantic City convention, Catt invited the president to address the assemblage at their closing session. The president replied in a personal letter to Catt that he would accept the invitation barring any schedule conflicts, adding a sentence at the end of the letter, “I sincerely wish to come.” The evidence suggests that Catt saw Wilson’s presence in Atlantic City as a way to accomplish two goals. She hoped his appearance before the convention could be used in the public relations campaign. Even if he did not come out in support of the federal amendment, his mere presence at the national convention of an organization with that end as its stated goal could be interpreted to show his decreasing resistance to such a measure. Additionally, she hoped his exposure to a theater full of dedicated, orderly suffragists would help facilitate his complete conversion to the ranks of the believers – in other words, an advocate for the federal amendment.

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157 Eileen McDonagh, "Issues and Constituencies in the Progressive Era: House Roll Call Voting on the Nineteenth Amendment, 1913-1919," *The Journal of Politics* 51, no. 1 (February 1989): 126. McDonagh’s analysis provides strong support for the NAWSA strategy. In addition to measuring whether congressmen came from suffrage states, she also measures support for the federal amendment as a factor of political party and/or region. McDonagh concludes, “It is the presence or absence of state-level suffrage that may be more importantly related to support for the federal suffrage amendment than either party identification or region.”

As expected, the president did not speak explicitly in favor of the federal amendment during his address. Neither did he, though, insist that suffrage be attained through the state method. In a marked departure from his past statements, he professed his support for the principle of suffrage without clearly stating his preference for the issue to be settled by the states. Wilson said, “We feel the tide [of the suffrage movement]; we rejoice in the strength of it, and we shall not quarrel in the long run as to the method of it.”\footnote{Wilson’s shift in position was not an unconscious action or a slip of the tongue. Later correspondence indicates that he intended his remarks at Atlantic City to represent his openness to a federal amendment heading into the 1916 election. Responding to a request in October from the Writers Equal Suffrage League for a statement of his position, Wilson directed his secretary to provide the league with a copy of his Atlantic City speech.\footnote{Anna Johnson to Wilson (October 24, 1916), \textit{LWWP}.}} Wilson’s shift in position was not an unconscious action or a slip of the tongue. Later correspondence indicates that he intended his remarks at Atlantic City to represent his openness to a federal amendment heading into the 1916 election. Responding to a request in October from the Writers Equal Suffrage League for a statement of his position, Wilson directed his secretary to provide the league with a copy of his Atlantic City speech.\footnote{Anna Johnson to Wilson (October 24, 1916), \textit{LWWP}.}

Reminiscing several years later, Catt expressed her belief that it was that night in Atlantic City when Wilson “yielded to the momentum of the movement which was rapidly reaching its climax in his administration. [The convention was] the very hour when conversion to the principle became with him conversion to an obligation to join the campaign.”\footnote{Catt and Shuler, \textit{Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement}, 260.} When Wilson looked out over the audience in Atlantic City, he saw exactly what Catt wanted him to see – orderly women that cheered him before and after his speech and who contrasted sharply with the image he held of CU agitators. This

\footnote{“Speech of President Woodrow Wilson at the 48\textsuperscript{th} Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association” (September 8, 1916), \textit{NAWSA Records}, Box 82, Reel 59.}
positive image, she believed, catalyzed Wilson’s conversion to the NAWSA cause of a federal suffrage amendment.

Just two months later, Catt decided to increase the intensity of the public relations campaign aimed at distinguishing between NAWSA and the CU. NAWSA press secretary Rose Young wrote to her in November 1916 requesting that she write some articles to be used in conjunction with personality stories, cartoons, and news items in order to “get the National American so dominantly featured in relation to the federal amendment that there won’t be any room on the map for the C.U. to get a grip on popular imagination again.”¹⁶² Catt, concurring with Young’s proposal, composed a letter that Young released to the press. Young indicated on the press release that Catt had written the letter in answer to three questions: 1) Why the Congressional Union came into existence 2) Why it advanced a policy contrary to that of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and 3) What the differences are between the two groups.

Catt effectively used the letter to answer those questions. She explained how the mixing of the Congressional Committee responsibilities with the Congressional Union and the violations of NAWSA principles had led to Paul’s decision to part ways with the National. Furthermore, she provided a detailed explanation of the CU policies of holding the party in power responsible and abandoning state suffrage campaigns in favor of a singular focus on the federal amendment. In contrast, she explained, “The National looks to both parties for support of the Federal Amendment and to intensive organization and vigorous activity within the states, to secure the ratification of the Federal Amendment;

¹⁶² Rose Young to Catt (November 14, 1915), CLOC, Box 36, Reel 24.
and the National would also secure the vote by suffrage referenda whenever possible.”163

Stressing NAWSA’s non-partisan approach, focus on the federal amendment, and continued work at the state level, Catt clearly explained the differences between the two organizations. She concluded the letter with her personal assessment of the ineffectiveness of the CU policy of holding the party in power responsible.

By the end of 1916, NAWSA had succeeded in getting both major parties to include suffrage planks in their national platforms. Like their counterparts in the NWP, they would have much preferred a plank endorsing the federal amendment, but in that they were committed to work at both the state and national level, they chose to see the states’ rights planks as a positive step. Through an aggressive publicity campaign, NAWSA leaders had educated a large number of Americans about the difference between NAWSA and the CU. More importantly, they had educated the president. Wilson was convinced enough of NAWSA’s goodwill to speak at its national convention. He did not endorse a federal amendment, but his language indicated a new openness to national suffrage. His mere presence at the convention was a public relations plume in NAWSA’s hat that they used repeatedly during the final three years of the campaign.

Woman suffrage was but one of many issues facing Wilson during his 1916 re-election bid. His reaction to pressure from suffragists, as well as his attempt to win over progressive voters by supporting important pro-labor legislation, serves as the subject of the next chapter. Additionally, this chapter details the post-election analysis conducted by NAWSA, the NWP, and Wilson’s Administration. Different interpretations of the

1916 results – accompanied by the increasing prospect of US intervention into the war in Europe - led to new strategies by all three groups in 1917.
CHAPTER 4
WILSON’S PROGRESSIVE TURN AND THE 1916 ELECTION

One of the most important things to note when examining Wilson’s approach to the 1916 election is that the issue of woman suffrage was, at best, a minor concern. The issues that dominated the campaign were America’s potential involvement in the war in Europe and where the two major political parties would fall on a broad range of progressive issues. Wilson’s campaign strategy evolved immensely during the course of 1916, but by the time the election arrived in November, his platform can best be summarized as peace, prosperity, and progressivism. This chapter reveals Wilson treading carefully through the months leading up to the election, balancing his need to win back progressive voters with his need to placate the conservatives within his own party, particularly those from the South. While the preceding chapter detailed the president’s successful maneuvers to appear pro-suffrage in advance of the 1916 election, this chapter examines his equally successful attempt to cast himself and his party as pro-labor. Specifically, it conducts a comparative analysis between Wilson’s evolving stance on woman suffrage and his changed position on two key labor issues: restricting child labor and supporting an eight-hour workday. This chapter concludes with an assessment of how various groups interpreted the results of the 1916 election. Recognizing that NAWSA, the NWP, and the Wilson administration understood the election results in different ways helps to explain the new strategies employed by each group in 1917.

A close examination of Wilson’s decision to support both the Keating-Owen Child Labor Bill and the Adamson Act, which granted railroad workers an eight-hour day, is illuminating for understanding his conversion to the federal woman suffrage
amendment in a number of ways. But at the outset of this analysis it is important to note key differences between Wilson’s approach to labor legislation as compared to the issue of woman suffrage. Unlike his views on woman suffrage, Wilson had supported the principle of protective legislation for child workers and limited hours for workers for most of his public life.164 Additionally, Wilson tended to see the government’s role with regard to economic issues in a much different light than he did social issues. As a number of his biographers have noted, he was reluctant to act as decisively on the latter as opposed to the former.165 Despite these differences, though, Wilson’s increasingly supportive stance on labor legislation and willingness to move away from a strict states’ rights position does bear important similarities to his slide toward support for woman suffrage.

Specific similarities to the suffrage battle include the fact that his support for the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act and the Adamson Act marked a sharp reversal of his position on these specific pieces of legislation. His shift indicated a new openness to national solutions for social justice issues. Further, a look at his executive correspondence regarding labor reveals that Wilson’s advisors were adamant that he needed to bolster his political support among progressives if he had any hope of being

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165 Walworth, Woodrow Wilson, 327. Walworth argues that Wilson “realized that the issues of race equality and woman suffrage involved slow changes in the social mores of his people. He knew that he could not act upon them with constructive decisiveness, as in the case of economic maladies that obviously demanded remedy.” See also, Clements, The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson, 45.
reelected in 1916 – even if that meant disappointing more conservative members of his own party, especially from the South. This fact bears strongly on his actions with regard to woman suffrage. Portentously, the battle over the child labor bill reveals significant cracks within the supposedly monolithic South.

Additionally, evidence in this chapter shows that Wilson was willing to listen to and follow the counsel of his advisory team. He followed closely the entreaties of those close to him who urged his support of both the child labor and 8-hour day bills. Similarly, the president paid heed to those within his inner circle who urged him to take a moderately pro-suffrage stance by supporting a states’ rights suffrage plank in the 1916 Democratic platform, but stopping short of endorsing the federal amendment. Finally, both of these legislative battles culminated with Wilson’s personal intervention with members of Congress. His willingness to exert executive influence with legislators foreshadows his actions with Congress on behalf of the federal woman suffrage amendment during his second term. Looming over all of the domestic issues in 1916, though, was the raging war in Europe. Wilson’s desire to influence the outcome of that conflict colored all of his calculations.

On the international stage, Wilson charted a bold course for the country. Recognizing that, like him, most Americans were opposed to U.S. military intervention in the war and deeply divided over the causes of the fighting in Europe, he developed a plan for a mediated peace. First outlined in a speech on May 27, 1916, Wilson set forth his vision to end U.S. isolation by taking the lead in a negotiated peace agreement among the...

\[166\] As this chapter will show, the advisors who played a critical role in shaping Wilson’s attitude on labor questions included, among others, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, Oklahoma Senator Robert Owen, National Child Labor Committee leader Alexander McKelway, and Industrial Relations Committee Chairman Frank Walsh.
warring nations of Europe and then committing the nation to participation in a postwar association of nations that would maintain peace in the future. His plan offended isolationists but pleased a majority of Americans who enthusiastically supported the campaign slogan: “He kept us out of war.” Although an emphasis on nonintervention would seem to be a shift from Wilson’s fierce defense of American rights on the seas and his preparedness campaign of 1915, Link argues convincingly that Wilson’s peace stance was based on much more than political expedience. Over the course of 1916, Wilson had grown both increasingly frustrated with the Allies and distrustful of Great Britain. He clearly recognized the political value of taking a stand for peace. However, Link argues, his transition to “a leading champion of nonintervention was facilitated by developments both at home and abroad.”

Domestically, Wilson worked to regain ground with progressive voters. Several factors contributed to his belief that such action was necessary. First off, he and his advisors had carefully studied the election returns from 1912. They were keenly aware that Wilson’s victory owed more to the split between the Republican Party and Roosevelt’s Bull Moose insurgency than to any issue championed by the Democrats. They were also cognizant of the fact that, although he did not score any points in the Electoral College, the Socialist candidate, Eugene Debs, had won nearly a million votes

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169 In 1912, Wilson won 435 electoral votes compared to only 88 for Roosevelt and 8 for Taft. However, he received only 42% of the popular votes, the rest being divided between Roosevelt (27%), Taft (23%) and the Socialist candidate, Eugene V. Debs (6%). Carol Goldinger, ed. *Presidential Elections since 1789*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1987), 114.
representing 6% of the popular vote. In addition, many of the president’s actions during the first three years of his administration had further alienated progressives. Specifically, they opposed his military preparedness program and his approval of racial segregation in federal service. They were further discouraged by his failure to grant the American Federation of Labor immunity under the Sherman Act and to support woman suffrage, child labor legislation, and rural credits. As early as November 1914, leading progressive journalists such as Hebert Croly of the The New Republic expressed dissatisfaction with Wilson’s conservativism. As Link argues, “It was obvious that [Wilson and the Democrats] would have to reverse themselves and enact these and other measures if they were to persuade independents, Progressives, and midwestern farmers that they led a great national party that had struck the shackles of state rights and laissez-faire dogma.”

Labor leaders joined with Croly in critiquing Wilson’s failure to live up to many of his promises from the 1912 campaign. Late in the 1912 election cycle, Wilson had

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170 Interestingly, the Socialist Party began rapidly losing members after the 1912 election. According to Debs’ biographer Nick Salvatore, Socialist leaders were unable to sustain class consciousness among the rank and file in succeeding years. Further, new tensions based on geography created challenges within the party. The large increase in the Socialist vote in 1912 had primarily come from Western and southwestern states. But national leadership remained very much in eastern Socialist control. As a result of both of these factors, more than 22,000 members left the party over the course of 1913. More than 6500 more members were gone by the end of 1915. The Socialist vote dropped off dramatically during the 1914 mid-term elections. Nick Salvatore, Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 265-267. There is nothing in Wilson’s correspondence to his campaign staff to indicate that any of them were aware of the internal Socialist Party tensions or that they took notice of the declining Socialist vote in the 1914 mid-terms. This could be explained by the fact that Wilson and his team rarely wrote or spoke explicitly about courting Socialists. It seems likely that when Wilson and/or Democratic strategists talked about courting “progressives” they were referring not only to former members of the Progressive Party, but also to independents who would be attracted to a social justice agenda, to include Socialists.


linked up with one of the nation’s rising legal scholars and political reformers, Louis Brandeis, and developed a plan to combat the Progressive Party’s goal of branding him as anti-labor.174 As noted labor historian Phillip Foner has documented, Brandeis encouraged Wilson and the Democrats to take a position that would, “couple the right to organize with the need for social legislation wherever it was required to protect labor from the overwhelming power of industry.”175 Wilson began emphasizing these principles in the final two months of the campaign, appearing pro-labor enough to win the public endorsement of the American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers just a week before voters went to the polls.176 But with that endorsement came expectations of specific gains for labor – expectations that the Wilson administration failed to meet during the first three years of his administration.177

174 The 1912 campaign was not the first time that Wilson had worked to remake his image with progressive-minded voters. During his 1910 gubernatorial race in New Jersey, he shed his conservatism in order to embrace the growing reformist sentiment across the state. This was particularly true in the last month of the campaign when he came out unequivocally in favor of a strong corrupt practices law and for an empowered public utilities commission. See Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House*, 180-181. Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*, 122-126.


176 Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol V: The AFL in the Progressive Era 1910-1915*, 115-117. For additional background on the actions of the AFL in the 1912 campaign, see Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917*, 231-240. Greene notes that the trade unionists’ vote in 1912 certainly helped Wilson, but he received less support from that bloc than the 1908 Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan. More disturbing to Democrats and AFL leaders alike was the increase in labor votes for Debs. More than half of the nearly one million votes Debs received came from people voting Socialist for the first time.

As the 1916 election neared, the issue of restricting child labor emerged as an opportunity for Wilson to begin his amends to progressives and labor leaders alike. The leading reform organization for restricting child labor during the Progressive Era was the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). When originally formed in 1904, the NCLC specifically disavowed federal legislation, preferring to press for reform through the states. Over the next decade, their methods met with great success in almost all parts of the country.¹⁷⁸ Problems persisted, though. Powerful mill owners in the southern manufacturing states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama had successfully blocked the passage of meaningful child labor legislation. Additionally, the tremendous variation in state laws and uneven enforcement gave industries incentive to move to states with more lenient regulation. The combined difficulties of disunity in state legislation and southern recalcitrance led the NCLC to develop and support a federal child labor bill in 1913.¹⁷⁹

The NCLC-supported Palmer-Owen Bill, introduced in Congress in 1914, relied on the principle that the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution gave Congress the

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¹⁷⁸ By 1914, forty states had enacted at least some type of protective legislation for children working in mills and factories.

power to prohibit child labor.\textsuperscript{180} For most states, the bill’s provisions were less restrictive than the legislation already in place at the state level. For the southern mill owners whose states had no such laws, though, it was anathema.\textsuperscript{181} Nonetheless, it passed in the house by a vote of 233-43 in February, 1915. But passage in the senate was blocked by a conservative third-term Democrat representing the interests of the southern mill owners, Senator Lee Overman of North Carolina who employed obstructionist tactics such that the bill died without ever coming to a vote when Congress adjourned on March 4, 1915.\textsuperscript{182}

The bill was reintroduced at the next session of congress as the Keating-Owen bill.\textsuperscript{183} It quickly sped through the house and passed in January 1916 by a vote of 343-46. In the senate, Overman again managed to block the measure. When the Democrats met in caucus in July, the southern opponents of the bill threatened to filibuster and obstruct key pieces of legislation if the child labor bill came up for a vote.\textsuperscript{184} It was at this point that Wilson made his important decision to intervene and pressure the members of his own party. On the morning of July 18, he traveled from the White House to the

\textsuperscript{180} Specifically, the Palmer-Owen bill banned the interstate commerce of any goods manufactured by a company that employed children under the age of 14 or employed children between the ages of 14 and 16 for longer than eight-hour days.

\textsuperscript{181} Trattner, \textit{Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America}, 124. Novkov, \textit{Historicizing the Figure of the Child in Legal Discourse: The Battle Over the Regulation of Child Labor}, 373. This bill was first introduced by two Democrats, Representative A. Mitchell Palmer, a third-term Congressman from Pennsylvania, and Senator Robert Owen of Oklahoma.

\textsuperscript{182} Trattner, \textit{Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America}, 127.

\textsuperscript{183} Representative Palmer had vacated his House seat in order to pursue an ultimately unsuccessful campaign for election to the U.S. Senate. Therefore, Senator Owen now co-sponsored the bill with Representative Edward Keating, a progressive journalist turned Democratic politician from Colorado.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 128-130.
capital for a meeting with Democratic senate leaders with the express purpose of convincing the members of his own party to pass the Keating-Owen Bill. Following the president’s meeting with the senate Democrats in which he connected passage of this bill with the party’s overall image heading into the 1916 election, the obstructionists relented and the bill came up for debate the following day. It passed by a vote of 52-12 on August 8 and Wilson signed it into law on September 1, 1916.\(^{185}\) It was immediately challenged by a lawsuit and, despite nearly two years of effectively reducing the number of child laborers, the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* in 1918.\(^{186}\)

Wilson’s support of the Keating-Owen Bill marked a reversal of his previous position regarding a federal child labor measure. Even before taking office in 1913, Wilson made it clear to reformers that, as much as he sympathized with the cause, he felt that federal legislation to limit child labor that was based on congressional power over interstate commerce exceeded constitutional boundaries.\(^{187}\) He reiterated this position to

\(^{185}\) The facts surrounding Wilson’s meeting with the Senate Democrats have been detailed in numerous sources to include Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917*, 226-227.\,(\hspace{1em}) Trattner, *Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America*, 130.\,(\hspace{1em}) Wood, *Constitutional Politics in the Progressive Era: Child Labor and the Law*, 66-68.

\(^{186}\) In a 5-4 vote, the Supreme Court ruled that the commerce clause of the constitution which granted the federal government the right to regulate interstate commerce did not give the federal government the right to regulate the laws governing the hours or age of workers within individual states, even if the goods those workers produced (cotton, in this particular case) were traded across state lines. Such regulation, the majority argued, was purely an issue for the individual states, in accordance with the 10th amendment. This ruling was officially overturned in *United States v. Darby Lumber Company* in 1941 when the Court upheld the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 which relied on the commerce clause to for federal regulation of employment conditions.

\(^{187}\) As president-elect, Wilson held a conference with a wide range of social welfare advocates in January, 1913. Two prominent members of the NCLC, Dr. Owen Lovejoy and Dr. Alexander McKelway, attended the conference and made the case for federal child labor legislation. Wilson released a statement at the conference’s conclusion that questioned the constitutionality of any such proposal. He stated, “Every subject treated here to-day engages my deep interest and enthusiasm. My enthusiasm is in proportion generally to the practicability of a scheme.” For an account of this meeting, see News Report: “Wilson Captures Social Workers: Holds a Secret conference with Them at Mrs. Alexander’s Castle Point Home” (January 27, 1916), *LWWP*. 

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NCLC leaders when they asked him for support of the Palmer-Owen Bill in early 1914, telling them that “such legislation could not be upheld and, if passed, would open the door to unlimited federal regulation.” Nonetheless, he maintained a public silence on the topic as the bill moved through the House in 1915 and stalled in the Senate that spring. When it was reintroduced as the Keating-Owen bill in 1916, he again refrained from public comment until it stalled in the Senate for a second time and then made his decision to intervene.

Wilson’s journey to the capitol on that July morning in 1916 was a clear departure from his previous stance on federal regulation of child labor through the commerce clause of the Constitution. His decision a month later in August to support a federal eight-hour day law for railroad workers (the Adamson Act) involved an equally dramatic reversal. The railroad crisis in the summer of 1916 was not the first time that Wilson had become personally involved in disputes between the railroad brotherhoods and railroad owners. Twice previously in his first term, he had intervened in labor negotiations in order to prevent a strike. But his actions concerning the Adamson Act are especially

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188 Trattner, Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America, 121-122. See also Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 59.

189 The “Big Four” railroad brotherhoods included the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, and Order of Railway Conductors.

190 Wilson’s first intervention occurred in 1913 when he pressured Congress to pass the Newlands Act. This legislation revised the Erdman Act of 1898 by improving the rules for arbitration and mediation in favor of the Brotherhoods. The second intervention came in July and August of 1914 when the Brotherhoods demanded improvements to working conditions and wages from railroad owners. When the two sides could not reach an agreement and the Brotherhoods threatened to strike, Wilson called leaders from both groups to the White House and got them to agree to a plan of arbitration as proposed by the Board of Mediation and Conciliation. Both of these crises are covered in detail in Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol VI: On the Eve of America's Entrance into World War I, 1915-1916, 143-163.
significant in that the crisis culminated with the president demanding federal legislation to protect a particular class – a position that he argued strongly against in his 1912 campaign. Further, Wilson’s support of the eight-hour day for railroad workers became a major issue in the 1916 campaign. While earning him remarkable support from progressives, labor leaders, and workers, it also was a point on which his Republican opponent centered his attacks in the final months of the campaign.

The specific events that led up to Wilson’s intervention on behalf of the brotherhoods in August 1916 are well known. A quick summary is as follows: In June 1916, the brotherhoods demanded an eight-hour day for their members, along with no reduction in wages and time and a half for overtime work. The owners rejected this demand, prompting the brotherhoods to vote overwhelmingly in favor of a general strike to begin on Labor Day (September 4, 1916). The Board of Mediation met with both groups in early August, but could not bring agreement. When the board president informed Wilson that negotiations would probably fail, Wilson requested to meet with representatives from the brotherhoods and the owners at the White House.

As the conference at the White House began on August 14, three weeks before the strike deadline, the president proposed a compromise. He urged the owners to grant the eight-hour day, but also asked the brotherhoods to delay a final decision on punitive overtime pay until a federal commission could be appointed to study the entire railroad


problem and then make a recommendation. The brotherhoods accepted this compromise on August 18, but the owners’ representatives did not. Wilson then summoned the actual presidents of the railroads to Washington. Simultaneously, he directed congressional leaders to begin work on legislation that would codify his compromise proposal in case he was unable to persuade the railroad presidents to voluntarily accept it. In a series of meetings from August 18-21, the president was unable to prevail over the railroad presidents. 193

In the waning days of August, Wilson decided that he had no recourse but to call for congress to act in order to prevent a strike. He met with senate Democrats on August 28 to lay out his position and then took the extraordinary step of addressing a joint session of congress on the following day. He asked for legislation that represented the basic tenets of the compromise he had proposed to the brotherhoods and the owners, but that also included measures to facilitate arbitration in future conflicts. Although he did not explicitly blame the railroad owners for the impasse, he implied that they – more so than the Brotherhoods – were the obstacle to a solution that did not involve government intervention. 194

Following the president’s address, the Commerce Committee immediately resumed work on the specifics of the legislation. The final form of the bill did not include the rate increase and antistrike provisions that Wilson had requested, but it did


194 Ibid. Of the owners, Wilson said, “The representatives of the railway management have felt justified in declining a peaceful settlement which would engage all the forces of justice, public and private, on their side to take care of the event . . . They do not care to rely upon the friendly assurances of the Congress or the President. They have thought it best that they should be forced to yield, if they must yield, not by counsel, but by the suffering of the country.” An Address to a Joint Session of Congress (August 29, 1916), LWWP.
comply with the President’s request in almost every other way. Named for the
Commerce Committee Chairman, Senator W.C. Adamson of Georgia, the Adamson Act
passed the House by a vote of 239-56 on September 1 and passed in the Senate on the
following day by a vote of 43-28. Voting in the Senate was highly partisan with all but
two Democrats voting in favor of the measure and all but one Republican (Senator La
Follette) in opposition. In the House, all but three Democrats supported the bill and,
while a slim majority of Republicans voted against it, 53 joined the Democrats by voting
aye. Wilson signed the bill in a ceremony on his personal railcar at Union Station on
September 3. He gave each of the four signing pens to the chiefs of the Four
Brotherhoods who promptly cancelled plans for the Labor Day strike.

So, in a span of just three days in early September and with only two months left
before the 1916 election, President Wilson signed into law two pieces of legislation that
increased the regulatory power of the federal government far beyond the boundaries of
his 1912 “New Freedom” platform. Both the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act and the
Adamson Act seemed to signal a major reorientation in the President’s thinking about the
power of government to legislate social justice through federal action. Understandably, a
number of scholars have addressed the important question of this dramatic shift.

Wilson’s primary biographer, Arthur Link, argues that Wilson was a qualified
liberal with doubts about intervention in the economy when he was elected to his first

195 Specifically, the vote among House Republicans was 69-53. For a breakdown of voting and
detailed analysis of the geographical distribution of those supporting the measure, see Sanders, Roots of

Nationalism,” Link contends that Wilson wanted the federal government to destroy special privileges and any barriers to individual potential. Much of the rhetoric from both men was aimed at large corporations which they believed unfairly limited competition. But for Wilson, labor unions and progressive reformers also sought policies that, in his thinking, stifled individualism. He labeled the Progressive Party’s social welfare and reform program “paternalistic.” 197 According to Link, the president explicitly extended the meaning of the New Freedom doctrine of “special privileges to none” to oppose protective labor legislation of all kinds, claiming that it favored a particular class of citizens at the expense of others. 198

So, who was the Woodrow Wilson of 1916 who suddenly supported protective labor legislation? According to Link, he was a man facing re-election and desperately in need of progressive support. Link explains:

Those observers who predicted the President would adhere stubbornly to New Freedom concepts did not well understand Woodrow Wilson. He had broad political principles, to be sure; but he was not an inflexible dogmatist on methods or details. As he thought the Democratic Party offered the only hope of constructive, progressive change, he believed his party’s most important task was to stay in power. Nowhere did he come out and say that his desire to maintain the Democrats in power was responsible for the commitment he made to advanced progressivism in 1916. Yet he became almost a new political creature, and under his leadership a Democratic Congress enacted the most sweeping and significant progressive legislation in the history of the country up to that time. 199

The “advanced progressivism” to which Link refers included Wilson’s nomination of Louis D. Brandeis to the Supreme Court, his support of the rural credits, workmen’s


198 Ibid., 56.

compensation, and child labor bills, his backing of the Lafollette Seaman’s Act, and support for the principle of woman suffrage. As a result of these moves, nearly every social justice plank of the 1912 Progressive Party platform had been enacted by the Wilson Administration by the eve of the 1916 election.

In placing all of the key social reform legislation of late 1916 into the single category of “advanced progressivism,” Link glosses over key differences in the level of public support for the various measures and the degree to which Wilson’s support marked a shift in his personal principles. Link does acknowledge that the President’s shift toward nationalistic solutions began early in his first term, noting that Wilson “was, quite simply, at a point of metamorphosis in his thinking about legislative policy, and the political exigencies only hastened his change.” For Link, then, Wilson’s progressive turn resulted from a convergence of his new thinking about national solutions combined with the dictates of electoral politics.

On the specific issue of a federal child labor bill, Link’s account contains no hint of whether the president was concerned with alienating the southern Democrats who opposed the measure or whether he had any correspondence with them prior to his direct intervention in July. It also omits any discussion of Wilson’s concern with whether or not...
not the measure would pass the test of constitutionality that it was sure to face. Similarly, Link’s re-telling of the President’s involvement with the Adamson Act is devoid of specific analysis outside of the political ground to be gained by Democratic support for the measure.202

In a work focused specifically on child labor legislation, Stephen B. Wood directly challenges Link’s interpretation of Wilson’s conversion.203 While acknowledging that political considerations were surely part of the equation, he sees the President as undergoing a transformation in thinking about the constitutionality of federal intervention into the economy throughout his first term in office. Wood further points out that Link “largely ignores the rapid shift in public attitudes about the constitutional issues between 1907 and 1916 . . . and the fact that both radical agrarian and conservative states’ rights Democrats enthusiastically supported the Keating-Owen Bill.”204 Wood’s analysis of Wilson’s political thought conflicts with that offered by most historians of the Progressive Era who tend to see the president as, at best, a reluctant reformer.205

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though, portrays the president as willing to use the power of the federal government to intervene in the economy from the beginning of his 1912 campaign. Rather than seeing Wilson’s success in pushing the Keating-Owen Bill through the Senate as a shift away from New Freedom principles, Wood argues that it was a fulfillment of the president’s consistent vision to humanize industrial life in America.

Wood’s interpretation is supported by historian Kendrick Clements’ more recent biography of Wilson. Unlike Woods, Clements engages with historians who have trumpeted the conservative Wilson interpretation and, unlike Link, he considers the motivation behind Wilson’s support of each one of the pieces of “advanced progressivism” individually. In the case of both the Keating-Owen Bill and the Adamson Act, he concedes that Wilson’s support for these measures was primarily driven by his desire to win re-election. However, he argues, the fact that the shift may have been

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Ibid., 77. Unfortunately, Wood’s work appears uninformed by the larger body of scholarship on Wilson and the Progressive Era. He makes no reference to works by historians such as Hofstadter or Kolko, both of whom had published research relevant to Wood’s interpretation. His failure to engage with the interpretations by previous historians is one of the few shortcomings of an otherwise excellent analysis of this particular chapter of Progressive Era history. In a more recent biography, John Milton Cooper, Jr. supports this analysis of Wilson’s progressive turn. Emphasizing the influence of English political theorist Edmund Burke on Wilson’s thinking, Cooper asserts that Wilson viewed expediency as a virtue, so long as one did not compromise fundamental principles. In this case, Wilson agreed with the growing reformist sentiment that the federal government had a role to play in regulating the economy and protecting workers. And he grew increasingly comfortable with supporting legislation that would enhance that role because, in his mind, such support did not force him to abandon the basic small government tenets of the New Freedom platform. See Cooper, Woodrow Wilson: A Biography, 336.

Clements, The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson, 44.
motivated by political concerns does not necessarily make it unprincipled.\textsuperscript{209} Clements examines a wide array of Wilson’s writings on the role of government in promoting the general welfare and concludes, “As a responsible political leader [Wilson believed] it was therefore his duty to change his positions in response to changing public demands. To change with the times was to be consistent with principle, not to abandon it.”\textsuperscript{210} While conceding the importance of electoral politics, Clements also believes Wilson’s shift was in keeping with his constantly evolving stand on the potential of government to legislate in order to meet the public’s needs.\textsuperscript{211}

Labor historians, too, have given considerable attention to the both the reason for and the impact of Wilson’s rather remarkable transformation in 1916. In his sweeping history of the labor movement published in 1982, Phillip Foner disputes Link’s grouping of the Adamson Act with measures such as child labor and woman suffrage. In the case of the Adamson Act, Foner says that political considerations of the upcoming presidential election certainly played a role, but they were “not the prime motive for Wilson’s action – the serious damage a railroad strike would inflict on the nation’s economy and the Wilson preparedness program was a significant factor influencing his thinking.”\textsuperscript{212} But

\textsuperscript{209} Note that this line of argument is echoed by Victoria Bissell Brown in her excellent essay on Wilson’s conversion to the cause of woman suffrage. See Brown, \textit{Did Woodrow Wilson's Gender Politics Matter?}, 127-128.

\textsuperscript{210} Clements, \textit{The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson}, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{212} Foner, \textit{History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol VI: On the Eve of America's Entrance into World War I, 1915-1916}, 167. Foner also points out that Wilson had indicated support for the principle of shorter hours before the 1916 crisis with the railroads and that Wilson was convinced that the majority of the public agreed with him on the general merits of the eight-hour day.
in the case of a federal child labor bill and woman suffrage, he contends that Wilson’s reversal was driven by the political exigencies of the 1916 election.\footnote{Ibid., 230. Foner mistakenly writes that Wilson supported the federal woman suffrage amendment prior to the 1916 election and that this won him support from NAWSA. As the preceding chapter and following chapter show, Wilson showed an increasing openness to the federal amendment as early as his September 1916 speech to the NAWSA convention in Atlantic City, but he did not explicitly speak in favor of the federal amendment until January 1918.}

A more cynical view of Wilson’s motives appears in a later Foner work that he co-authored with David Roediger. Writing in 1989, Roediger and Foner note Wilson’s political finesse with both the Keating-Owen Bill and the Adamson Act. In both cases, they argue, Wilson was able to make himself appear pro-labor without ever taking an unequivocal stand for federal action. They note that, although Wilson spoke of the eight-hour day as if it should be applied across all industries, the legislation he supported only made it applicable for children and certain railroad workers. Unconvinced of Wilson’s complete conversion, they write, “Both the Adamson Act and the Keating-Owen Child Labor Law illustrate Wilson’s political skill and the ambiguity of federal commitment to shorter hours.”\footnote{Roediger and Foner, \textit{Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day}, 195.} Understood in this way, Wilson’s support for the Adamson Act, in particular, can be seen as having much the same effect as his vote in favor of the state suffrage measure in New Jersey in 1915. Roediger and Foner join with most historians in noting that, actual limitations notwithstanding, “organized labor seized [the Adamson Act] as a presidential seal of approval for eight hours.”\footnote{Ibid., 195. See also Robert Whaples, ”Winning the Eight-Hour Day, 1909-1919,” \textit{The Journal of Economic History} 50, no. 2 (Jun. 1990): 403.} Just as suffragists used the President’s vote in New Jersey to argue that he had been won over to the cause (and to
argue, by extension, that others should follow his lead), so too did labor advocates tout Wilson’s support for the principle of the eight-hour day in future battles.

Other labor historians concur with Roediger and Foner about the primacy of political considerations for Wilson. Disagreements mostly center on who did the most to convince him of the political importance of supporting pro-labor measures. In her history of the American Federation of Labor, Julie Greene argues that Frank Walsh, chairman of the Commission on Industrial Relations, played a decisive role. Called by Wilson to the White House in late August, Walsh convinced the president that the eight-hour day was just and that large number of workers’ votes would swing toward the Democrats were he to take the side of the brotherhoods in the railroad crisis.\footnote{Greene, \textit{Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917}, 258. While emphasizing the key role played by Walsh with the Adamson Act, Greene more generally argues that Wilson’s progressive turn was the result of “a combination of political ambition, a desire for reelection, and the arguments of progressives he trusted.” Ibid.} As part of her overall argument about the importance of Midwestern and Southern agrarian interests, Elizabeth Sanders argues that it was this peripheral agrarian coalition – more than the leaders of organized labor or progressive reformers – who provided the votes in Congress that Wilson needed in order to enact key labor legislation.\footnote{Sanders, \textit{Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917}, 380-382.} Despite this difference in emphasis, both Sanders and Greene note the irony of the fact that winning the eight-hour day – seen by many as a major labor victory – was not a measure that the AFL had worked for nor actively supported since it involved intervention by the state.\footnote{Greene, \textit{Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917}, 258-59. See also Sanders, \textit{Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917}, 382. For Greene, this illustrates her larger point that Gompers and the AFL, tied to anti-statism, became increasingly less relevant and failed to set the agenda for working-class politics.}
Finally, there are those historians who choose not to dwell on the details of Wilson’s evolving principles on domestic legislation in favor of stressing his concern with foreign affairs. With varying points of emphasis, these historians argue that Wilson was willing to act the political chameleon in 1916 because he firmly believed that America had to take the lead in reshaping the international political order - and that only he and the Democratic Party understood how this ought to be done. Further, he had no faith in Hughes or other Republican leaders to grasp the significance of this mission.219 For these historians, Wilson was willing to make almost any compromise on the domestic front in order to ensure he remained in power to lead America on its mission to save the world.

A historiographical void lies between those who claim that Wilson’s motives in supporting the Keating-Owen Bill and the Adamson Act were primarily political and the assertions of others that the President’s support was consistent with his changing understanding of the power and potential of the federal government to curb the harshness of life in an industrialized nation.220 This chapter attempts to fill part of that void with a more thorough examination of Wilson’s interaction with the reformers who lobbied for the bills, the interest groups that opposed them, and the members of his own party in the Senate who were clearly divided on the issues. It also uses Wilson’s experience with

219 For examples of this argument, see Abrams, Woodrow Wilson and the Southern Congressmen, 1913-1916, 437., Levin, Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution, 2-4 and 45.

220 More recent historical work on child labor has failed to shed additional light on the complex issue of Wilson’s motivations in swinging the full power and authority of the executive behind the Keating-Owen Bill. The two most recent works on the topic are Hugh D. Hindman, Child Labor: An American History (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002) and Novkov, Historicizing the Figure of the Child in Legal Discourse: The Battle Over the Regulation of Child Labor, 369-404. Hindman’s work fails to even mention Wilson’s intervention with the Senate in 1916. Novkov’s account quickly glosses over the battle in Congress in favor of investigating the battle in the Supreme Court. An analysis of Wilson’s influence over Congress is not within the scope of her inquiry.
both the advocates and opponents of protective labor legislation as a way to help contextualize his decisions with regard to woman suffrage. His increasing openness to national solutions in the form of federal legislation in 1916 had important implications for his attitude toward the federal woman suffrage amendment in the following year.

The issue of restricting child labor was not new to Wilson when he assumed the presidency in 1913. It was, rather, an issue he had confronted early and often in his public career. As Governor-elect of New Jersey in December, 1910, he voiced his support for a state child labor law during a speech to the senior class of Princeton University. During his brief administration in New Jersey, he helped shepherd a “Messenger Boy Bill” through the state legislature in 1911 and later authored the platform of the New Jersey Democratic Party in 1912 which promised to continue to work for legislation that included the “careful regulation of the hours of labor for children.”

As president, he repeatedly voiced his support for the principle of restricting child labor. In his 1913 inaugural address, he declared as just, “laws determining conditions of labor which individuals are powerless to determine for themselves.” When the editor of the Medical Review of Reviews asked him for a statement of support to be used in an upcoming child labor awareness campaign in 1914, Wilson complied, responding, “This

221 Wilson guest of Senior Class (Dec. 8, 1910), LWWP.

222 The “Messenger Boy Bill” restricted the employment of boys less than eighteen years of age between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. A News Report of Remarks in Trenton to the New Jersey Consumers’ League (February 25, 1911), LWWP. The Platform of the New Jersey Democratic Party (October 1, 1912), LWWP.

is a cause to which I have long been devoted.” Later, he approved of a plank in the 1916 Democratic Party Platform promising that all federal agencies would adhere to the child labor standards proposed by the NCLC in its “Uniform Child Labor Law” and that the party encouraged similar legislation for each of the states. In every case where he had the opportunity to voice his support for the principle of restricting child labor, Wilson expressed such support. Simultaneously, though, he consistently stated his concern about the constitutionality of any federal regulation.

As early as 1908 Wilson wrote in his political treatise, Constitutional Government in the United States, that a federal child labor bill which relied on the commerce clause was an abuse of Congressional power. Wilson’s primary concern – one which could continue to plague his thoughts even after he decided to support federal regulation – was opening the floodgates of the commerce clause. If congress could regulate the labor of children within the borders of a state, he worried, where else might they see fit to use the commerce clause to intervene?

He reiterated this concern when speaking to reporters just after his gubernatorial victory in New Jersey in November, 1910. Wilson explained his belief that, “We will never get to the place toward which we all aspire by any such excited life in any one part of the Constitution. If it is to grow as we grow, it must be throughout its structure. The

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225 The Platform of the Democratic Party (June 10, 1916), LWWP.

226 Woodrow Wilson, Constitutional Government in the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 179. Specifically, he cautioned, “If the power to regulate commerce between the States can be stretched to include the regulation of labor in mills and factories, it can be made to embrace every particular of the industrial organization and action of the country. The only limitations Congress would observe, should the Supreme Court assent to such obviously absurd extravagancies of interpretation, would be the limitations of opinion and of circumstance.”
theory that child labor, for example, may be classed under interstate commerce logically leads to the inclusion of more and more of the phases of intercourse until there is no reason why divorce and marriage laws should not be put there.”

This statement illustrates two important characteristics in Wilson’s thinking. The first is his belief, in 1910, that the commerce clause could not safely be extended to regulate child labor without becoming an open avenue for Congress to regulate matters far beyond the intended scope of the clause. Secondly, though, the statement reveals Wilson’s recognition of the fact that the Constitution should “grow” and be adapted by the public to meet their changing needs. Clearly, he believed that any such growth should be gradual, limited, and carefully applied so as to not upset the delicate constitutional system of checks and balances. But he was not so conservative that he believed the American public should be prisoners of a document designed to serve their needs.

Wilson’s concern about the constitutionality of a federal child labor bill continued throughout his first presidential term. Prior to taking office in January, 1913, Wilson told NCLC leaders, “My own party in some of its elements represents a very strong States’ rights feeling. It is very plain that you would have to go much further than most interpretations of the Constitution would allow if you were to give to the government general control over child labor throughout the country.”

His position changed little over the course of his first year in office. When NCLC President Felix Adler and two of his lieutenants requested a meeting with the President in January, 1914 to discuss the Palmer-Owen Bill, he told his secretary, “Glad to see these gentlemen, but they ought to

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know, in all frankness, that no child labor law yet proposed has seemed to me constitutional.”

Neither his public statements nor his private correspondence include any direct references to the constitutionality of federal regulation after this point. That can be partially explained by Lovejoy, McKelway, and Adler’s success in getting the president to agree to maintain a public silence while Congress debated both the Palmer-Owen and the Keating-Owen bills. It may also be explained by the fact that the NCLC leaders had done extensive work to build their case that the proposed bill was, in fact, constitutional and would be upheld by the Supreme Court.

Like Wilson, NCLC leaders were apprehensive about the ability of the Palmer-Owen Bill, if passed, to withstand judicial review. Their concerns with constitutionality had driven Lovejoy to bring in a number of legal and labor experts to help draft the bill. Additionally, they drafted an educational memorandum entitled “In Reply to Questions on the Constitutionality of the Palmer Federal Child Labor Bill.”

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229 Tumulty to Wilson (January 24, 1914) and Wilson to Tumulty (January 24, 1914), PWW. Adler was accompanied by Dr. Alexander McKelway and Dr. Owen Lovejoy, both leading members of the NCLC.

230 Prior to their February 1914 meeting with the President, the NCLC Board of Trustees had held a special meeting to consider the Palmer-Owen Bill. At that meeting, the board approved several important resolutions. For the first time in the organization’s ten year history, board members agreed to support a federal child labor bill. They also appointed a committee whose purpose it was to meet with President Wilson and try to win his support for the proposed legislation. Finally, they resolved to confer with the Legislative Drafting Bureau “with a view to retaining the services of the Bureau in supplying expert information on points of constitutionality.” Minutes, National Child Labor Committee Board of Trustees, Thirty-ninth Meeting (January 22, 1914), National Child Labor Committee Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter referred to as NCLC Papers), Box 7.

231 William Draper Lewis, Dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and Charles P. Neill, former commissioner of the Bureau of Labor, were instrumental in developing the legislation’s form and substance. Trattner, Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America, 123.

anticipation of questions that NCLC leaders knew would be asked, the memorandum cited a series of recent Supreme Court rulings that the authors believed had increased the power of the federal government to intervene in the economic affairs of individual states if it was to safeguard or improve the welfare of the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{233}

When the NCLC leaders met with Wilson in February, they presented him with a copy of the proposed bill and the educational memorandum.\textsuperscript{234} According to Lovejoy, the President agreed to maintain a public silence and said “that he would give the matter very careful consideration.”\textsuperscript{235} It is significant to note that the next public action taken by the president with regards to child labor was to press for the passage of the Keating-Owen Bill in July 1916. This suggests that he was sincere when he said he would carefully consider the memorandum on constitutionality and that, perhaps, he was convinced by the compelling document that federal regulation of child labor was not beyond the scope of the commerce clause. At a minimum, it seems, he became willing to let the courts decide the matter.

Although there is no transcript of Wilson’s meeting with Democratic Senators on July 18, 1916, the debate that followed in the Senate suggests that, in addition to making his point about the political value of passing the bill, he may have also urged the reluctant members of his own party to defer to the judicial branch. The consensus opinion of the

\textsuperscript{233} Specifically, it cited \textit{Hoke v. United States} (1913) and \textit{Muller v. Oregon} (1908). \textit{Hoke v. United States} upheld the Mann Act which relied on the commerce clause to ban the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes (the so-called “white-slave trade”). In \textit{Muller v. Oregon}, the court upheld the right of government to intervene in economic affairs in order to promote social welfare. Specifically, it upheld an Oregon statute limiting the workday for women to ten hours.

\textsuperscript{234} Report of the General Secretary to the fortieth Meeting of the Board of Trustees, National Child Labor Committee (April 20, 1914), \textit{NCLC Papers}, Box 7.

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
bill’s proponents, repeated in one form or another in almost all of their speeches, was that
the bill was desirable for humanitarian reasons and that it stood a solid chance of being
upheld by the Supreme Court, particularly given the Court’s recent favorable rulings in
_Muller v. Oregon_ and _Hoke v. United States_.\footnote{Congressional Record, 64th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 12194-12229 and 12276-12313. See specifically the speeches of Senator Robinson of Arkansas (12055-56), Senator Kenyon of Iowa (12218), and Senator Colt of Rhode Island (12285). See also Wood’s analysis of this line of thinking among the bill’s proponents in Wood, Constitutional Politics in the Progressive Era: Child Labor and the Law, 69-75.} Senator Gallinger, a Republican from
New Hampshire, made direct reference to Wilson’s changed outlook on the bill’s
constitutionality. Gallinger explained, “I have since had occasion to consult some of
those same [Democratic] Senators and they have told me that they have changed their
views, as the President of the United States has changed his views, and that they now
believe the legislation to be constitutional . . . assuming that it will go to the Supreme
Court of the United States for interpretation and decision.”\footnote{Ibid., 12301.}

Gallinger’s statement implies that Wilson told members of his own party that he had changed his mind on the
possibilities of the commerce clause to regulate child labor. If that implication is correct,
it also means that Wilson’s motivation in pressing for the bill was more principled than
the interpretation which holds that he acted almost purely out of political necessity.

Political necessity, however, was certainly part of the motivation. Early on in the
1916 campaigning season, Wilson began receiving advice from supporters about how to
use the child labor issue to win over disgruntled progressives. In June, Senator Owen,
co-sponsor of the child labor bill, wrote to Wilson, “I enclose what I think would be of
special value as a plank to attract the progressive elements in the country who ought to be


with us . . .”238 The enclosure to which Owen referred was a statement of Democratic principles that included a plank to prohibit child labor. Wilson’s willingness to include this plank in the 1916 Democratic Party platform indicates that he took Owen’s suggestion to heart.

As the Keating-Owen Bill languished in the Democratic Senate Caucus in July, Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, wrote to encourage the President to intervene. Daniels, a native of North Carolina and former editor of one of the South’s leading newspapers, *The Raleigh Observer*, told Wilson that he knew there was opposition to the federal child labor bill among certain southern Congressmen - but went on to say, “I believe that the failure to pass that bill will lose us more votes in the close states than our Southern Senators appreciate.”239 On the same day that Wilson heard from Daniels, he also received a letter from McKelway who cautioned, “In spite of the progressive record of the Democratic Party, I fear that the action on the child labor bill will be regarded as a test of genuine interest in humane measures opposed by commercial interests. I wish that you could see your way clear to use your influence in furtherance of this important measure.”240 The combined effect of Daniels’ and McKelway’s warnings were enough to propel Wilson to action. He responded back to the NCLC leader the following day, “I went up to the Senate yesterday to urge the immediate passage of the

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238Owen to Wilson (June 8, 1916), *LWWP*.

239Daniels to Wilson (July 17, 1916), *LWWP*. Daniels pointed out that Senator Gallinger, a Republican from New Hampshire, had made a speech on the Senate floor in which he emphasized that the Republicans were ready and willing to pass the child labor bill and that its failure to be brought to a vote rested squarely with the Democratic caucus. Wilson responded to Daniels the following day, informing him, “I am going to try to see some of the Senators at once and see if we cannot assist to get them out of the hole that the old fox [Gallinger] has put them in.” Wilson to Daniels (July 18, 1916), *LWWP*.

240McKelway to Wilson (July 17, 1916), *LWWP*. 
Child Labor Bill and am encouraged to believe that the situation has changed considerably.”^{241}

In terms of winning over reform-minded voters, both the public coverage of Wilson’s actions and the private correspondence he received were overwhelmingly positive. A July 19^{th} headline in the New York Times read, “President Demands A Child Labor Law, Makes a Personal Visit to the Capitol to Impress his Views on Senate Leaders, Urges the Pending Bill, Bases His Request on the Measure’s Merits as Well as Political Expediency.”^{242} Subsequent New York Times coverage highlighted the manner in which the bill’s proponents used Wilson’s activism as a mechanism for propelling the bill towards a successful vote.^{243} This was clearly an intended effect. Banking on the political value of the bill, Wilson even postponed accepting the Democratic Party’s nomination until the bill had passed so that he could make reference to it in his acceptance speech.^{244}

A flood of letters in the days following Wilson’s trip to the Capitol suggest that his activism did, in fact, garner him progressive support. Progressive journalists from both sides of the country congratulated him on taking decisive action.^{245} Similarly, Wilson

^{241}Wilson to McKelway (July 19, 1916), LWWP.


^{245}See John J. Fitzgerald (editor of the Boston weekly journal The Republic) to Wilson (July 19, 1916), PWW. See also Charles Samuel Jackson (editor of The Oregon Journal) to Wilson (July 21, 1916), LWWP.
received a telegram from Benjamin Barr Lindsey, a district judge in Denver and a member of the National Executive Committee of the Progressive Party. Lindsey’s telegram, which the Democratic National Committee subsequently released for publication in the *New York Times*, gushed, “Your splendid attitude on this question and willingness to change from your former position with the states rights Democrats to Federal or National control when it becomes clearly apparent that it is the best method to put an end to certain evils or advance certain rights should be sufficient proof to wavering Progressives that the Democratic Party is as willing as the Republican Party in proper cases to put the National welfare above state considerations.”

Lindsey’s sentiments were echoed by other progressives in both their private correspondence with Wilson and their public writings.

Wilson’s support for child labor legislation was one of those rare political moves that managed to please a significant number of voters, while not having the simultaneous affect of alienating a large voting bloc. Opponents of the federal bill were primarily limited to a few southern states that Wilson’s advisors often told him were not representative of the South as a whole. This fact was made clear in a number of ways. When the House Labor Committee held public hearings on the bill in the spring of 1914, the testimony was dominated by the bill’s advocates. The bill passed in the House by

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an overwhelming majority of 233-43 in February 1915, indicating the broad support the measure enjoyed. Of the 43 opposition votes, 35 came from six southern states, but there was not a “solid south” vote. In fact, only in the Congressional delegations from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi did a majority oppose the bill.\textsuperscript{249}

More serious opposition emerged before the final vote in the Senate. David Clark, a native of North Carolina and the editor and sole owner of the \textit{Southern Textile Bulletin}, seeing the ease with which the bill passed in the House, organized a conference of mill men from several southern states and founded the Executive Committee of Southern Cotton Manufacturers. The organization’s sole purpose was to block federal child labor legislation.\textsuperscript{250} Clark had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the NCLC to abandon its campaign for a federal law. He accused the NCLC propagandists of grossly exaggerating both the number of children working in textile mills and the poor working conditions within those mills. He conceded that there were a significant number of children employed in mill work - but argued that a federal law was unnecessary because, “The Southern States are essentially law abiding, and sooner or later every mill will be forced to comply with the legal requirements.”\textsuperscript{251} Clark’s plea fell on deaf ears, for the NCLC was moving confidently forward with federal legislation.

\textsuperscript{248} It was not until the final session of hearings in May that any opposition materialized. Even then, the contrary view was presented by just three prominent cotton manufacturers from South Carolina who contended that the South was well on its way to ending child labor and argued against the constitutionality of any federal law. Ibid., 38-39., Trattner, \textit{Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America}, 125-126.

\textsuperscript{249} \textit{Congressional Record}, 63\textsuperscript{rd} Congress, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915), 3836.

Neither Clark nor the organization he represented ever tried to influence Wilson directly. When the federal child labor bill was reintroduced in the 64th Congress, Clark’s organization had numerous manufacturers and doctors give testimony before the House Labor Committee and, later, before the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee. When the latter voted 7-6 to report the bill favorably, Clark successfully appealed to southern senators to block consideration of the bill. They only relented, he later recalled, “when President Wilson under the influence of certain agitators went to the Senate and demanded the passage of the law.”

Clark was convinced that Wilson’s motivations were purely political. In an editorial, he wrote, “The passage by Congress and the approval by President Wilson of the Child Labor Law was a matter of politics; nothing more, nothing less. Still, Clark made no attempt to correspond directly with the President or any members of his cabinet about his decision. Instead, the Executive Committee of Southern Cotton Manufacturers chose to fight the federal law through the court system. It was Clark who recruited a mill operative, Reuben H. Dagenhart, to file suit against the Keating-Owen law. This case eventually became the Supreme Court Case *Hammer v. Dagenhart* in which the law was found to be unconstitutional.

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251 David Clark, “A Demand for a Square Deal,” *Child Labor Bulletin*, 4, no. 1 (May 1915), 41. Clark’s gave his “square deal” speech at the NCLC’s 11th Annual Conference in 1915 at which he personally appeared as a representative of the Executive Committee of Southern Cotton Manufacturers.


253 Ibid.


So opposition to the bill was limited. Wilson heard from several men from the South that Clark and the mill owners he represented were a small minority. For example, James H. Holloway of North Carolina told Wilson, “The opposition to the Child Labor Law does not represent One PerCent of the people of the South. It is being festered and agitated by our cotton and Knitting Mill Barons who look with horror and dismay on any effort looking to the reduction or curtailment of their enormous profits.”256 The message from men like Holloway was clear – do not worry about alienating the South by supporting the Keating-Owen bill. Armed with this advice and seeing the overwhelming support that the bill received in the House, Wilson recognized an opportunity to support a popular piece of legislation without alienating a significant bloc of voters. The political benefits clearly outweighed the potential costs.

Despite his eventual support for the Keating-Owen bill, Wilson never fully relinquished his constitutional misgivings about the use of the commerce clause to regulate the labor of children. Several months after signing the bill into law he received a letter from Secretary of War Newton Baker containing a series of resolutions adopted by the National Consumers League. One of the resolutions was approval of a federal eight-hour day law for women founded on the principles embodied in the federal child labor law. Wilson responded to Baker, “I dare say these are the first of a series of suggestions of a similar kind which will grow out of the Child Labor bill. I wonder what you yourself

256Holloway to Wilson (July 23, 1916), PWW. See also, Watkins to Wilson (July 21, 1916), PWW. Elton Watkins, a native of the South and later a U.S. Representative from Oregon wrote to the President, “I was born, reared and save last few years have lived in the south, consequently I know and understand temper and tone of southern people on child labor. The Hardwicks and Smiths [two southern Senators who opposed the bill] constitute an infinite small minority . . . Child labor finds favor in that class represented by the Harvester Trust and the cotton mills.”
think as to the limits of this sort of legislation by Congress? If Wilson harbored such doubts about expanding the commerce clause after the fact, why had he consented to support the child labor bill in the first place?

The president was willing to set aside his constitutional misgivings as a result of conducting his own cost-benefit analysis. On the benefit side of the ledger, he could list the fact that the principle behind the Keating-Owen bill, restricting the labor of children, was one he had consistently supported during his career in public life. Additionally, the measure enjoyed tremendous support among progressive voters and trade unionists, two voting blocs he sought to add to his coalition for the 1916 election. Finally, he was convinced by the two votes in the House (233-43 in 1915 and 343-46 in 1916) that passage of this bill was the will of the general public. And the costs were negligible. Pressing the Senate antagonized men like David Clark and the southern mill owners he represented, but it was clear from the House and Senate hearings and from the advice he received from other southerners that Clark and company were a small minority. More importantly, though, for a man with a strong states’ rights and laissez-faire background, was the potential for opening up the commerce clause to continued intervention by the federal government into the economic affairs of the states.

Wilson was able to rationalize away this final cost by taking to heart the arguments in favor of constitutionality offered up by the NCLC. Never a strict constructionist, the President recognized the need for the Constitution to change in order to meet the needs of those it was designed to serve. As he reviewed the NCLC memorandum that cited cases in which the Supreme Court had upheld the right and, in some cases, the responsibility of

\[\text{257Baker to Wilson (November 20, 1916), and Wilson to Baker (November 22, 1916), } LWWP.\]
the federal government to intervene in the economy in order to promote social welfare, he became optimistic about the potential for the Keating-Owen bill to withstand judicial review.\(^\text{258}\) At a minimum, the overwhelming public support, the lure of progressive and labor votes in the upcoming election, and the rightness of the principle involved made him willing to support the bill in the near term and defer to the judiciary in the long term. Ultimately, his decision to support a federal child labor bill reflected a combination of political need and principled decision-making.

The Adamson Act differed markedly from the Keating-Owen Act in that it did not involve such a direct matter of constitutionality and its opponents were a much larger and more unified group, namely the pro-business interests from across the country.\(^\text{259}\) But Wilson’s involvement with this legislation did follow very much the same pattern as the child labor bill. In the months leading up to the 1912 election, he explicitly rejected federal action to protect class interests. Speaking to a group of unionists in Buffalo on Labor Day in September, 1912, Wilson championed traditional American individualism and denied the very concept of different interests between labor and capital: “Half of the difficulties, half of the injustices of our politics, have been due to the fact that men regarded themselves as having separate interests . . . I would like always to look at [the
nation] as a whole, not divided up into sections and classes.”

He went on to specifically criticize the Progressive Party’s proposals for federal protective labor legislation, saying, “Let me tell you that the old adage that God takes care of those who take care of themselves is not gone out of date. No federal legislation can change that thing.” Speaking to a Working Men’s League in New York a few days later, Wilson began by saying, “I always like to feel that the company in which I am speaking represents no class and no class feeling, but represents the united interests of a people which can be divided, if divided at all, only artificially.”

Perhaps as a result of his narrow victory in 1912 and the election returns that indicated just how many Americans clearly disagreed with him on the reality of class interests, Wilson’s tone softened dramatically between September 1912 and his inaugural address in March 1913. As he took office, he reached out to workers and reform advocates alike. The new president noted America’s industrial achievements, but also said, “We have not hitherto stopped thoughtfully enough to count the human cost, the cost of lives snuffed out, of energies overtaxed and broken, the fearful physical and spiritual cost to the men and women and children, upon who the dead weight and burden of it all has fallen pitilessly the years through.”

He even took the dramatic step of questioning whether industrialization had rendered the ideal of individualism obsolete:

260 A Labor Day Address in Buffalo (September 2, 1912), LWWP.

261 Ibid. Wilson echoed this point about the fallacy of class interests in a talk to Buffalo Democrats later that night. He told the assemblage that the American people wanted, “to clear their government for action by making it free and then, when it is free, they wish to use it, not to serve any class or any party, but to serve civilization and the human race.” An Evening Address in Buffalo (September 2, 1912), LWWP.

262 An Address at a Workingmen’s Dinner in New York (September 4, 1912), LWWP.

263 An Inaugural Address (March 4, 1913), LWWP.
“Our thought has been ‘Let every man look out for himself; let every generation look out for itself,’ while we reared giant machinery which made it impossible that any but those who stood at the levers of control should have a chance to look out for themselves.”

Most dramatically, his inaugural address seemed to indicate a new openness to protective labor legislation. Wilson proclaimed, “Nor have we studied and perfected the means by which government may be put at the service of humanity . . . There can be no equality of opportunity, the first essential of justice in the body politic, if men and women and children be not shielded in their lives, their very vitality, from the consequences of great industrial and social processes which they cannot alter, control, or singly cope with.” He did not clarify whether the federal government or state governments or corporations themselves should “shield” workers, but his words were enough to raise the hopes and, more importantly, the expectations of progressives and labor leaders.

As documented previously in this chapter, Wilson’s actions in his first term consistently failed to live up to the expectations created by his inaugural address. Siding with the Brotherhoods in the railroad crisis of 1916 was, then, another opportunity for him to make amends. The potential votes to be gained by siding with labor on this issue are largely the same as those associated with the child labor bill and need not be recounted here. But how to move from general support for the principle of the eight-hour day to federal regulation of workers’ hours when he had previously stood so firmly against just such measures – and how to do so without appearing to be pandering for

\[264\] Ibid.

\[265\] Ibid.

\[266\] Of note, the proposed platform that Senator Owen sent to Wilson on June 8, 1916 also included support for “A working day not to exceed eight hours, with one day of rest in seven.” As with the child labor provision, Wilson consented to the inclusion of this line in the 1916 Democratic Party Platform. See Owen to Wilson (June 8, 1916), LWWP.
votes - remained an obstacle. Ultimately, Wilson justified his position on three basic principles: the justice of the eight-hour day, its endorsement by the general public, and the very real calamitous effects that would result from a general strike by the railroad Brotherhoods. He further shielded himself against charges of political expediency by repeatedly emphasizing that legislative action was a last resort to which he had turned only when all other options had been exhausted.

As the crisis reached a breaking point in late August, Wilson expressed in both his private correspondence and public declarations that he believed the eight-hour day was just and that it represented the consensus opinion of the majority of Americans. In a private letter to Democratic Senator Francis Newlands, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce, Wilson explained, “I made this recommendation [for the owners to concede the eight-hour day] because I believe the concession right. The eight-hour day undoubtedly has the sanction of the judgment of society in its favor and should be adopted.”267 On that same day, he issued a public statement that word-for-word repeated what he had told Newlands. The president’s statement was subsequently reprinted in every major newspaper in the country.268

As the battle over the eight-hour day increasingly moved into the public arena and was fought out in the nation’s newspapers, Wilson stood by his argument from justice. On August 18, the President of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), George Pope, sent Wilson a telegram (which he simultaneously released to the press)

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268For example, see “President Makes Public His Argument that Failed to Move Railway Heads,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1916, 1; “Responsibility on You if Strike is Declared”; Wilson in Advance Fixes the Blame on the Railway Managers and Presidents, but the Best Opinion Seems to be that Men will Stay at Work – Details of the Conferences in the White House,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1916, 1.
calling for the President to side with the owners and to force the Brotherhoods to agree to arbitration. In his response (also released to the press), Wilson again cited the public’s support for the eight-hour day, calling it a measure “to which the whole economic movement of the time seems to point.” Predictably, editors of the nation’s leading newspapers weighed in on the Pope-Wilson exchange, with Democratic-leaning papers generally supporting Wilson and the Brotherhoods and Republican-leaning papers supporting Pope and the owners in their call for arbitration. In the face of criticism, the president never wavered. He continued to emphasize justice, public will, and the debilitating impact of a general strike.

There is little reason to doubt Wilson’s sincerity about the disastrous effects of the strike. The fact that he devoted more than a week in the middle of August to personally leading the negotiations between the Brotherhoods and the owners is evidence of both his desire to avoid a strike and his hope to achieve a non-statist agreement. The New York Times reported on August 19 that the president was “still optimistic” about bringing the two sides together on a compromise. But when hopes of a compromise vanished and


the strike appeared imminent, Wilson’s fear of the consequences overpowered all other considerations and, reluctantly, he made the dramatic decision to turn to Congress.\footnote{A committee of railroad presidents submitted their final refusal to compromise to Wilson on August 28, 1916. See “Enclosure” to Austin Bruce Garretson and Others, With Enclosure to Wilson (August 29, 1916), \textit{LWWP}.}  

In his address to the joint session of Congress on August 29, Wilson reiterated the same arguments he had made in the press during the preceding weeks. He explained that he remained committed to the principle of arbitration for industrial disputes but went on to say that current law did not grant him the power to compel the two sides to submit the issue to arbitration. Emphasizing that a strike by 400,000 rail workers was now imminent, he forecasted the potential effects in cataclysmic terms: “Cities will be cut off from their food supplies, the whole commerce of the nation would be paralyzed, men of every sort and occupation will be thrown out of employment, countless thousands will in all likelihood be brought, it may be, to the very point of starvation, and a tragical national calamity brought on . . .”\footnote{“An Address to a Joint Session of Congress,” (August 29, 1916), \textit{LWWP}.}  Wilson also cited the potential for the railroad strike to threaten the nation’s security, both in terms of hampering the military’s ability to logistically support the 15,000 troops stationed on the Mexican border and its ability to respond to changing events in the war in Europe. Finally, he spoke again of justice, proclaiming, “that the whole spirit of the time and the preponderant evidence of recent economic experience spoke for the eight-hour day. It has been adjudged by the thought and experience of recent years a thing upon which society is justified in insisting.”\footnote{Ibid. Even after giving this address, Wilson was not certain that the crisis has been averted. He wrote to an advisor the next day, “I do not know whether it will be possible to get from Congress any action which will control, or even moderate, the situation.” Wilson to Norman Hapgood (August 30, 1916), \textit{LWWP}. Wilson’s concern was shared by Henry Ford who wrote to the President on September 1, 1916 to warn him that, if the strike was not averted, “The Ford Motor Company will of absolute necessity shut
Congress heeded the president’s call and the Adamson Act became the law of the land on September 3, 1916. Labor leaders and progressives alike hailed the attainment of what many considered to be labor’s most significant goal. IRC Chairman Frank Walsh heaped praise on Wilson, calling his action “unparalleled in the annals of statesmanship” and claiming that the Adamson Act marked, “the beginning of the end of an industrial despotism.” Again, the newspapers lined up along partisan lines, but it is interesting to note the much more significant outcry from the Republican-leaning press over the Adamson Act as compared to the child labor bill. In the weeks that followed, Wilson’s Republican presidential opponent, Charles Evan Hughes, increasingly centered his campaign around attacking the incumbent on this specific issue. He accused Wilson of selling out to labor in order to win votes, a charge that Wilson hotly disputed. Rather than becoming defensive, Wilson embraced his action with regard to the eight-hour day and, much to Hughes’ dismay, also made it a centerpiece of his campaign.

Whereas Wilson needed reassurance from his southern advisors that his support for the Keating-Owen Bill would not alienate the majority of southern Democrats, he neither sought nor received any such advice with regards to the Adamson Act and the
down its factory and all its assembling plants throughout the country and every man of its more than forty nine thousand workers will have to go off the pay roll.” Ford to Wilson (September, 1, 1916), LWWP.


277 Ibid., 227.

278 Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 238-239.
alienation of the “commercial interests.” This simplest explanation for this difference is
that Wilson never harbored hope of swinging pro-business voters away from the
Republican Party. As with the Keating-Owen Bill, he conducted a cost-benefit analysis
and saw that he stood to make substantial gains with progressives and labor by his
support of the eight-hour day. The potential electoral losses were relatively insignificant.
The only real loss was his abandonment of the principles of both states’ rights and anti-
statism. As he looked to build a national party, one that could face both domestic and
international challenges, he was willing to accept that loss. And it was, in fact, Wilson’s
ability to portray himself and his party as more attuned to the nation’s temper on issues of
progressivism and peace that carried him to victory in 1916.

So how did Wilson’s moderate stance on woman suffrage, outlined in the
preceding chapter, factor in with his broader platform of progressivism and peace during
the 1916 election, particularly with regard to women voters in the West? In short, it
worked brilliantly. With the exception of Oregon, Wilson won the electoral votes of
every state in the West. The headline in the New York Times read, “Votes of Women and
Bull Moose Elected Wilson; Western Progressives Turned to Him Almost En Masse, but
Not Those of the East; Peace a Powerful Issue.”

The Woman’s Party terrorized the two conventions and frightened them with the
prospect of ‘four million votes,’ which it held over them as a club. Mr. Hughes was
led to believe that it had the votes and made his celebrated declaration for the
Anthony Federal amendment. The Woman’s Party tried to make its threats good and
marshal the Western women for Hughes, but the dispatches received by The Times
showed that it failed utterly. It did have an influence, but the wrong kind. These
dispatches are unanimous in recording the antagonism excited by the activities of the
Woman’s Party, and also by the special train of Hughes women which went

campaigning from New York into the West. From many states come reports that both these things added greatly to Wilson’s vote; from no State comes a report that it subtracted from that vote. The women, where they broke away from party lines or where they voted contrary to their men folks, voted for Wilson. They did so generally on the argument that “He kept us out of war.” In some States, such as Washington, the influential argument with them was not this one, but the legislative record which appealed to them as progressives.\(^{280}\)

Correspondence between Wilson and his closest advisors in the months before the election indicate that they should not have been at all surprised by women’s behavior at the polls in November. With a much firmer grasp of the relative importance of suffrage as an election issue than that held by the NWP, they had counted on such behavior all along.

Wilson was instrumental in the development of the Democratic platform that was eventually adopted at the St. Louis convention in June. The plank endorsing the principle of suffrage but only recommending that the individual states extend the franchise to women had his full support. During the debate over that particular plank, the anti-suffrage Governor Ferguson of Texas made a last-minute attempt to have it removed completely. His motion gained the support of a number of Southerners, which propelled Catt to telegraph the President and ask him to clarify his position. He promptly replied that the plank received his approval and that he wished to recommend to the states that they extend suffrage to women upon the same terms as to men.\(^{281}\) After the newspapers ran reports of Catt’s call to Wilson for clarification of his position, a woman in California wrote the president, “Who is Carrie Chapman Catt that she can call the President of the United States to order. Don’t fear those four million woman votes in the Suffrage states.

\(^{280}\) Ibid.

\(^{281}\) For Catt’s telegram to Wilson, see Catt to Wilson (June 16, 1916), \textit{PWW}, Box 89, Reel 209. For Wilson’s reply, see Wilson to Catt (June 19, 1916), \textit{NAWSA Records}, Box 9, Reel 7.
They will vote the democratic ticket.”282 The message to not worry about Western women abandoning the Democrats over the issue of suffrage was one that Wilson heard repeatedly over the next four and a half months.

In early August, Daniels relayed a message to Wilson from Representative Keating from Colorado. Reacting to Hughes’ declaration in support of the federal amendment just a few days earlier, Keating opined that Wilson should not change his states’ rights position. Voters would recognize that he was only changing his position to try and win votes, and, in fact, a shift at this juncture would only have the opposite effect. Despite the fact that Keating was an advocate for the federal amendment and desired Wilson’s support, he recommended that the president adhere to the party platform in order to win the election.283 Similarly, both Vice-President Marshall and Colonel Edward House complimented the president on standing by his states’ right stance, even as Hughes voiced support for the federal amendment.284 Interestingly, all of this counsel came from members of Wilson’s advisory circle who were self-professed suffragists. They recognized, though, that suffrage would not be the deciding issue of the election and that a Democratic victory was more important for accomplishing a wide range of Wilsonian initiatives.

Wilson articulated his position on suffrage during a speech to the Jane Jefferson Club of Colorado on August 7. He proclaimed his faith that women voters would study the broad questions facing America and select the candidate that could best handle all of

282 Annie Dock to Wilson, (June 19, 1916), _PWW_, Box 89, Reel 209.
283 Daniels to Wilson (August 2, 1916), _LWWP_.
284 See Wilson to Marshall (August 3, 1916), and House to Wilson (August 6, 1916), _LWWP_.

those questions. Additionally, he criticized Hughes for supporting a federal amendment when the Republican Party had been unwilling to go that far at their Chicago convention. Adamant that he would not disregard the official declaration of his party, he would do everything within his power to press for suffrage in state referenda. Finally, in a sign of things to come, he complimented the sacrifices and war service of women in Europe as proof that women contribute service to their nations just as men do and therefore deserve equal citizenship. 285

Political insiders from the West continued to reassure Wilson that his suffrage position would not harm him throughout the late summer and early fall of 1916. One of Wilson’s advisors passed along a letter in late August from Mary Field, “a highly intelligent woman who knows more about California than anyone I know.” Field refuted the Woman’s Party claim that they would be able to sway the woman’s vote in the West. She was confident that women would not vote on a sex basis. Rather, most people in the West were grateful that Wilson had kept the nation out of war. She continued, “I feel that Wilson’s policy has done for women far more than the endorsement of the franchise amendment. Far reaching and less obvious are the results of his federal reserve banking system, his rural credits, his tariff regulations, his industrial relations commission – all of which have direct, though subtile [sic], effect on the lives of women, especially the workers. 286 Field’s letter, much like the majority of responses to Belmont’s request for financial support of NWP activities, indicates that women were much more complex political creatures than the NWP made them out to be.

285 Wilson to the Jane Jefferson Club of Colorado (June 7, 1916), LWWP.

286 Field to Howe (August 21, 1916), LWWP.
Wilson even received reassurances from NAWSA leaders that he need not worry about the Woman’s Party activity in the West. Anna Howard Shaw, now retired but still an honorary member of the NAWSA executive council, told Wilson’s campaign manager to disregard the NWP. She stressed that NAWSA was the largest suffrage group and the one to whom the President should pay attention.287 Less than two weeks later, Wilson found himself being wildly applauded by the assembled members of NAWSA at the Atlantic City Convention. His closest advisors, political activists from the West, and the nation’s largest group of suffragists all expressed their support for his stance on suffrage. With good reason, he ignored the NWP and ran a successful campaign based on his accomplishments in the arenas of foreign policy and progressivism.

Wilson’s strategy of supporting the principle of woman suffrage, federal child labor legislation, and the eight-hour day as part of a broad program of reforms aimed at securing the votes of progressives and trade unionists was successful. He narrowly defeated Hughes in the electoral college 277-254. The popular vote went 9,126,300 for Wilson (49%) as compared to 8,546,789 for Hughes (46%). Importantly, the Socialist vote was reduced to just 589,924 (3%).288 Most contemporary election analysts attributed the shift in votes from the Socialist candidate to Wilson to the Democratic Party’s record on labor issues.289 Historians have reached the same conclusions.290 And, of course,

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287 Hapgood to Wilson (August 28, 1916) LWWP.

288 Goldinger, Presidential Elections since 1789, 115.

there was the issue of peace. Perhaps even more important than any of the debates on
domestic policy, Wilson’s firm stance against American intervention in the war in Europe
secured the necessary votes for his 1916 victory. As the next chapter will show, the
significance of this fact weighed heavily on the president in early 1917 when he was
forced to make the difficult decision to lead the nation into war.

NAWSA viewed the election results as a vindication of their strategy to remain
non-partisan and to continue to work for suffrage amendments at both the state and
federal level. For months after the election, NAWSA leaders used their newsletter and
journal to editorialize about the superiority of their approach over that of the NWP.
Oftentimes, they reprinted articles and editorials from the nation’s mainstream
newspapers, most of which contained the same analysis: that the women’s vote in the
West had played a large role in Wilson’s victory and that women proved to be
independent thinkers who were concerned with a broad range of domestic and foreign
policy issues.291

Predictably, the NWP had a much different interpretation of the election results.
In contrast to every major newspaper in the country, the first post-election publication of
The Suffragist declared, “In analyzing the election returns, we find that the women
responded loyally to our appeal not to give their support to Mr. Wilson because of his

290Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 240-250. , Foner, History of the
Labor Movement in the United States, Vol VI: On the Eve of America’s Entrance into World War I, 1915-
1916, 229-231. In Pure and Simple Politics, Greene writes, “The keys to Wilson’s successful coalition had
included a progressive program that spoke more broadly to the needs of working people . . . an inclusive
strategy that reached out to Socialists as much as to moderate and conservative workers and that relied also
on ties between labor activists and social justice progressives.” Greene, Pure and Simple Politics: The
American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917, 273.

291See “Women’s Vote Features Great National Election,” Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News
47, no. 46 (November 11, 1916), 361. For additional election analysis by NAWSA see the Nov. 25, 1916,
opposition to national woman suffrage.” To support this dubious claim, the editors cited the results in Illinois – the only state in which votes of women were counted separately – pointing to the fact that Hughes received 70,000 more votes from women than did Wilson. That the results in Illinois did not reflect the larger trend in Western states did little to deter NWP leaders from claiming victory for their strategy. Neither did the fact that, despite their call to “hold the party in power responsible” for inactivity on the federal amendment, Wilson was re-elected and the Democrats retained control of Congress.

NWP leaders struggled to explain away this apparent failure: “We were not concerned with the result of the election. Ours was a campaign in which it made no difference who was elected … What we did try to do was to organize a protest vote against Mr. Wilson’s attitude toward suffrage. This we did.” Again, this claim ran contrary to the consensus opinion of election analysts across the country that women in the West voted overwhelmingly in favor of Wilson. In subsequent editions of The Suffragist, the editors slightly modified their victory assertion. They backed away from the claim of swinging a large number of women voters away from the Democrats and, instead, focused on their achievement of having made suffrage a central issue in the campaign. In future elections, they warned, politicians of both parties will be more acutely aware “that many women are anxious to use their votes to win political liberty for the women of the whole country.”

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293 Ibid.

taking this position, Paul and her followers stood squarely in line with the prevailing theories about the role of third parties. But they also faced the challenge that confronts all third parties in the wake of an election; that is, how to sustain and even build momentum in the years before the next election. The next chapter will show that Paul answered that challenge with the NWP picketing strategy.

As 1916 drew to a close, Wilson found himself still in control of the White House and his party still in control of Congress. He had been narrowly reelected, largely on the basis of his ability to keep the nation out of war. And he had shown an openness to change his policy stances if certain conditions were met. Based on the evidence in this chapter, those conditions included the following: proof that the change was just and that it represented the will of the general public, that it enjoyed the support of his closest advisors, and that, while political benefits would certainly be welcome, Wilson could justify to himself that it was in keeping with the contours of the Constitution. Despite having run as the “peace” candidate, events on the world stage would force him to radically alter America’s position on the war in 1917. The crisis in Wilson’s Administration would force Catt to also make a fundamental change in NAWSA’s policy by convincing the organization to simultaneously work in support of the war and suffrage. Paul, too, would drastically alter the strategy of the NWP in 1917. Rather than taking a stand on the war in Europe, Paul initiated a war at the White House gates.
CHAPTER 5

1917 – YEAR OF DECISIONS

On New Year’s Day in 1917, the biggest and boldest headline on the front page of the New York Times read, “London Applauds the Allies’ Reply; Washington Sees Chance for Peace; Stir About Second Note From Spain.” News of the war in Europe dominated the headlines on the first day of the new year. In many ways, this was a sign of things to come. Long before the United States formally entered the war in the spring of 1917, events on the battlefields of Europe captured a great deal of the attention of American politicians and the general public alike. By February 1917, though, with US entry into the war looking increasingly likely, national attention became almost entirely focused on the war. This would remain the case for the remainder of 1917 and for most of 1918 as well. It is critical to establish this fact at the start of this section in order to keep the events that will be described in this chapter in their proper perspective. In very different ways, the nation’s suffragists sought to keep some attention on their movement in 1917. But for the general public and certainly for the President, the war remained the central focus throughout the year.

As the last chapter revealed, Wilson was narrowly reelected in November 1916, largely on the basis of keeping the nation out of war. But by early February 1917, events on the international stage would result in his dramatic decision to reverse course and lead the nation into war. This chapter places Wilson’s actions with regard to suffrage in the year after his re-election into context with the other issues he faced – issues that had the

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potential to affect the entire world. It reveals an increasingly close political and personal relationship between Wilson and NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt, two leaders who needed one another’s support. Wilson desired all the political allies he could find as he reversed his position on US involvement in the war. As president of NAWSA, Catt needed support from the President as she executed “The Winning Plan,” which entailed winning referenda in a number of states and overcoming legislative hurdles so as to increase the chances of securing a federal amendment.\footnote{For a detailed explanation of “The Winning Plan” see Chapter 3.} Evidence presented in this chapter shows Wilson and Catt’s vision for the proper suffrage strategy evolving in concert in 1917 through constant and careful correspondence.\footnote{Catt and Wilson or their secretaries (Helen Gardener for NAWSA and Joseph Tumulty for Wilson) exchanged more than 30 letters in 1917. In other words, they communicated with one another at least once every two weeks. Much of this correspondence is considered later in this chapter.} At Catt’s behest, Wilson played a vital role in several successful state suffrage campaigns and facilitated the creation of a separate congressional committee on woman suffrage. A factor pushing Catt and Wilson even closer together was the strategy employed by Alice Paul and the NWP.

From January through November, the NWP sent groups of women dubbed “silent sentinels” to picket the White House. Wilson’s opposition to the federal amendment was the focus of their protest. Starting in June, angry mobs attacked the pickets. Subsequently, the pickets, rather than their attackers, were arrested and jailed. The bravery of the NWP pickets in the face of hostile crowds and certain imprisonment is an inspiring story. Further, the violation of their civil rights by a government claiming that the world needed “to be made safe for democracy” is a dark stain on the Wilson Administration. Shamefully, NAWSA chose to look the other way as their sister
suffragists were sent to jail for exercising the right of free speech. But contrary to NWP claims at the end of the year, the picketing campaign was not critical in Wilson’s shift toward support of the federal amendment. That shift had been underway since his speech at Atlantic City in September 1916. Rather, it was NAWSA’s work in 1917 that speeded his conversion to advocacy of the federal amendment by early 1918. At best, the antagonistic actions of the NWP improved NAWSA’s standing with Wilson. At worst, their actions armed anti-suffragists with yet another reason to deny women the vote and made the work of pro-suffrage forces across the nation that much harder.

This chapter begins with an overview of the ideology behind the picketing campaign followed by a summary of how historians have interpreted its impact. A careful examination of the evidence regarding Wilson and the public’s reaction to the pickets results in a challenge to the pro-militant revisionist interpretation. Switching focus to the issue that actually dominated the year – namely, US entry into the war – this chapter analyzes key decisions made by Wilson, Catt, and Paul. It chronicles Wilson’s assistance to Catt as she and NAWSA orchestrated victories in a number of state suffrage referenda and as they pushed for the creation of a separate suffrage committee in the House of Representatives. With the President’s backing, the federal amendment received its first successful vote in Congress in January 1918. An analysis of the competing NAWSA and NWP strategies and an assessment of the suffrage situation on the eve of that vote serve as this chapter’s conclusion.

Beginning on January 10, 1917, the NWP sent daily delegations of “silent pickets” to stand outside the White House gates holding banners which read “Mr. President, What Will You Do For Woman Suffrage?” and “How Long Must Women
Wait for Liberty?” The women came in groups of two or three and stood at their posts for hours at a time, day after day. For nearly six months, the police and the President generally ignored the activists. However, as the United States entered the war in April and patriotic fever swept across the nation, many citizens began to view the picketers as disloyal.

In June, the NWP banners became increasingly provocative, accusing Wilson of hypocrisy by fighting a war for democracy abroad but denying true democracy at home. Angry onlookers attacked the pickets and shredded their banners. As scenes like this played out repeatedly in late June and early July, several picketers were arrested and imprisoned on charges of obstructing sidewalk traffic. Their attackers were almost never arrested. During their imprisonment, the jailed suffragists resorted to hunger strikes in protest against the illegality of their arrests and the bad conditions in the prison. Prison officials responded by conducting brutal forced feedings. The picketing, arrests, hunger strikes, and forced feedings that went on from June through November provided the NWP with intense press coverage. Although much of it was critical of their actions, NWP leaders believed it helped the cause by keeping the issue of suffrage on the front pages of the nation’s newspapers. Further, in pointing out Wilson’s hypocrisy and waging an unrelenting war at his doorstep, they believed they forced him to capitulate to the federal amendment in order to escape the negative publicity brought about by their campaign.298

Much historiographical debate has centered on the role of the pickets in Wilson’s eventual decision to advocate for the federal amendment. Indeed, the President began the year as a staunch states’ rights suffrage supporter but ended the year with tacit endorsement of the federal amendment.\(^{299}\) Did this transition occur mostly or partly as a result of the picketing campaign, or did it occur in spite of the NWP actions? The traditional interpretation, first articulated by Eleanor Flexner in *Century of Struggle*, argues that NWP-generated histories in the years immediately following ratification of the nineteenth amendment greatly exaggerated the impact of the pickets. Flexner concedes that suffrage received increased publicity as a result of the NWP activity but believes that more of the general public and members of Congress were alienated rather than won over to the cause. Wilson, she argues, was much more influenced by other events in 1917, particularly his close association with NAWSA and the increasing role women played in the public after the U.S. entered the war.\(^{300}\)

In their close analysis of Wilson’s relationship to suffrage in a 1981 article, Christine Lunardini and Thomas Knock argue that the NWP’s action pushed Wilson towards NAWSA, but they take no further stand than that. Responding to that argument,

\(^{299}\) The last chapter detailed Wilson’s stand during the 1916 election, which was to support the plank in the Democratic platform that recommended to the states that they enfranchise women, but to stop short of endorsing the federal amendment. As will be detailed later in this chapter, Wilson intimated that he would support the federal amendment in a statement to Carrie Chapman Catt following the suffrage victory in New York state in November 1917. His first clear public statement of support for the federal amendment did not actually come until early January 1918.

\(^{300}\) Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, 279-280. David Morgan mostly agrees with Flexner, although he allows that an indirect contribution of the NWP was to galvanize NAWSA to greater action. Morgan, *Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America*, 186. Other interpretations from the traditionalist perspective include O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*, Bland, *Techniques of Persuasion: The National Woman's Party and Woman Suffrage, 1913-1919* Specifics from both of these works are discussed in Chapter 1.
Sara Hunter Graham launched a revisionist interpretation by maintaining that Wilson came out in support of the federal amendment in December 1917 as a direct result of the NWP picketing campaigns. The pickets, she claims, succeeded in pointing out the inconsistency of his war aims about spreading democracy and his administration’s indifference to democracy at home. Graham contends that the pickets posed such a threat to Wilson that he entered into a conspiracy with NAWSA, major newspaper editors, and the director of his Committee of Public Information in order to suppress coverage of NWP activities.301

Perhaps inspired by Graham’s rebuttal, Lunardini more boldly argues in a later work that the NWP campaign did succeed in making the point to the President that there would be consequences to pay if he did not accede to their demands. Those consequences included losses for Democrats in future elections and loss of positive public opinion as a result of his administration’s harsh treatment of the pickets.302 With few exceptions, more recent scholarship has tended to accept the revisionist interpretation, emphasizing the heroism and bravery of the NWP pickets over the traditional lobbying efforts and state-level work conducted by NAWSA.303


302 See Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*

303 See Ford, *Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party, 1912-1920*, Mead, *How the Vote was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914*, Adams and Keene, *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign*  Adams and Keene’s work is an important new contribution to suffrage historiography. Their analysis of the impact of Paul’s Quaker background on her ideology is superb. Additionally, they expertly detail Paul’s deliberate use of nonviolence and visual rhetoric in pursuit of the federal amendment. Their work is generally one-sided, though. NAWSA’s actions in 1917 are, at best, discounted, but more often simply ignored. As a result, Adams and Keene reach an unbalanced conclusion that disproportionately credits Paul and the NWP with Wilson’s conversion. For an exception to the rule of recent scholarship accepting the revisionist interpretation, see
Evidence in this chapter challenges the revisionist interpretation. A thorough examination of the relevant correspondence and newspaper coverage for the most intense period of picketing (January-November 1917) reveals that the pickets were a constant but relatively mild annoyance to the President. Most of the publicity so coveted by Paul and her followers was negative. As ugly as the crowds and the police were towards the suffragists standing by the White House gates, there was no public outcry when they were arrested and imprisoned. Rather than being pushed to take more decisive action on the federal amendment, Wilson found his ability to work for the suffrage cause hampered by the activities of the NWP. The President acknowledged that the actions of the pickets brought some bad publicity to his administration, but he was more concerned with the bad publicity their actions brought to the greater suffrage campaign. From the beginning, but increasingly so after the war began, Wilson, NAWSA leaders, members of Congress, most of the general public, and even a significant number of NWP loyalists thought the picketing campaign was ineffective and, in fact, harmful to the cause.

So, what exactly was the picketing strategy, why did it appear, and how did Wilson respond to it as it evolved over the course of the year? The NWP Executive Council released a statement to the press on January 9, 1917 that they had met with the President and that he had declined to support the federal amendment, citing his allegiance to the Democratic Party’s platform. At an “indignation meeting” held that afternoon, the Council had resolved to initiate a new campaign against the President. Their press release explained that they intended to post women pickets at the White House grounds in

Brown, *Did Woodrow Wilson's Gender Politics Matter?*, 125-162. Echoing Morgan in many ways, Brown concludes that the NWP campaign alone would never have been successful, but that the NWP did provide NAWSA leaders and pro-suffrage senators and congressmen with “the leverage they needed to approach the president as problem solvers and mediators.” Quote from p. 151.
order to make it impossible for the President to enter or leave the White House without encountering a picket pleading for the cause of suffrage.  

In fact, Paul had begun developing the picketing strategy at least a month before the “indignation meeting” in January. Letters from the NWP headquarters were sent to potential picket line volunteers in late December 1916. Paul had campaigned hard against Wilson and the Democrats in 1916, but the President had been reelected and his party retained control of Congress. Claims of victory in The Suffragist notwithstanding, Paul was keenly aware that “holding the party in power responsible” had failed in 1916 and that the next opportunity to test this strategy again – the 1918 mid-terms – was a long way away. In the months following the disappointing 1916 election, Paul “felt she needed to instigate a new nonviolent technique to rally her troops and keep them from exhaustion and depression.” She specifically settled on picketing the President for many of the same reasons that she pursued the “holding the party in power responsible” strategy in 1914 and 1916. As the leader of the party that controlled both houses of Congress, Wilson had the power to force the issue of the federal amendment. According to Paul, the pickets would serve as a form of visual rhetoric aimed at convincing the President to use that power. 

Wilson’s initial reaction was to view the pickets as a sort of amusing distraction. He would tip his hat to them as he came and went from the White House. On the first

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307 “Suffragists Will Picket White House,” New York Times, January 10, 1917. For more depth on Paul’s ideas about the power of visual rhetoric, see Ibid., 36-41 and 157-162.
extremely cold day that the pickets stood at their posts, he instructed his chief usher to invite the women into the lower corridor of the White House in order to escape the wind. When they declined, he ordered the usher to deliver hot bricks to the gate for the women to use for warmth.\textsuperscript{308} He joked with members of his Cabinet that he actually liked the pickets because they brought him prominence.\textsuperscript{309}

An article in the \textit{New York Times} reveals that Wilson was not the only one amused by the pickets. The Gridiron Club of Washington held a dinner for the President and several members of his Cabinet in February. A group of actors performed a series of comedy acts in which they parodied recent political events. The article reported that the actors introduced a character named “Hazel Jones” as one of the silent suffrage sentinels at the White House. “Hazel” was then made the target of several gibes in a minstrel skit, demonstrating that most members of the audience viewed the pickets as a group of crazy women. The newspaper related one specific joke: “Do you know Hazel had an awful accident? . . . One of those big fat squirrels in the White House grounds bit off her ear. The President said it wasn’t the squirrel’s fault, and the President was right . . . Suppose you were a hungry squirrel with an appetite for nuts, and for eight hours in the rain and snow and sleet somebody stood in front of your house.”\textsuperscript{310} The pickets were mocked again when actors portraying Ellis Island officials quizzed an immigrant about his knowledge of America. When they asked the immigrant what President Woodrow

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\textsuperscript{308} Diary entry of Thomas W. Brahany, White House Chief of Staff (March 4, 1917), \textit{LWWP}.

\textsuperscript{309} E. David Cronon, ed. \textit{The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921}, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 154.

\end{flushright}
Wilson spent most of his time doing, the man responded, “Dodging women with [suffrage banners].”\textsuperscript{311}

The President was forced to give the pickets more careful consideration beginning in late June. On June 20, a group of delegates from the new Russian Republic that had just enfranchised its women arrived at the White House to meet with Wilson. They were greeted by an NWP banner that read, “President Wilson and Envoy Root are deceiving Russia. They say ‘We are a democracy. Help us win the war so that democracies may survive.’ We women of America tell you that America is not a democracy. Twenty million women are denied the right to vote.”\textsuperscript{312} The banner went on to say that Wilson was the chief opponent of suffrage in America. It urged the Russian delegation to tell Wilson he must enfranchise women before claiming Russia as an ally. The inflammatory banner drew a crowd of opponents who ripped the banner to shreds. A similar scene occurred on the following day when NWP members arrived at their posts with an identical banner. On that day, the crowd not only tore apart the banner, but some also physically attacked the pickets and had to be restrained by the police.\textsuperscript{313}

The incident surrounding the “Russian banner” received considerable press coverage. Almost every major newspaper in the country carried the story.\textsuperscript{314} Several leading papers responded by publishing editorials condemning the pickets for attacking a

\textsuperscript{311} Ibid.


sitting president during wartime. The Boston Daily Globe, a pro-suffrage paper, chastised the pickets because they had “harmed the cause” of suffrage. The editorialist argued, “The women of America should be enfranchised, but if they are to be, they must pass the test of service . . . A Red Cross nurse, a housewife saving food, a woman worker setting free a man for the Army, any of them is a more telling argument for suffrage than a whole line of silent sentinels picketing the man on whose shoulders rest the burdens of America.”315 Editorials in the Chicago Daily Tribune and The Atlanta Constitution echoed the Globe: The NWP pickets were disloyal citizens who would serve their cause more faithfully by supporting the nation through war service.316

Members of Congress also voiced their displeasure over the “Russian banner” to reporters. Congress was deeply divided over the issue of woman suffrage, but senators and representatives were nearly unanimous in their condemnation of the NWP’s actions.317 The Washington Post reported, “Meanwhile the affairs of the last two days have operated to give Congress a veritable chill. Even the friends of suffrage among senators and representatives now have ‘cold feet’ and feel that the cause of suffrage has received a setback from which it cannot recover during the present session.”318 Of note, news accounts, editorials, and statements from members of Congress all highlighted the fact that the NWP represented a minority of suffragists and noted that NAWSA did not


317 A New York Times article quoted seven members of Congress (five pro-suffrage and two anti-suffrage), all of whom denounced picketing in general and, specifically, the NWP decision to display the “Russian banner.” “Crowd Destroys Suffrage Banner at White House,” New York Times, June 21, 1917, 1-2.

condone the pickets. In almost every case, reporters made a clear distinction between the NWP and NAWSA, evidence of the success of the former in distancing itself from the latter over the course of the preceding year.

Over the next two weeks after the first “Russian banner” appeared, a pattern developed in which the pickets would arrive at their posts, be attacked by unruly crowds, and then be arrested. Initially, the police claimed that the arrests were for their own protection, although later the pickets were charged with obstructing sidewalk traffic. Wilson did not make any public statements during this time, but privately he confided his disappointment in the type of publicity being drawn to suffrage. He wrote to his daughter on the day of the second crowd attack, “I dare say you heard of the fracas raised by the representatives of the Woman’s Party here at the gates of the White House. They certainly seem bent upon making their cause as obnoxious as possible.”

On July 14, sixteen women were arrested on the charges of causing unlawful assembly before the White House. In court three days later, the women received fines, but refused to pay, so were sentenced to varying periods of confinement at Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia. According to the Commissioner of the District of Columbia, Louis Brownlow, the President was not told beforehand that the arrests were going to be made, and he was indignant when he found out afterwards. He immediately pardoned the women and ordered Brownlow to his office. Brownlow recalled that Wilson clearly disapproved of the arrests because it only indulged the women in their desire to be

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considered martyrs. The President ordered Brownlow to refrain from further arrests without his approval.  

When fighting between the pickets and the crowds continued over the next few days, Brownlow reported to the President that he needed to make more arrests. Wilson agreed that Brownlow should take minimum measures necessary to maintain peace on the streets. Brownlow recalled, “Thereafter we pursued a policy of attempting to keep the peace, not arresting the pickets until they, or at least some of them, had taken positive action.” Brownlow’s memory of the events, written more than 40 years later, was undoubtedly affected by his desire to appear concerned for the safety of the pickets rather than guilty of committing serious breaches of their First Amendment rights.

I will not make the argument that Wilson was unconcerned with publicity, but I will dispute the contention of Graham that he engaged in a conspiracy to suppress the facts involved in the picketing arrests and imprisonment. Wilson’s secretary, Joseph Tumulty, informed him on the day after he had pardoned the sixteen pickets that several editors of prominent newspapers had inquired how the White House would like them to cover the events. T.W. Noyes, editor of the Washington Evening Star, told Tumulty that he favored having a bare statement of fact, but no publicity in any paper. Arthur Brisbane, editor of the Washington Times suggested that the Administration avoid the appearance of any “conspiracy of silence.” Wilson instructed Tumulty, “My own opinion is that a compromise course ought to be adopted . . . My own suggestion would be that nothing that [the pickets] do should be featured with headlines or put on the front page


321 Ibid., 79.
but that a bare colorless chronicle of what they do should be all that was printed. That constitutes part of the news, but it need not be made interesting reading.”

Graham contends, “At NAWSA’s instigation, President Wilson and the wartime censorship agency abridged the freedom of the press” in order to suppress news about NWP activities. She finds evidence for this conspiracy in Wilson’s instructions to Tumulty (as noted above) and in a report from NAWSA lobbyists that the Committee on Public Information (CPI) Director, George Creel, arranged appointments for them with major news services. The purpose of the appointments was for the NAWSA lobbyists to emphasize their desire for newspaper coverage to make a clear distinction between NAWSA and the NWP and to emphasize the former’s abhorrence of the picketing. Creel’s office also issued an official bulletin to all newspapers, post offices, government officials, and public agencies on July 3, 1917, in which similar points were made.

The President clearly preferred that the pickets not receive the type of publicity that they were seeking, but Graham’s own review of prominent newspapers reveals that the next major set of arrests in August received front page coverage. If Wilson attempted to suppress news coverage, and there really is no evidence beyond the correspondence outlined above that he did any such thing, the attempt failed.

Furthermore, his alleged suppression was clearly not much of a priority since there is no

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322 Wilson to Tumulty (July 20, 1917), Life and Letters, Vol. 7.


324 Ibid., 109. Adams and Keene also cite the correspondence among the editors and the Wilson Administration, although they stop short of suggesting a conspiracy that involved NAWSA leaders. See Adams and Keene, Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign, 167.

evidence that Wilson or Creel took punitive action against any of the major newspapers that continued to give front-page coverage to the pickets.

When viewed in comparison to the administration’s suppression campaign against anarchists, I.W.W.’s, and Socialists, the plan to ask newspapers to provide “colorless” coverage of the pickets appears relatively benign.326 Beginning in the spring of 1917, “federal marshals corralled radicals of every nationality, faction, and ideological persuasion, and U.S. district attorneys freely interpreted a vague Espionage Act, passed in 1917, to win indictments and convictions on charges of treason and antiwar activity.”327 Additionally, the Postmaster General denied second-class mailing privileges to leftist publications such as the Milwaukee Leader, the Appeal to Reason, and the Masses, resulting in the virtual shut-down of those publications. In June 1918, Socialist leader Eugene Debs was arrested and later sentenced to ten years in prison for speaking out against American participation in the war.328 The fact that the Wilson Administration was generally more lenient toward the pickets than other dissenters does not make the arrests and imprisonments more palatable. Nor is this evidence presented as an excuse for the clear violation of the NWP’s civil rights. Rather, it serves to demonstrate that the administration simply did not consider these activists to pose a significant threat to Wilson’s standing with the American public or with his international audience.


327 Salvatore, Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist, 288.

Given that most of the articles about suffragist arrests were critical of the NWP anyway, Wilson had even less motivation to actively work to limit the exposure. There is no doubt that NAWSA leaders worked closely with the administration, including the CPI, to distance themselves and the cause of suffrage from the militants. But they did so in full view of the public eye. The fact that NAWSA and Wilson were in agreement on the damage to the cause being inflicted by the NWP does not equate to a conspiracy to “abridge the freedom of the press.”

The argument that Wilson resorted to arrests to try and silence the pickets who were arousing public opinion against him is even less convincing when one sees the number of letters that Wilson received criticizing him for being overly lenient with the pickets. A woman in Missouri wrote to him in late July demanding that he put a stop to the “un-American” picketing of the White House. In August, a man who had witnessed the fighting between pickets and crowd members and the subsequent arrests, defended the actions of the crowd, saying, “An indignant public should be allowed to deal with such banners according to the dictates of their patriotism without police interference.”329 The actions of the crowd, of course, also led Wilson to believe that the opinion of the pickets was a tiny minority. Editorialists further reinforced this view. Wilson was actually criticized for his leniency by a number of leading newspapers.330

He did occasionally receive advice and petitions from those who supported the pickets, some of whom were prominent citizens, but there is no evidence that any of these

329 See Dee Richardson to Wilson (July 24, 1917) and Henry Noble Hall to Wilson (August, 15, 1917), *LWWP*.

appeals caused Wilson to alter his suffrage stance.\textsuperscript{331} When he received letters from people concerned about the conditions in which the jailed suffragists were kept at the Occoquan Workhouse, he directed his staff to immediately investigate the charges and take any such action as needed to ensure there was no basis for future charges.\textsuperscript{332}

The last day of picketing in 1917 occurred on November 10. According to a press release, NWP leaders decided to suspend the picketing campaign because “there are few candidates for the role remaining outside of jail, and the other [reason] is that the women hope that the next Congress will pass the Federal amendment and so make further picketing unnecessary.\textsuperscript{333} In late November, the 31 suffragists remaining in jail (to include Paul) appeared before a District Judge who ruled that they had been illegally committed to Occoquan Workhouse and were entitled to liberation on bail pending an appeal. After their release, they did not picket again until the summer of 1918.\textsuperscript{334}

\textsuperscript{331} For letters supporting the pickets, see Charles August Lindbergh to Wilson (August 27, 1917), \textit{LWWP}. See also the report of J.A.H. Hopkins, National Progressive Committeeeman, on his visit with Wilson regarding the pickets in “Quote’s Wilson’s Views; Hopkins Tells of Interview Regarding Suffrage Pickets,” \textit{New York Times}, August 13, 1917, 9. Hopkins’ wife was one of the imprisoned suffragists.

\textsuperscript{332} See Wilson to Tumulty (October 23, 1917) and (November 16, 1917), \textit{Life and Letters}, Vol. 7. See also William Gwynn Gardiner to Wilson (November 9, 1917), \textit{LWWP}.


\textsuperscript{334} Graham also repeats the story first told in Irwin’s NWP history that a reporter from the New York Post, David Lawrence, was sent by Wilson in mid-November to meet with Paul in prison. Irwin, \textit{The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party}, 261. Lawrence allegedly offered a deal to Paul: Wilson would guarantee that the suffrage amendment would pass by the end of 1919 if she would agree to end the picketing. Graham says that Paul’s answer is unknown, but speculates that she agreed based on the following evidence: The pickets’ sentences were overturned the following week and they were released from jail. The NWP then refrained from any further picketing and Wilson advocated passage of the federal amendment to the House in January 1918. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that indicates Irwin’s version of events is simply incorrect. The story published by David Lawrence in \textit{The Evening Post} makes no mention of the alleged deal. See “For and Against Suffrage Pickets,” \textit{The Evening Post}, November 27, 1917. Lawrence denied at the time that he was an emissary from the White House. According to Flexner, he refuted Irwin’s story again in a letter to Flexner prior to her first publication of \textit{Century of Struggle}. See Flexner and Fitzpatrick, \textit{Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States}, 377. Additionally, the \textit{New York Times} reported on November 9 – a week before Lawrence’s visit to Paul – that the NWP planned to stop picketing the White House. During an NWP
To the greatest extent possible, Wilson ignored the pickets during 1917. When the publicity surrounding their arrests made it impossible for him to ignore them, he did his utmost to minimize the publicity they received. Undoubtedly, this was partially an attempt to keep bad light from falling on his Administration. More importantly, though, he sincerely believed the pickets were harming the cause of suffrage at the state and national level.\(^335\) His growing interest in the federal amendment was not a result of the coercive actions of the NWP. Rather, it was the result of its increasing political value as NAWSA successfully won more and more state suffrage campaigns, as the U.S. engaged in a war to spread democracy, and as Democrats began to prepare for the 1918 mid-term elections.\(^336\)

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335 For example, when Wilson wrote a message of support for the suffrage campaign in New York state, he added, “May I not say that I hope that no voter will be influenced in his decision with regard to this great matter by anything the so-called pickets may have done . . . Their action represents, I am sure, so small a fraction of the women . . . that it would be unfair and argue a narrow view to allow their actions to prejudice the cause itself.” Wilson to Catt (October 13, 1917), CLOC, Box 9, Reel 7.

336 The actions of the NWP raise the question of the utility of a radical alternative. Did Wilson move closer to Catt out of fear that, through inaction, Catt’s followers would eventually migrate toward Paul, leaving Paul and the NWP as the majority suffrage organization in the nation? Did Catt work more aggressively on the federal amendment out of the same fear? Perhaps. But the theory of the radical alternative includes an assumption that the radical alternative can, in fact, deliver on its promise to attract more adherents and undermine the mainstream organization. For example, in the case of the labor movement, Phillip Foner writes, “When [AFL President Samuel] Gompers warned the Democratic Party that unless it ‘produced’ for labor, a labor party would be organized, his words carried meaning only because of the existence of the pro-labor party forces within the AFL. In short, these forces prodded both the AFL to adopt more aggressive political methods and the major political parties, particularly the Democratic Party, to enact some of the legislation labor sought.” Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol V: The AFL in the Progressive Era 1910-1915*, 142. As discussed in Chapter 4, the credible threat posed by the Socialist Party winning 6% of the popular vote in 1912 resulted in strong motivation by Wilson and the Democrats to enact Socialist-supported legislation before the next presidential election. But Paul and the Woman’s Party had failed to deliver on their promise to “hold the party in power responsible” in either the 1914 or 1916 elections. Rather than resulting in membership growth, their picketing campaign in 1917 resulted in a loss of more than 10,000 members representing more than 10% of their overall strength. Many of the departing members joined NAWSA. So, in some ways, Paul made Catt and NAWSA an easy ally for Wilson in the same way that Malcolm X made Martin
NAWSA, unlike the President, could not ignore the pickets. From the start, NAWSA leaders denounced the silent sentinels of the NWP – continuing the campaign Catt had started in 1916 to distinguish NAWSA from the CU. Shaw wrote to a close friend of Wilson’s in March 1917 expressing her deep regret at the actions of the Woman’s Party and reiterating her continued support for Wilson. After condemning the pickets, she added, “I fully agree with you that Mr. Wilson intended just what he said at our National Convention at Atlantic City and what is more he has lived up to his promise. He has done more for suffrage during the month of February than all of the Presidents who have even been in the White House.”

In response to the wave of publicity after the July arrests, Catt issued an “Open Letter to the Public” in which she stressed the complete separation of NAWSA from the NWP. Pointing out that the NWP was a minority organization, she claimed that the National represented 98% of the organized suffragists in the United States and was officially on record as absolutely opposed to the picketing tactics. Catt urged the press and public alike to disregard the tactics of the NWP and to grant women suffrage in spite of the distasteful actions of a small minority. In describing NAWSA, she boasted, “With its membership of two millions [sic] of women representative of all the states, it is the essential agent to be reckoned with; that its work has always been constructive, law-

Luther King, Jr. more palatable to many Americans, including President Lyndon Johnson. But the NWP never came close to posing a legitimate threat to Wilson or the Democratic Party. Their effectiveness as a radical alternative pales in comparison to the other factors pushing Wilson toward Catt, NAWSA, and support of the federal amendment.

337 Shaw to Warren (March 13, 1917), LWWP.

338 Catt, “An Open Letter to the Public” (July 13, 1917), NAWSA Records, Box 82, Reel 60. As noted earlier in this chapter, the press responded positively to Catt’s request to make a clear distinction between NAWSA as the nation’s majority suffrage organization and the NWP as a militant minority group.
abiding and non-partisan.” Catt thus established the NWP as a dramatic foil for the National, urging the public to make a clear distinction between the two groups.

Interestingly, Catt had not always been so intolerant of militant tactics. Just seven years earlier, when interviewed about an upcoming trip to America by Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the militant suffragists in England, Catt said:

I am not a militant, and believe in evolutionary rather than revolutionary methods for obtaining reforms. Consequently, I do not indorse the policy of the militants, but, on the contrary, I have much admiration for Mrs. Pankhurst, whose sincerity of purpose and willingness to sacrifice herself no one who know her can question. Further I freely acknowledge that the situation created by a vacillating, short-sighted government on the one hand and sharp, clever, militant women on the other has resulted in much useful agitation the world over . . . It is well known that I am non-militant. Nevertheless, I wish to go on record with the statement that I shall never publicly nor privately repudiate the militants. I do not like nor approve of their form of campaign, nor do I share a common opinion that they have set the woman suffrage movement ahead tremendously, but when a wrong is to be righted and millions of people are aroused to action in behalf of the movement, it is pusillanimous and contemptible for those who work in one way to condemn those who work in another.”

Apparently, tolerance and respectful disagreement was easier when it involved British militants rather than militant tactics on American soil. In the heat of the suffrage battle in the United States in 1917, Catt did exactly what she said she said she would “never” do; at every opportunity, she publicly and privately repudiated the NWP pickets.

Catt especially made sure the President understood that she did not support the NWP campaign against him. Prior to his decision to pardon the pickets after the July arrests, she had scheduled a conference with the President to discuss the negative impact

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340 “Mrs. Catt on Mrs. Pankhurst,” The Woman’s Journal, September 27, 1913.
the pickets might have on upcoming legislative action. After he granted the pardon, the
NAWSA Executive Secretary wrote to Wilson’s chief of staff that Catt thought the
meeting would be unnecessary and that it could wait “to a later date when the war
measure and the Congress will bear less heavily upon him . . . His serene and tactful
handling of the recent ‘picket crisis’ cleared the air for a time, at least, and makes the
conference unnecessary, we hope until the close of this Congress.” While emphasizing
that her organization disapproved of the pickets, Catt made sure to recognize the other
issues facing the President. This diplomatic and considerate approach, while abhorred by
Paul and other NWP leaders, was effective in winning the support of the President and
his staff.

As the crucial New York state suffrage campaign neared its climax in the fall of
1917, pro-suffrage forces across the state worked tirelessly to overcome the damage to
their campaign caused by the NWP pickets. The NAWSA affiliate in New York passed a
resolution protesting against men who said they planned to vote against the amendment
because of the picketing in Washington, D.C. NAWSA representatives denounced the
tactics of the NWP. They asked the men of New York not to punish them for the acts of
a few who were misled into militancy. Governor Charles Whitman and Congressman
Charles Smith, both pro-suffrage, also attacked the pickets for their questionable tactics
and asked New Yorkers to vote in favor of suffrage despite the actions of the NWP.
New York suffragists had only to look north to Maine to see they had good reason to fear

341 Gardener to Brahany (July 26, 1917), LWWP.
that the NWP campaign had damaged their chances of winning the referendum. Maine voters defeated that state’s suffrage measure by a vote of almost two to one on September 10, 1917. Analysis in *The Portland Press* indicated that the “natural conservatism of Maine people” was the primary reason for the referendum’s failure. The article went on to say, “Intensifying this natural conservatism of the people of Maine . . . was the action of the suffragists in Washington, which came into prominence almost simultaneously with the submission of the question to the voters of this state. Maine people, as a whole, entirely disapproved of the action of the women agitators for suffrage in Washington.”

After the suffrage victory in New York, Catt and other members of the NAWSA Executive Council requested a meeting with Wilson to thank him for his assistance in New York and solicit his support for the federal amendment. In the memo requesting the meeting, NAWSA executive secretary Helen Gardener informed the President that the NWP was planning a large demonstration against him on November 10 and that it would help squelch NWP publicity if Wilson met with NAWSA members prior to that. This exchange is probably the most convincing piece of evidence to support the contention of traditionalist historians who have argued that the NWP’s antagonism of the President pushed him closer to NAWSA. Gardener’s note perfectly illustrates Bissell Brown’s assessment: “The pressure of the pickets gave NAWSA . . . the leverage they needed to approach the president as problem solvers and mediators.” Wilson not only met with the group, but also came closer than ever to fully and publicly endorsing the federal amendment.

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345 Memorandum for the President from the White House Staff (November 6, 1917), *LWWP*.

amendment. After the meeting, Catt explained to reporters that the President had promised to do everything within his power to help the cause. While this somewhat ambiguous statement stopped short of endorsing the federal amendment, Catt chose to interpret it as evidence that Wilson would, in fact, lend his aid to that fight when the new session of Congress opened in January.347

After Catt’s meeting with Wilson, his director of the Committee for Public Information, George Creel, sent him a memo stating that the NWP wanted to have an audience with him in order to urge the federal amendment. Creel recommended that Wilson decline to meet with them, saying, “May I advise against such an audience and if you agree with me will you suggest form of refusal. Mrs. Catt and Dr. Shaw speak for equal suffrage in the nation and the Congressional Union is without standing and deserves no recognition.”348 Creel’s letter indicates that Catt’s campaign to distinguish NAWSA as the “organization to be reckoned with” fully succeeded with leading members of the administration.

NWP leaders, though, also believed they had led a victorious campaign in 1917. Paul spent a period of time in a sanatorium in Baltimore during the summer of 1917 recuperating from exhaustion. Burns filled in as the acting chair of the NWP. Expressing her confidence in the NWP strategy to a supporter in Rhode Island in late July, Burns declared, “We have been passing through a very trying time, but I believe great good has been accomplished . . . We expect to go on picketing during the coming


348 Creel to Wilson (November 9, 1917), LWWP.
week. There is great indignation that so many arrests have been made which now apparently can be proved false.”

Despite the public outcry against the pickets, Burns was convinced that a significant number of people were actually more indignant of the pickets’ arrests. This false belief was shared by most NWP leaders. Writing to her comrades who were in jail, NWP member Beulah Amidon encouraged:

The big world is watching---and learning---and admiring, and pretty soon the job you’re helping at will be done. Can you imagine how it will be when that amendment actually passes? Sometimes, when I am too tired to think, I just take a long breath and try to dream of a whole nation politically free---and then there is nothing too hard to do to make the dream come true. We had wonderful stories in the NY, Washington, Phila., and Boston papers this morning, and every batch of clippings that comes in is bigger and friendlier.

Amidon’s words were surely encouraging to her comrades in jail. Undoubtedly, she believed every word she wrote. But her perception that people were “admiring” the pickets and that the press coverage was friendly was simply wishful thinking.

Upon her return to the NWP ranks in late September, Paul, too, voiced her belief that the picket strategy was effective. In an argument foreshadowing Graham’s article

349 Burns to Mrs. Richard Wainwright (July 23, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.

350 One leader who dissented and ultimately resigned from the Executive Board of the Woman’s Party was Harriet Stanton Blatch. Blatch was not opposed to picketing – and in fact had helped Paul convince other members of the Executive Board to endorse the plan in early January. But Blatch and Paul strongly disagreed over who, exactly, should picket. Paul was willing to use women from all over the country, regardless of whether or not they came from states that had already granted them the right to vote. Blatch vehemently argued that only disenfranchised women should picket. Women from western states who had the vote should continue to pursue direct political action by pressuring their elected representatives to support the federal amendment. Unable to resolve this difference, Blatch sent Paul her resignation from the Executive Board on February 15, 1917. See Blatch to Paul (January 24, 1917) and Blatch to Paul (February 15, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2. Once the United States entered the war, Blatch not only moved away from Paul and the NWP, but also moved away from suffrage in general and concentrated her efforts on broader reform issues. According to Blatch biographer Ellen DuBois, “By the time the Nineteenth Amendment was passed by Congress and ratified by the thirty-sixth state, Harriot Stanton Blatch was already living and working in a postsuffrage world. DuBois, Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage, 183.

351 Amidon to Picket Prisoners (August 23, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
more than sixty years later, Paul wrote, “The vigor with which the administration is seeking to crush the picketing indicates, it seems to me, the effectiveness of this form of agitation.” Again, Paul’s method of measuring success seems skewed. As with her campaign against the pro-suffrage Senator Thomas of Colorado in 1914, she was convinced that garnering the hatred of those whose assistance she sought was good for the cause. The responsiveness of the White House and Congress to NAWSA, who employed the exact opposite approach, demonstrates just how wrong Paul’s philosophy was.

Enough of the leaders, though. What did the rank and file of the Woman’s Party (small though they were) across the country think of their organization’s new direction in 1917? Some were supportive when the picketing first started and before the war began. A woman in Philadelphia wrote in February, “Don’t let people persuade you to withdraw the ‘pickets’ from the White House. They are something far more than a spectacle. If war should be declared and our country should need our energies . . . it will be time enough then to call in the pickets.” Two sisters in New York who pledged $500 to the NWP in July because they were so inspired by the brave pickets expressed a similar sentiment. When they actually sent their check in August, they qualified their support, “We do not feel that the banners which display protest such as Kaiser Wilson are at all worthy of the cause and we fear may discredit it even among those most sympathetic.

352 Paul to Miss Mary B. Dixon (September 26, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
353 Mary V. to Paul (February 8, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
We hope that our contribution will not be used for this part of the work but rather for the educational propaganda.”

Perhaps the oddest letter of support came from Mary E. McCumber, the head of the North Dakota NAWSA affiliate. McCumber, apparently a closet militant, wrote to Paul to tell her how much she admired her willingness to “fight right on the firing line.” She added that there were “thousands of women scattered over the country who are watching your achievements with pride and gratitude.” We can probably assume with relative confidence that Paul derived more than a little satisfaction in receiving a letter of support written on NAWSA stationary.

The bulk of the mail from NWP members, though, was strongly opposed to the picketing campaign. Two letters in January came from members canceling their pledges because they thought the picketing was both unwise and ridiculous. Many of those who had not been opposed in January and February became so when the U.S. entered the war in April. Many more were later driven completely away from the NWP.

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354 Irene and Alice Lewishon to NWP (July 20, 1917) and Irene Lewishon to Paul (August 18, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.

355 McCumber to Paul (June 25, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.

356 This statement is based on the existing letters in the NWP papers. Letters of opposition to the picket strategy outnumber letters of support by a margin of nearly three to one. The question remains as to whether those who supported the strategy were as motivated to write to the NWP leadership and voice their opinions as those who opposed the strategy. The majority of all correspondence from rank and file members of the NWP back to the headquarters dealt with donations. Respondents were usually answering a call to send in money that they had previously pledged or that members of the NWP Executive Council had solicited. Given that as the basis of the correspondence, it seems that supporters and opponents of the picketing strategy would have had the same motivation to write to the NWP headquarters. If the motivation to write was, indeed, equal, than the raw ratio of 3:1 accurately portrays strong opposition to the picketing strategy within the NWP.

357 Mary P. Smith to CU (January 11, 1917) and Perle Shale Kingsbury to Maud Younger (January 25, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
by its actions with regard to the Russian delegation in June.\textsuperscript{358} The tenor of the letters
Paul received grew much graver after the incident with the Russian delegation.

In a note that struck right at the heart of Paul’s belief that there was no such thing
as bad publicity, a woman in New Jersey reflected:

Because I believe in the federal amendment and because I believe the war
should not stop the fight for suffrage, I belong to the Woman’s Party; and
because I have had confidence in the women in Washington I have said
many times to myself that they know best and the rest of us must stand
behind them. But today’s paper shakes my confidence, so untrue and
misleading does that [Russian] banner seem to be. Publicity is certainly
gained, but at a great cost.\textsuperscript{359}

This letter conveys the torn feelings of many NWP members who wanted to continue to
work for the federal amendment but were uncomfortable with the militant course Paul
charted for their organization.

When Paul sent out a mass mailing requesting funds in late June, many of the
recipients took the opportunity in their replies to voice their displeasure with the
picketing (and to decline to send any money). The Chair of NAWSA’s Massachusetts
state association wrote that she was convinced that the work of the NWP was delaying

\textsuperscript{358} Based on their analysis of internal NWP membership records, Adams and Keene estimate that
the unpopularity of the picketing strategy resulted in the loss of as many as 10,000 members from the total
of 60,000 or 70,000 that existed at the start of 1917. Adams and Keene, \textit{Alice Paul and the American
Suffrage Campaign}, 172. Some historians have argued that the militance of the NWP galvanized young
recruits to the cause. Adams and Keene, for example, note that, “By 1917, 87 percent of the organizers
sent out to work in the states and encourage women to come into Washington for the picketing were
between nineteen and twenty-nine, a significant decrease in age from earlier years.” Quote from p. 173.
For similar data, see Ford, \textit{Iron-Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party,
1912-1920}, 102. Nancy Cott acknowledges this demographic shift, but argues that age was a less important
aspect of NWP membership than was adherence to the “broader agenda of Feminism.” Cott defines
Feminism as opposition to sex hierarchy, the belief that women’s condition is socially constructed, and
self-perception of women not only as a biological sex but also as a social grouping. Cott, \textit{The Grounding of
Modern Feminism}, 4-5. Cott thus concludes that “The temperamental radicalism of the CU was probably
as important as chronological age in the way it was seen by both outsiders and insiders as the party of
youth.” Quote from p. 57.

\textsuperscript{359} Mary Everett to Paul (June 21, 1917), \textit{NWPP}, Reel 2.

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rather than helping the federal amendment. In her state, she reported, the tactics of picketing and heckling the President repelled both men and women. Similarly, a woman in Illinois who confessed that she subscribed to the NWP newspaper, *The Suffragist*, refused to send money saying, “I do not believe that Mr. Wilson is our greatest enemy, though I have been impatient at his attitude, nor do I think that we gain by holding a party as a party responsible.”

From the far side of the country came a major blow to the NWP leadership in early July. Elizabeth Kent, a member of the NWP Executive Committee, and an extremely active campaigner in California, tendered her resignation from the Executive Committee on July 9. She telegrammed Paul, “Have greatest respect for your judgment but feel that present methods are not my methods and therefore I cannot honestly remain on board.” Kent had been supportive of the initial picketing strategy, but the Russian banner had been too much for her to handle. Many less prominent members of the organization echoed her sentiments.

During the fall of 1917, a number of letters from women not located in the urban-industrial center of New York or the political hub in Washington, D.C. warned that the NWP was losing the publicity war in most other parts of the country. An NWP member in Mississippi reported, “I do ‘my bit’ in your defense whenever I can get in a word. Through much garbled and prejudiced news reports the sentiment, and emphatically

360 Grace Johnson to Paul (July 2, 1917), *NWPP*, Reel 2.

361 Colby to Paul (July 8, 1917), *NWPP*, Reel 2.

362 Kent to Paul (July 9, 1917), *NWPP*, Reel 2. Kent did not resign from the NWP altogether. She remained an active and important member throughout the campaign.

363 For example, see Celia Raymond to Burns (August 16, 1917), *NWPP*, Reel 2.
among suffrage enthusiasts, is violently against you.³⁶⁴ A Tennessee woman complained that the papers in her area refused to print the NWP publicity bulletins and instead published articles critical of the pickets. The Woman’s Party, she lamented, was losing almost all of its members in Tennessee. From Georgia came a report that the Atlanta Constitution refused to publish anything about the pickets as an interview or as an article of news.³⁶⁵

Publicity was stymied in other ways, too. A representative of the American Bar Association, upon receiving circulars and tickets concerning a mass meeting by the NWP to describe their prison experiences, wrote back to the NWP Headquarters that he had received the materials too late to announce it at the meeting of the Bar Association, but would not have announced it even if he had received them earlier. He explained, “I am thoroughly in favor of Woman’s Suffrage but have no toleration whatever for the conduct of the Pickets which has disgraced this city for some months past.”³⁶⁶

Beulah Amidon’s inspiring letter to her comrades in jail failed to take these types of sentiments into account. The women who braved freezing cold weather in the winter and steaming temperatures in the summer, angry crowds and indifferent police, dirty prison cells and forced feedings, exhibited tremendous courage and dedication to their cause. The violations of their civil liberties is a black mark on the history of the United States, and especially on all those who supported the cause of suffrage but stood by as the pickets were arrested for exercising their right to free speech. Regrettably, Catt and other

³⁶⁴ Mary Houston to Paul (September 1, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
³⁶⁵ Memo to Paul from the Tennessee Branch of the CU (September 3, 1917) and Memo to Gertrude Fendel (December 9, 1917), NWPP. Reel 2.
³⁶⁶ Easby-Smith to Emory (December 5, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
NAWSA officials actually facilitated the attack on the pickets’ civil liberties by their constant denunciations of NWP tactics.\textsuperscript{367} Neither the bravery of the pickets nor the injustices they suffered, though, changes the fact that their actions were harmful to the greater suffrage cause. Specifically aimed at the President, their actions only made the positive work he did for the suffrage cause in 1917 even more difficult at a time when his difficulties were legion.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the primary reason for Wilson’s reelection was the support he received from people who believed he had kept the nation out of the war in Europe. His bold plan for a mediated peace had appealed to Americans deeply divided over the cause of the war and fearful of ending America’s neutrality. In the month after his narrow election victory, he constructed a plan for a peace conference. As a first step toward the realization of that vision, he sent a memo to both the Allies and the Central Powers asking for a clear statement of their war aims. Their responses in early January demonstrated just how difficult a mediated peace would be, for their visions of a just post-war settlement were vastly different. Nonetheless, Wilson felt comfortable in giving his “peace without victory” speech to Congress on January 22, 1917.\textsuperscript{368}

Unbeknownst to him at that time, the German leadership had already decided to resume their unrestricted submarine warfare in an attempt to speed the end of the war. This action was a direct violation of the Sussex Pledge the Germans had given Wilson in May

\textsuperscript{367} NAWSA leaders almost never protested the attacks against or the arrests and imprisonment of NWP members. Alice Stone Blackwell, president of the NAWSA-affiliated Massachusetts state suffrage organization, serves as an exception to this rule. Following the incident surrounding the “Russian banner,” Blackwell told reporters, “I think it was foolish to display the banner appealing to the Russian mission, but at the same time the action of the women was lawful and those who attacked their banner and tore it to pieces were acting in an illegal and disgraceful manner. The way the women were treated was shameful.” “Crowd Tears Down Banners,” \textit{Christian Science Monitor}, June 21, 1917, 6.

1916. In that accord, the German government had agreed to refrain from attacking merchant vessels and liners without warning. The German ambassador informed the President of the submarine warfare plan on January 31, and Wilson – true to the promise he had made at the time of the Sussex Pledge – broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on February 3.\textsuperscript{369}

Wilson’s cabinet urged him to request an armed shipping bill from Congress so that U.S. merchant ships could defend themselves against attack. Wilson was reluctant to do so until he learned of the German plan to bring Mexico into a war against the U.S. After the famous “Zimmerman Telegram” containing the German message to the Mexican leadership came to light for Wilson on February 24, he asked Congress to arm merchantmen on the following day. Illustrating the limits to executive influence, the bill passed the House but failed in the Senate where staunch neutralists debated it so long that the Congress expired on March 4 without a vote.\textsuperscript{370}

On March 12, a German submarine sank an unarmed American merchant ship – the first time Germany violated the Sussex Pledge in deed, rather than word. That same day saw the start of the Russian Revolution, widely welcomed in America which had been troubled by the presence of the authoritarian Tsarist regime’s presence among the Allied Powers. Wilson recognized the new Russian government on March 22.\textsuperscript{371}

The President called an emergency session of the new Congress in early April. He gave his war message to a joint session and uttered the famous phrase, “The world

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 373-376.

\textsuperscript{370} Clements, \textit{The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson}, 138.

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 139.
must be made safe for democracy.” Angered by the Zimmerman Telegram and the sinking of U.S. merchant ships, the Senate adopted a statement of war against Germany on April 4 by a vote of 82-6 and the House adopted it two days later by a vote of 373-50. Congress also adopted a joint resolution to restrict their debate during that session of Congress to “war measures” - issues that directly affected America’s ability to prosecute the war.372

American troops began arriving in Paris in June. Much of Wilson’s time over the summer was spent negotiating the terms of American Army units’ participation in the war with the Allies. Wilson and his commander, General John J. Pershing, felt strongly that American troops should fight as a united unit and not be used as individual fillers for gaps in the Allied armies. Wilson and Pershing’s views prevailed, but the negotiations with the allies were tense and time-consuming.373

The second Russian Revolution in November ended Russia’s involvement in the war and made its eventual outcome very unpredictable. In January 1918, Wilson delivered his famous “Fourteen Points” speech to Congress. The exuberance with which it was initially received was quickly overshadowed when the Germans initiated a major offensive in the spring of 1918 that was marginally successful. They were on the move again in the Marne offensive of July only to be badly defeated, mostly by the fresh U.S. troops.374 The Allies began a counterattack in July that succeeded in pushing Germany back toward her borders over the course of the next few months. The Central Powers

374 Ibid., 408-410.
began to crumble in October and, finally, the Germans capitulated and signed the armistice on November 11, 1918.

It was against this backdrop of world-changing events that Catt developed and executed the “Winning Plan” she had outlined in Atlantic City in September 1916. Recognizing early on that Congress would be distracted by the war, she made state campaigns the main arena for NAWSA activity in 1917. As Morgan argues, Catt was content to fight a holding action in Congress while increasing the eventual number of supportive Congressmen by creating more suffrage states. She also recognized that participation in the war effort could be used to demonstrate the full capacity of women and further justify their demands for equal suffrage.375

For the majority of her public life, Catt worked simultaneously towards broadening women’s rights and achieving world peace. Before the First World War, she was active in the Woman’s Peace Party. After the war and the passage of the federal suffrage amendment, she founded the Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, an organization to which she devoted herself until the end of her life in 1947. Her decision, then, to support American involvement in World War I may at first seem contradictory. Certainly many of her comrades from the peace movement believed it was and harshly criticized her decision.376

375 Morgan, Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America, 118.

376 Catt’s successful campaign to convince NAWSA to support the war was extremely controversial and led to the defection of several prominent members. NAWSA’s National Publicity Director, Elinor Byrns, resigned in the middle of a speaking tour when she heard that the National’s officers had voted to support the war. She continued to work for suffrage by joining the NWP which had voted to take no stand on the war. See Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, 61. Similarly, NAWSA’s state leader in Wisconsin, Meta Berger, defected to the NWP over the issue of war support. See S. Rowbotham, A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States (New York: Viking, 1997), 99. After the United States entered the war, the Woman’s Peace Party split into three
What those comrades-turned-critics failed to grasp was Catt’s political pragmatism. She articulated time and again in letters, articles, and speeches her conscientious objection to war of any sort but also her realization that American intervention in the war in Europe was inevitable after February 1917. Given that inevitability, Catt calculated that NAWSA stood a much greater chance of achieving its objectives if they threw themselves solidly into home front war service while simultaneously working to secure the federal suffrage amendment. NAWSA’s war service would aid in the public relations campaign to convince voters that women as citizens fulfilled their obligations just like men and deserved the vote. It would also deflect the potential criticism of anti-suffragists who would surely criticize NAWSA as “unpatriotic” for working towards suffrage while the war was being fought overseas.\(^{377}\) When war became inevitable, Catt the pragmatist felt that her decision to support the war was also inevitable.\(^{378}\)

February was indeed the crucial month in terms of decisions about the war. On February 3, 1917, Secretary of State Robert Lansing informed Congress that the United

\(^{377}\) Van Voris, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life*, 137-138. The manner in which the anti-suffragists influenced the strategic decisions of the suffragists is considered in-depth in the next chapter.

\(^{378}\) The historical record contains several clues to Catt’s decision early on to privilege suffrage over her involvement with the peace movement. For example, when Jane Addams was working to call nationwide mass peace demonstrations in December 1914, Catt offered her services only so far as her participation did not reflect poorly on the suffrage campaign. She amplified, “I think it most advisable that the suffragists should not be the prime mover in this step. When I say that I will undertake [organizing the demonstration] in New York, I do not mean that I will head the movement, but that I will get the right people to do it and will give my assistance to it.” Catt to Addams (December 4, 1914), CLOC, Box 4, Reel 3. Always conscious of the public’s perception of suffragists, Catt maintained her distance from potentially damaging relationships with other movements. She continued to be casually involved in the Woman’s Peace Party until March 1917 when the organization officially rebuked her for NAWSA’s statement of support for the war. See “Peace Party Ousts Mrs. Carrie Catt,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1917.
States had broken off diplomatic relations with Germany. On that same day, one of Catt’s closest co-workers at NAWSA, Clara Hyde, wrote to Mary Peck about Catt’s latest activities. She informed Peck, “The second item you should know about is that C.C.C. dines with President and Mrs. Wilson on Monday night as the guest of Secy. Of War Daniels and his wife!! The old goat is warming up. I’d give a king’s ransom to watch Carrie turn her lamps on him.” Wilson’s appointment book confirms that he and his wife dined with Daniels and Catt on February 5, 1917. No record exists of what was discussed during their dinner. However, the events of the preceding and following days strongly suggest that the impending war was a topic of conversation, along with whether or not NAWSA intended to support the President should he officially decide to send troops to Europe. Wilson had held a meeting just four days earlier with the executive officers of the Woman’s Peace League who voiced their continued disapproval of increasing U.S. militancy.

It seems more than likely that the President inquired if Catt and NAWSA held the same views as the Woman’s Peace League. Whether or not he asked that question remains a mystery, but the following day Catt issued a call to the Executive Council of NAWSA to meet later that month and adopt their official position on the war. It would seem that Catt felt the question of NAWSA’s position had been raised – if not explicitly by the President then at least by the circumstances of the day.

379 Hyde to Peck (February 3, 1917), NAWSA Records, Box 24, Reel 16. Hyde incorrectly identified Daniels as the Secretary of War. He was actually the Secretary of the Navy.

380 Appointment Books (February 5, 1917), PWW, Box 3, Reel 3.

381 Appointment Books (February 1, 1917), PWW, Box 3, Reel 3.
In her call to the Executive Council, Catt began by stating, “Our nation is on the brink of war.” She went on to explain that the decision the organization needed to make was whether “suffragists [should] do the ‘war work’ which they will undoubtedly want to do with other groups newly formed, thus running the risk of disintegrating our organizations or shall we use our headquarters and our machinery for really helpful constructive aid to our nation. The answer to these questions must be given now.”

Even before war had been declared, Catt seemed to see the political benefits of making NAWSA’s stand apparent to the public and key politicians alike.

At the meeting of the Executive Council on February 23-25, the members passed a resolution by a vote of 63-13 pledging their support and service in the event of war. Although invited, Wilson was unable to attend the final session in which the resolution was presented to Secretary of War Newton Baker. He did send a letter to the NAWSA headquarters expressing his “very great and sincere admiration of the action taken.”

Wilson expressed his appreciation and admiration in more concrete terms over the next two years as he became not only a supporter but also an advocate for the federal suffrage amendment. In her urgent call for NAWSA to define its position on the war, Catt rigorously answered any question the President might have had about looking for support to its two million members. In return, he seems to have answered Catt’s question about his support for national woman’s suffrage.

A statement of support in the case of war from the nation’s largest suffrage organization provided an embattled Wilson with a much-needed ally. Antiwar sentiment

382 Catt to Executive Council (February 6, 1917), NAWSA Records, Box 82, Reel 60.

383 Wilson to NAWSA (February 28, 1917), NAWSA Records, Box 32, Reel 21.
ran high in the early months of 1917. Between February and April, peace federations from across the country flooded Congress with petitions opposing the war. Wilson received thousands of telegrams reminding him that he had been elected on the basis of keeping America out of war. Membership in the antiwar Socialist Party actually started to rise in early 1917 as many Americans viewed the war as a conflict backed by American corporate interests. Opposition was especially widespread in farm communities and urban working-class neighborhoods. Although public opinion would shift dramatically once US troops headed into the fight in Europe, that transition was far from being a foregone conclusion in February. Facing strong opposition for reversing his peace stance, Wilson was sincere when he thanked Catt for NAWSA’s early vote of confidence in him.

The NWP, too, realized that it must take some position on the war. Paul sent a letter out to all her state chairmen on February 8th in which she called for a national convention in March to consider the organization’s war policy. In the letter, she stressed that the organization was dedicated only to the enfranchisement of women and that, until changed by an action of the convention, that would continue to be the NWP policy. The March convention voted to sustain the current policy of focusing only on suffrage and remaining neutral on the issue of the war. What Paul did not anticipate, or ever realize, was that a majority of Americans saw “taking no stand on the war” as a very active stand. They viewed the NWP as unpatriotic and harmful to the nation. This, much

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386 Paul to State Chairmen (February 8, 1917), *NWPP*, Reel 2.
more so than opposition to suffrage, was the source of the anger that propelled crowds to attack the White House pickets.  

Paul maintained her belief that NAWSA had forgone suffrage work to participate in war service throughout the remainder of her life. In an interview given just a few years before she died in 1977, Paul related the same thing to her interviewer that she expressed to members of the NWP in 1917: it was up to the NWP to singularly focus on suffrage because the National was “working only for war.”

Paul’s charge that NAWSA abandoned suffrage work is totally unfounded. An April 1917 article in the New York Times, running under the headline, “Suffragists’ Machine Perfected in All States under Mrs. Catt’s Rule,” gave testimony to NAWSA’s two-pronged strategy. The article referenced NAWSA’s recent commitment to war service, but went on to describe the organization’s vast political lobbying, publicity activity, and state campaigning. Specifically, it pointed out that the National’s news service sent press releases to 6,000 newspapers throughout the country and that members in all the states collected stories of local work and fed them back to the National which then redistributed them to Washington and New York papers. Of greater significance, NAWSA successfully orchestrated suffrage referendum victories in nine states while the

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387 Evidence for this comes from the fact that the NWP pickets were generally ignored by the public until after US entry into the war. Even then, it was not until the pickets raised the “Kaiser Wilson” banner in June 1917 that sidewalk observers violently attacked the pickets. As a further link to the war, newspaper coverage of the attacks on the pickets indicates that the mob leaders were often soldiers or sailors. According to an Associated Press story that ran in several major newspapers, the crowd shouted, “traitors,” “treason” and “they are the enemies of their country,” when the pickets displayed the “Kaiser Wilson” banner. See “Peaceful Pickets Cause Big Row,” Los Angeles Times, June 21, 1917, 11.


war raged in 1917-1918, further testimony to the organization’s ability to simultaneously perform war service and conduct suffrage work.

Catt was quick to exploit the political capital earned by suffragists’ war service. An excerpt from one of the NAWSA press releases to the *New York Times* demonstrates the manner in which she wedded the issues of suffrage and war service:

In the United States, suffrage associations have illustrated this alertness of women. Suffragists were already stimulating the production and conservation of food before any definite governmental action was worked out. And through their suffrage associations they were passing on the word to other women. What Connecticut found out was told in Alabama. Nebraska’s thrift aroused emulation in New York. Women in Plattsburgh, New York, and San Antonio, Texas, were of one mind about being “camp mothers” to soldiers . . . There has been no sectionalism, there can be none among women, alike disfranchised, and alike, seeking for the ballot for the common end of protecting that which is dearest to their hearts. No other group of people came so readily into line for national service, for no other group seeking enfranchisement has ever sifted through every class and station of life. Ready-to-serve suffragists have put the handles of the tools of their colossal organization into the government’s hands.390

This article underscores several important points that Catt thought critical in the public relations campaign. It mentions the nationwide spread of NAWSA’s efforts, the unity of their effort that transcended sectional boundaries, and their willingness to heed the nation’s call for aid while still fighting for equal suffrage.

Wilson did not fail to hold up his end of the bargain, either. Although he did not advocate for the federal amendment until the year was complete (neither did NAWSA push him to do so), he made significant contributions to the cause, as will be shown, through his support of state referenda and the creation of a separate suffrage committee in the House of Representatives. Partially as a result of the President’s aid, eight more

390 Catt, “Ready for Citizenship” (August 24, 1917), *NAWSA Records*, Box 82, Reel 59.
states granted women full or partial suffrage in 1917. With the support of
Representatives from these states, suffragists secured the necessary two-thirds vote in
favor of the federal amendment in the House on January 10, 1918. Wilson’s actions in
1917 contributed no small amount to that victory.

Catt repeatedly called on the President for support in state suffrage battles in early
1917. In January, she wrote to the President’s secretary, Tumulty, alerting him that
Oklahoma’s legislature was about to vote in favor of a suffrage bill. She requested that
Wilson write her a letter that included a statement that he hoped the voters in the state
would approve the amendment. On the same day, she sent another letter to Tumulty
explaining that a somewhat different bill was pending in North Dakota. Imposing that
she and the President were in accord on the issue, she requested, “A letter of
congratulations from the President and an expression of approval of this form of
legislation, together with an expression of his continued interest in the suffrage
movement and hope for its ultimate establishment would be of great assistance to the
cause in general and serve the purpose of which we spoke.”

391 The eight new suffrage states included North Dakota, Ohio, Indiana, Rhode Island, Nebraska,
Michigan, Arkansas, and New York. The legislatures in North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, Indiana, and
Michigan granted presidential suffrage. Arkansas granted women the right to vote in primary elections.
Only New York granted full suffrage. Still, in 1917 alone, the number of presidential electors for whom
women were entitled to vote increased from 91 to 232. Van Voris, Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life,
147. , Flexner and Fitzpatrick, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States,
282. For detailed accounts of the suffrage campaigns in each of these states, see Ida A. Husted Harper, ed.
Michigan, and Indiana all experienced setbacks in late 1917. Antisuffragists challenged the state
legislation in the court system and succeeded in forcing additional referendums. Despite legal challenges,
the suffragists continued to count these states in the suffrage column, as did most of the nation’s
newspapers who used NAWSA’s “suffrage map” in depicting the status of woman suffrage around the
country.

392 Catt to Tumulty (January 17, 1917), PWW, Box 89, Reel 209.

393 Ibid.
Wilson responded quickly, conforming to Catt’s specific wording requests in both cases. In his letter of congratulations regarding the successful North Dakota vote, he wrote, “As you know, I have a very real interest in the extension of the suffrage to women and I feel that every step in this direction should be applauded.” Catt’s use of the phrase “of which we spoke” and Wilson’s phrasing “as you know” testifies to the level of high agreement and cooperation between the two.

Wilson also lent his support to the ultimately unsuccessful campaigns in Maryland and Maine, but in the most important state battle, New York, Wilson was particularly active. Like Catt, he weaved the issues of democracy, war service, and suffrage into his statements and letters. To a letter from the head of the New York Woman Suffrage Party, Vira Whitehouse, asking for a declaration of his support, he responded, “I hope that the voters of the State of New York will rally to the support of woman suffrage by a handsome majority. It would be a splendid vindication of the principle of the cause in which we all believe.”

When Whitehouse wrote back to thank Wilson for his supportive words, she informed him that New York suffragists were suffering, “from the very general disapproval of the course of the pickets, over whom, of course, we have no control and whose methods we deeply deplore. Your message should help as much as anything to show the voters of New York State the fair attitude to take.”

394 Wilson to Catt (January 25, 1917), CLOC, Reel 7.
395 Wilson to Vira Boarman Whitehouse (August 27, 1917), LWWP. For Wilson’s letters to Maryland and Maine, see Wilson to Tumulty (April 24, 1917), Life and Letters, Vol. 7 and Wilson to Deborah Knox Livingston (September 4, 1917), LWWP.
396 Whitehouse to Wilson (August, 28, 1917), LWWP.
Taking into account the obstacle of the pickets, Wilson wrote to Catt in October again expressing his support for the campaign in New York. He included a statement, “May I not say that I hope that no voter will be influenced in his decision with regard to this great matter by anything the so-called pickets may have done . . . Their action represents, I am sure, so small a fraction of the women . . . that it would be most unfair and argue a narrow view to allow their actions to prejudice the cause itself.”  

Catt was quick to give the President’s letter a wide circulation in the New York newspapers. Just a few weeks before the vote in New York, Wilson met with Whitehouse and a delegation of 110 members of the New York State Woman Suffrage Party. His statement to them represents the climax of his connecting the war, women’s service to the country, and the right to full citizenship. So sweeping were his words that some even saw it as his first public endorsement of the federal amendment.  

His statement, printed in the *New York Times* on October 26, read, in part, “I am free to say that I think the question of woman suffrage is one of those questions which lie at the foundation [of the struggle for democracy].” He added, “I believe that, 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 . . . I think the whole country has appreciated the way in which the women have risen to this great occasion [of the war].” The suffrage amendment passed in New York two weeks later by a margin of 94,000 votes. The New York victory alone added 43 more representatives in Congress from suffrage states.

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397 Wilson to Catt (October 13, 1917), CLOC, Box 9, Reel 7.
399 Wilson’s Statement to New York State Woman Suffrage Party delegation (October 25, 1917), *LWWP*.  

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Wilson was also instrumental in breaking up a major administrative obstacle for the suffragists. For years, suffragists had been forced to plead their case for a federal amendment with the House Judiciary Committee because the House leadership had refused to establish a separate committee on woman suffrage. The Senate had established a separate committee in 1878, and suffragists were convinced that their interests had been treated more fairly and with greater attention in the Senate than in the House. In May, NAWSA executive secretary Helen Gardener wrote to Wilson and asked him to intervene on NAWSA’s behalf with Representative Edward Pou, a Democrat from North Carolina, who, as chairman of the Rules Committee, held the necessary influence to create a separate suffrage committee. Pointing out that this was the only request NAWSA had made during the “war session” of Congress, she implored the President to come to her aid. Gardener, too, made use of women’s war service by adding, “With this added bit of legislative machinery working in our interests, as occasion permits, we can all the more freely and happily give of our services in other directions to our country.”

In a polite and carefully worded letter, Wilson complied with Gardener’s request and endorsed the idea of a separate committee to Pou. The Congressman responded that he would heed the President’s advice and hold a vote on the matter with the Rules

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400 In 1913, disgusted with the unresponsiveness of the House Judiciary Committee, NAWSA (at Wilson’s suggestion), had petitioned the rules committee of the House for a separate woman Suffrage Committee. Hearings were held and the Rules Committee ultimately split 4-4 on whether to make a favorable recommendation on their report. Democrats were preparing to caucus over the matter when House Majority Leader Representative Oscar Underwood (D-AL) – a staunch anti-suffragist - called Democrats into an informal meeting and convinced the majority that suffrage was a state issue. Therefore, he reasoned, a separate committee at that national level was unnecessary. The issue died until Wilson’s intervention with Pou in May 1917. Alana S. Jeydel, Political Women: The Women’s Movement, Political Institutions, the Battle for Women’s Suffrage and the ERA (New York: Routledge, 2004), 116-117.

401 Gardener to Wilson (May 10, 1917), LWWP.
Committee. The committee ruled favorably on the resolution on June 6.\textsuperscript{402} Still, the creation of a new committee had to be approved by vote of the full House. Gardener again called on the President to use his influence. She asked that he try to persuade Representative James Heflin or Carter Glass, both Democrats, to vote in favor of the measure.\textsuperscript{403} Wilson again complied and was successful. He wrote to Heflin, urging him to support the new committee. The representative from Alabama wrote back that he personally favored a states’ rights approach to suffrage, but, “after reading your letter several times and thinking over the situation, I have concluded to follow your suggestion and not oppose the creation of a committee in the House on Woman Suffrage.”\textsuperscript{404} The House finally voted and approved the new committee by a close vote on September 24.

Wilson’s contributing role in this matter was of no small significance. With a separate committee in place, the federal amendment moved smoothly through the committee process in late 1917, resulting in its favorable report and eventual successful vote in the House in January 1918. The newly created committee’s report in January was the first time a favorable report on suffrage was issued by a House committee since the 51\textsuperscript{st} Congress met from 1889-1891.\textsuperscript{405} While not nearly as exciting or dramatic as arrests and hunger strikes, NAWSA quietly scored a major victory in its long-fought struggle to

\textsuperscript{402} Wilson to Pou (May 14, 1917), \textit{Life and Letters}. For Pou’s response, see Pou to Wilson (May 17, 1917), \textit{LWWP}.

\textsuperscript{403} Gardener to Wilson (June 10, 1917), \textit{LWWP}.

\textsuperscript{404} Heflin to Wilson (June 28, 1917), \textit{LWWP}.

\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 120. Jeydyl notes that the House Committee on Woman Suffrage had a distinctly different composition than the House Judiciary Committee. The former consisted almost entirely of pro-suffrage representatives (10-3 in the 65\textsuperscript{th} Congress and 11-1 in the 66\textsuperscript{th} Congress) while the latter was traditionally dominated by an anti-suffrage southern chairman (i.e. anti-suffragist Representative E.Y. Webb of North Carolina was the Judiciary Chair from 1914-1918) and consisted primarily of anti-suffrage members.
eliminate a legislative roadblock to the federal amendment. By cooperating with NAWSA in convincing Pou to push the creation of the committee and convincing Heflin to cast an affirmative vote, the President played a major role in one of the crucial battles of the larger federal amendment war.

In his struggle to ensure the autonomy of U.S. troops in Europe and his ongoing struggles with Congress over other pieces of war legislation during the summer of 1917, Wilson was unwilling to support suffrage as a war measure. When members of the NWP, accompanied by representatives of the Progressive, Labor, and Socialist movements, urged him in May to press the federal amendment at the existing session of Congress he refused. Catt declined to join the May deputation to the president and, in fact, declined to ask him to push the federal amendment at all during the “war congress.” In July, though, Gardener wrote to Wilson advancing NAWSA’s wish that he would use his opening speech to the new Congress in December to support the federal amendment as a war measure. In this one case, the president failed to comply with NAWSA’s wishes. His speech to Congress on December 3rd contained no mention of suffrage. Catt was unfazed. She had interpreted his remarks to her in November as a tacit endorsement. In early January, her confidence in Wilson was rewarded when, on the day before the vote in the House, he finally provided a public endorsement of the federal amendment.

The President’s primary focus during 1917 was U.S. entry into the war. Suffrage histories sometimes miscalculate the relative importance of their subject. Wilson’s attitude toward suffrage during 1917 must be placed into context with the world-changing

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issues that dominated his thinking during the year. To the extent that he involved himself with suffragists at all, he did so in concert with Catt’s strategy for securing the federal amendment and in spite of the hostile actions of the NWP. Wilson and Catt’s vision for the proper suffrage strategy changed over the course of 1917 as events unfolded. Importantly, their vision evolved jointly.

The evidence suggests that there were three decisions NAWSA made in 1917 that contributed to the eventual success of the federal amendment. First, they led the charge in denouncing the militancy of the NWP. As a result, NAWSA’s chastisement of the pickets made it easier for the Wilson Administration to deny the pickets their right of free speech. Nonetheless, NAWSA preserved the suffrage movement’s reputation and its political standing by distinguishing themselves from the White House pickets that the majority of Americans (and, more importantly, members of Congress whose votes would eventually be needed) abhorred. Wilson undoubtedly looked even more favorably on NAWSA as a result of his annoyance with the NWP campaign against him, but the NWP never posed enough of a threat to “force” him into the arms of NAWSA or into support of the federal amendment. That transition occurred largely in spite of the NWP campaign.

Secondly, NAWSA recognized the need to win more suffrage states before they could have a chance at success at the federal level. Knowing that the President and Congress would not, in all likelihood, give the federal amendment serious consideration during the “war congress” they chose to focus their efforts on state campaigns. As a result, they won victories across the nation and dramatically increased the number of Congressmen responsible to equal suffrage constituents. As political scientist Eileen
McDonagh demonstrated in her 1989 study of House roll call voting on the 19th Amendment, the single most important factor in determining whether representatives would vote in favor of the federal amendment was whether or not they came from a state that had granted suffrage. In her analysis, state-level suffrage was more important in determining representatives’ votes than either regional or party identification.409 When the House voted on the federal amendment in 1915, only 47% voted in the affirmative. Just three years later, 67% of representatives voted in favor of the amendment. The biggest reason for this dramatic change was the increase in suffrage states – a change that only occurred as a result of NAWSA’s continued emphasis on state-level suffrage work.

Finally, Catt convinced NAWSA’s leaders to choose to actively support the war, simultaneously strengthening their own hand and the hand of the President when it came time to stake their claim as equal citizens. To be sure, Catt and other NAWSA leaders recognized that suffrage was a right they deserved apart from their war service – most had been working for suffrage for multiple decades and their arguments during the war years were almost always a mix of natural rights and expedient claims. Still, the reality of the situation dictated that they use all practical arguments to support their claim. Right or wrong, the fact of women’s enormous contributions to the successful prosecution of the war was a major contributing factor in the nation’s willingness to support the federal amendment.

What was the result of these three critical decisions? By the end of 1917, eight more states had been added to the national total of those that had granted women either full or partial suffrage. The President’s support in the state campaigns had been critical

to their success. Likewise, his influence had helped to secure a separate committee on woman suffrage in the House of Representatives. This removed a major legislative hurdle for suffragists as they attempted to bring the federal amendment to a vote. Finally, by January 1918, they had succeeded in persuading the President to lend his voice to the growing chorus that demanded equal suffrage for all American women through passage of a constitutional amendment.

From January 1918 until final ratification of the 19th Amendment in August 1920, Wilson was an unwavering advocate for the cause. Presidential support did not equal quick victory. Chapter Seven will explore the challenges facing Wilson and the suffragists in the final years of the battle for the federal amendment. The following chapter, though, will pause to consider those who opposed suffrage. Specifically, it will examine the actions of the nation’s organized female anti-suffragists. The anti-suffragists failed to prevent Wilson from joining ranks with the suffragists, but they succeeded in shaping the terms of the national debate and the strategy of the suffragists. A full history of the federal woman suffrage amendment demands consideration of both their failures and successes.
CHAPTER 6
FIGHTING FOR WILSON: THE IMPACT OF THE ANTI-SUFFRAGISTS

The preceding chapters have recounted Wilson’s gradual shift from complete opposition to suffrage, to a position of states’ rights and – finally – to support of the federal amendment. For us to fully understand this transition, though, the activities and influence of those who opposed woman suffrage must be taken into account. Like their pro-suffrage counterparts, the opponents of woman suffrage battled on a number of fronts to defeat both state and federal suffrage measures. However, only two groups – southern Democrats and female anti-suffragists – openly petitioned the President. They were ultimately unsuccessful in halting Wilson’s drift into the pro-suffrage camp, but the arguments they developed and publicized were effective in framing the boundaries of the national debate over woman suffrage. This was especially true in the case of the organized female anti-suffragists, whose aura of respectability allowed them to be more overt in their appeals than other anti-suffrage forces.  

This chapter will outline the opponents of woman suffrage, with particular attention to those who waged an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to influence the President. Additionally, it will show how anti-suffragists effectively shaped the debate and forced their suffrage counterparts to make difficult and often divisive tactical decisions.

The opponents of woman suffrage can be roughly divided into four categories, with the caveat that significant overlap exists among these categories. The first – a

410 Throughout this chapter, I will use the term “anti-suffragists” to refer specifically to women who joined organizations and campaigned to block any measure that would have extended the right to vote to women. I will use other terms to refer to those individuals or groups that also opposed suffrage, but were not part of the organized female anti-suffrage movement.
category I will title “the interests” – tended to oppose women as voters because they feared that women would follow through on the suffragists’ promise to purify American society and political life. The interests included the liquor industry (fearful of women’s association with prohibition), the cotton and textile manufacturing industries (fearful that women would support reform legislation that would drive up their labor costs), and the railroad owners (fearful that women would support regulation of large, powerful corporations). The second category consisted of southerners who saw woman suffrage as a threat to white supremacy in the South. Having just succeeded in disenfranchising black men via state constitutional amendments, southern white supremacists were loath to reopen the issue of voter qualification and/or eligibility in the South.411 Leading Catholic Church clergy comprised the third category, basing their opposition on the belief that each sex had its own God-given distinct sphere of activity.412 The fourth and final category included over 700,000 women who belonged to the nation’s organized female

411 See Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910. This second category could be broadened to include those (primarily in the North) who opposed woman suffrage on the grounds that it would enfranchise non-English speaking immigrant women. Anti-suffragists of this variety were typically native-born Americans who were deeply troubled by the waves of immigrants that arrived in the United States in the late 19th century. Immigrant men, they argued, usually settled in the cities and quickly became swept up by urban political machines. Uneducated and poor, they were ready to sell their votes to the highest bidder. These nativists reasoned that enfranchising women would only amplify this problem. I have not included this group of anti-suffragists in the same category as the southern white supremacists because this line of anti-suffragist reasoning usually made its way into the public sphere via the speeches and writings of the female anti-suffragists whom I consider in a fourth category. For a superb review of the link between anti-suffragism and nativism, see Chapter Six: The “New Immigration” and Labor in Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, 123-162. See also, Ellen C. DuBois, "The Next Generation: Harriot Stanton Blatch and Grassroots Politics," in Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 159-173. Both Kraditor and DuBois acknowledge and explain how, paradoxically, suffrage leaders, often sharing the same class and white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon background of anti-suffrage leaders, articulated powerful arguments in favor of woman suffrage based on the same nativist sentiments.

412 James J. Kenneally, "Catholicism and Woman Suffrage in Massachusetts," The Catholic Historical Review 8, no. 1 (1967): 43. Kenneally points out that the Catholic opposition to suffrage was intertwined with opposition to the growth of the birth control movement. Anti-suffragists went to great lengths to establish an association between the two movements. Kenneally, 44-45.
anti-suffrage movement. At the head of this final category stood the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS).

Suffrage historians have scoured the historical record in an attempt to measure the impact of the interests. There is no doubt that these groups played an instrumental role in persuading voters – often through illicit means – to vote against suffrage in a number of state referenda. Leading suffragists were certain that the “liquor interests” stole the election in at least three states in 1912 alone. Given that these groups often operated in the shadows, the charges posed by the suffragists were difficult to prove. More importantly for this study, though, these groups did not overtly petition Wilson. The

413 The categories employed in this analysis serve to establish a basic framework for the opponents of woman suffrage. In no way are they meant to gloss over the very real and complex responses that individuals had to the suffrage issue. Many opponents of woman suffrage could fit into several of these categories. Conversely, there are those who could fit into one category, but who adamantly opposed members of another category. For example, David Clark, leader of the Southern Textile Manufacturers Association and ardent opponent of federal child labor regulation, was pro-suffrage. Likewise, Minnie Bronson, corresponding secretary for the National Association of Women Opposed to Woman Suffrage, was a long-time crusader for improved child labor laws. Both of these figures defy the categorization scheme outlined above. With the knowledge that oversimplification and generalization carry with them some cost, I offer these categories anyway as a means to grapple with a complex issue.

414 For example, the following works each devote an entire chapter to the opponents of woman suffrage with particular attention to the interests: Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, Flexner and Fitzpatrick, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States, Morgan, Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America.


416 For an example of a “shadowy” scheme by the liquor interests to work against woman suffrage, see “Brewing Propaganda,” The New Republic, Aug. 21, 1915, 62-64. The article details how certain brewing companies worked through the Texas Business Men’s Association and the Farmers’ Union news service to distribute “foul and misleading articles against suffrage.”

417 For example, in her discussion of the railroad influence, Elna Green explains that representatives of the railroad industry were discreet and never publicly lobbied against suffrage. Green, Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question, 49-50. Furthermore, Wilson’s papers do not contain any letters from representatives of the interests asking him to oppose suffrage.
absence of letters from these groups in Wilson’s papers should not be all that surprising. Despite their abhorrence of women voters, they generally eschewed overt lobbying against the cause. Furthermore, Wilson was elected in both 1912 and 1916 on a reform platform. The interests surely calculated that their entreaties to him to oppose suffrage for fear of the reforms that might follow would not have been well received.

Members of the second category – southern white supremacists – were more hopeful that Wilson would understand their position. Historian Elna Greene has established clear connections between those who led the charge for black disfranchisement in the South and those who worked to defeat woman suffrage. She concludes: “Just as they once had worked to redeem their states from Republican rule and then had disfranchised black voters to protect the Redemption, they then worked to prevent women from upsetting the political balance that they had worked to create.” Southern Democrats had good reason to believe that Wilson would support them in protecting the South’s unique racial hierarchy. He was a native southerner and a man whose party’s political base was firmly grounded in their region.

Several moves by Wilson during his first administration gave southern Democrats who opposed suffrage even more confidence that he would never forsake them or the “Lost Cause.” First, as outlined in preceding chapters, he maintained a staunch states’

418 A notable exception to this trend is Josephus Daniels. Daniels served as the editor of the Raleigh News and Observer during the last decade of the 19th century and was one of the leading figures in the white supremacy and black disfranchisement movement in North Carolina. As Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy, though, he was a consistent supporter of the woman suffrage movement and even worked to convince fellow southerners to support the federal amendment. For Daniels’ role in the disfranchisement of blacks in North Carolina, see Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920, 83-83 and 88-89.

419 Green, Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question, 52. For more on this, see Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920, 203-224.
right position throughout his first term. Secondly, he made it clear that he was of a like mind with his Southern brethren when he supported members of his cabinet who chose to segregate their federal departments. Finally, Wilson held a showing of William Dixon’s inflammatory and racist film, *The Birth of a Nation*, at the White House in 1914. Dixon and Wilson had been classmates at John Hopkins, and Dixon later used the fact that the film had been shown at the White House to fight off attempts by civil rights organizations and censors to prevent the film from wider distribution.⁴²⁰

Before examining Wilson’s interaction with the southern opponents of suffrage, it is important to establish the unique nature of the suffrage movement in the South. Instead of producing a two-way contest between pro and anti-suffrage forces, states’ rights advocates created a three-way battle.⁴²¹ States’ rights suffragists were those who opposed a federal suffrage amendment but worked to convince individual states to grant women the right to vote through state constitutional amendments. Unlike the federal amendment which would theoretically enfranchise all women regardless of race, the advocates of the state method believed that state amendments could be written in such a way as to enfranchise white women while still preventing blacks from voting.

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The extreme difference in how many southerners viewed federally-enforced versus state-controlled woman suffrage is critical to understanding Wilson’s interaction with southern members of his own party. From the time of his 1912 campaign up until his vote in favor of suffrage in the New Jersey referendum of October 1915, Wilson claimed that he had not made a decision about his personal position on suffrage. He was clear, however, that he was definitely opposed to a federal amendment; woman suffrage was a decision for the voters of each state. This position was completely palatable to southern opponents of suffrage. Even when Wilson revealed that he was personally in favor of the principle of woman suffrage by voting for the referendum in New Jersey, by remaining adamant about states’ rights, he was careful to not offend southerners. His decision in New Jersey may have riled those southerners who opposed woman suffrage in any form, but Wilson’s states’ right caveat prevented an outright break with the South.

So, up until the point at which he endorsed the federal amendment, Wilson did not find himself at odds with his southern brethren. Once he crossed that line, though, he came into direct conflict with two factions: southerners who opposed woman suffrage in any form and the states’ rights advocates. In other words, his conversion to the federal amendment placed him dramatically out of step with the majority of his own party in the South.

While the reform climate of the early 20th century forced the liquor interests to run shadow campaigns against woman suffrage, white supremacists felt free to work in the open. In speeches on the floor of Congress, southern congressmen clearly stated that they opposed woman suffrage because it threatened white rule in the South. For example, Senator Oscar Underwood of Alabama explained to his colleagues in the Senate
that he would never support a federal amendment because it violated the principle of states’ rights – a principle that was essential to maintaining the racial hierarchy. He declared, “We stand for these principles because we believe that the integrity of our race and our Government and the protection of our women require it.”422 This sentiment was echoed by Senator Ellison “Cotton Ed” Smith of South Carolina who evoked the memory of black voters during Reconstruction, saying, “In the enactment of the fifteenth amendment this principle of local self-government was revoked and, of course, disaster followed.”423 Despite appeals from the President and other members of their own party, Underwood and Smith never relented in their opposition to the federal amendment.

In the following chapter, we will see that Wilson was unable to allay the racial fears of key southern Senators as he lobbied them to support the federal amendment. Time and again, they explained to him that they could not (or would not) abandon either their outright rejection of woman suffrage or their states’ rights position. Again, the following chapter will show that it was largely the issue of preserving white supremacy in the South that prevented Wilson from securing the necessary votes for the federal amendment to pass under a Democratic Congress. This failure had important implications for the 1918 mid-term elections in which the Democrats lost control of Congress for the first time during Wilson’s two terms.

Another group that worked against woman suffrage included leading members of the Catholic Church. The Church did not officially stand in opposition to the suffrage movement, but some of its most prominent clergymen in the United States lent their

422 Congressional Record – Senate; 65th Congress., 2nd sess., 1918, 10931.
423 Congressional Record – Senate; 65th Congress., 2nd sess., 1918, 10932.
names to the anti-suffragists. For example, Cardinal James Gibbons - Archbishop of Baltimore, only the second American man to be named a Cardinal, and seen by many as the public face of Catholicism in the United States – repeatedly warned of the dangers of granting women the right to vote.

Gibbons was careful to distinguish between his personal opinion and the position of the Church. In April 1913, he publicly corrected suffragists who claimed that the Church was opposed to suffrage by releasing the following statement: “The mission of the Church is fine faith and morals. In other matters, individuals decide for themselves.” Gibbons went on, however: “Personally, I am opposed to female suffrage because I am in favor of perpetuating the real dignity of woman . . . If she were to embark on the ocean of political life, it is very much to be feared that her dignity would be impaired, if not jeopardized.” Gibbons later sent a message of support to NAOWS during the anti-suffragists’ annual convention in December 1916. In part, he derided the leaders of the suffrage movement, saying, “I regard ‘woman’s rights’ women and the leaders of the new school of female progress as the worst enemies of the female sex . . . I wish I could show them the ultimate result of participating in public life. It has but one end – the abandonment, or at least the neglect of the home.”

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426 Ibid.

427 “A Message From his Eminence James, Cardinal Gibbons to The National Association Opposed To Woman Suffrage,” Pamphlet Issued by The National Association Opposed to Woman
Even as some Catholic leaders provided assistance to the anti-suffragists and joined them in petitioning state legislature to reject suffrage referenda, they did not collectively work to influence Wilson. In fact, by the time that the federal amendment had taken center stage in the suffrage battle, much of the Catholic opposition had begun to crumble. Historian James Kenneally’s case study of Massachusetts reveals that Catholics in the Bay State eventually became advocates for suffrage as a result of changing social conditions and shifting lay attitudes. Large numbers of working women saw the value of the ballot and key clergy members swayed popular opinion by switching their allegiance from the antis to the suffragists.428

While Catholic opposition began to fade during the second decade of the 20th century, the activities of the nation’s organized female anti-suffragists reached a fever pitch. Unlike the interests and leading clergy members, this group worked hard to claim Wilson as an ally to their cause and struggled mightily to prevent his drift into the ranks of the suffragists. More importantly, the rhetoric of the anti-suffragists forced their suffrage counterparts to alter both their arguments and their approach to Wilson.

In the preface to the 1981 Norton Edition of her classic book, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, Aileen Kraditor described several changes that she would have liked to have made to the original 1964 edition. One of her most significant recommendations for change was the removal of the existing chapter on those forces that opposed suffrage and its replacement “with one that [took] the antisuffragists

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428 Kenneally, Catholicism and Woman Suffrage in Massachusetts, 57. For more on the increasing number of working class women who joined the suffrage movement, see Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, 152-162. , Mari Jo Buhle, Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920 (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 216-240.
more seriously, in both tone and content."  

Kraditor voiced the hope that other scholars would study the women who opposed their own enfranchisement with greater respect for both their ideology and their impact on the woman suffrage movement. Her call was answered by a number of scholars.

A wealth of detailed studies now exists that place the anti-suffrage organizations at the center of their inquiries. These studies have outlined the ideology, membership, strategy and tactics, alliances, and impact of the anti-suffragists, covering almost every aspect and angle of the anti-suffrage movement. New research and analysis have shown that, while the anti-suffragists were generally defensive, always reacting to the relative intensity of the suffrage movement, the arguments of the latter had to be formulated in such a way as to counter the arguments posed by the former. As one scholar puts it, the anti-suffrage experience illustrates the point that “countermovements are not solely reactive movements, but can impel movement innovation.”

Despite both the quality and quantity of anti-suffrage research in recent years, the relationship of the anti-suffragists to President Wilson remains under explored. Suffrage historians have devoted a great deal of attention to understanding how and why Wilson eventually transformed into an advocate for the federal suffrage amendment. Anti-suffrage historians, however, have given this conversion relatively scant attention. If Wilson is included in their scope at all, it is usually to point out that anti-suffragists expressed both public and private disappointment when the President announced his

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support for the federal amendment. To what extent anti-suffrage women had tried to influence or delay that announcement, however, is unclear.\footnote{431} Wilson historians, sadly, rarely consider the suffrage movement, let alone the anti-suffrage movement. The presence of an active anti-suffrage organization involving over 700,000 women during Wilson’s Administration is completely absent from their accounts.\footnote{432}

Anti-suffragists claimed Wilson as an ally to their cause while he was still the Governor of New Jersey. In a 1912 circular entitled, “Opinions of Eminent Persons Against Woman Suffrage,” the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW) listed “Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey” as one of the “notable persons who have remonstrated against women suffrage.”\footnote{433} When he adopted a states’ rights stance, the anti-suffragists continued to promote him as more closely aligned with their movement than with the suffragists. An article appeared in the January 1915 issue of *The Woman’s Protest* (a monthly publication of NAOWS), entitled, “The Attitude of the President – and the Suffragists’.”


\footnote{432} A search of the most prominent works on Wilson (to include Arthur Link’s 5-volume series on the Wilson Administration) and John Milton Cooper, Jr.’s 2009 biography revealed zero references to anti-suffrage organizations or the names of any of the movement’s leaders.

\footnote{433} “Opinions of Eminent Persons Against Woman Suffrage,” Circular published by Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW) (October 1912), The Suffrage Collection, SSC. Founded in 1895, MAOFESW was one of the nation’s first anti-suffrage organizations and continued to be the largest and most active state organization for several years after the formation of NAOWS in 1911.
The article quoted a recent statement by Wilson in which he reiterated the states’ rights position that he had adopted during his 1912 presidential campaign. The anti-suffrage analysis of his statement follows:

Of course, the statement of the President’s views is diametrically opposed to both of the suffrage amendments [Anthony and Shafroth-Palmer] he has been asked to support . . . It certainly does not indicate a “flop” to “votes for women” to anyone but a hopeful Suffragist without a sense of humor. But this goes to illustrate the kind of straws the sinking suffrage agitation will attempt to clutch. President Wilson believes that the woman suffrage question can be solved ‘most solidly and conclusively’ by the States under our present Constitution. Strangely, this is exactly what Ant-Suffragists believe! And just what Suffragists do not want! 434

Just as the suffragists worked to portray Wilson as friendly to their cause long before he took substantive action on their behalf, so too did the antis continue to cling to him after he had started his migration toward the enemy’s camp.

When it was rumored that the President might vote in favor of the suffrage legislation in New Jersey, anti-suffragists hurried to squelch the report. 435 The Woman’s Protest printed an article in the February 1915 issue citing statements from White House officials to counter the claim made by Anna Howard Shaw regarding Wilson’s favorable attitude toward the New Jersey amendment. Anti-suffragists could not still claim that Wilson was unalterably opposed to the principle of woman suffrage, but they refused to let him be portrayed as pro-suffrage. The article stressed that, despite suffragists’ rumors to the contrary, “White House officials took pains this afternoon to make it clear that President Wilson had said nothing to a delegation of suffragettes earlier in the day which


435 For Shaw’s opinion of the President’s stance, see “Wilson Encourages Suffrage Leaders: Dr. Anna Shaw, After White House Call, Thinks He Will Support Fight in New Jersey,” New York Times, Jan. 15, 1915, 1.
could possibly be construed as a commitment of himself to the equal franchise legislation
which is soon is to be voted upon in the New Jersey Legislature.”436

Like their counterparts in the suffrage movement, the anti-suffragists put great
stock in endorsements for their cause. In addition to clinging to the President as an ally,
they also claimed allegiance from members of his family. During a speech to the General
Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) in April 1913, Wilson’s daughter, Margaret, was
quoted by the New York Times as saying that she did not think woman suffrage was
necessary for women’s influence to be felt in the public sphere. The Woman’s Protest
quickly reprinted the article under the headline, “Miss Wilson Thinks Vote
Unnecessary.”437 Just a few days later, though, the New York Times printed a second
dispatch in which Margaret Wilson said she had been misquoted during the GFWC
speech and that she was, in fact, “very much in favor of woman suffrage.” The suffragist
press quickly countered the antis with an article in the Woman’s Journal and Suffrage
News entitled, “Miss Wilson for Suffrage.”438 Editor Alice Stone Blackwell used the
article to chide the anti-suffragists for “chronic misrepresentation.”

Earlier that year, the two camps had engaged in a similar turf war over the soon-
to-be First Lady, Ellen Wilson. Following a report in early January 1913 from the anti-
suffragists that the President-elect’s wife supported their cause, The Woman’s Journal
printed a front-page article under the headline, “Mrs. Wilson is Not an Anti.” The article
claimed that Ellen Wilson had told suffragist and Wilson supporter Annie Peck that she
was unequivocally not an anti. Ms. Peck concluded, “Although not avowed suffragists, I

436 “Suffrage in the President’s State,” The Woman’s Protest (February 1915), 16.
437 “Miss Wilson Thinks Vote Unnecessary,” The Woman’s Protest (May 1913), 14.
am confident that both Mr. and Mrs. Wilson are open to reason." The desire to claim prominent allies consumed both sides and Wilson and his family figured largely in their calculations.

Having once been able to hold Wilson up as a “notable person” who remonstrated against woman suffrage, the anti-suffragists registered concern when it began to appear that he might give in to pressure from the suffragists. As the preceding chapters have shown, Wilson began to figure more prominently into the calculations of NAWSA in 1913 thanks to Alice Paul’s reinvigoration of the Congressional Committee. Over the next several years, the federal amendment re-emerged as central to the suffrage movement. In that the anti-suffrage movement was, by its nature, a reactionary movement, the increased attention of the suffragists to Wilson’s stance inspired the antis to ramp up their efforts to maintain his alliance.

During the crisis with Mexico in the spring of 1914, a number of women’s organizations joined with pacifist groups to protest Wilson’s order for US Marines to invade Vera Cruz. NAOWS not only refused to participate in the protests but also telegraphed the following resolution to Wilson: “Resolved, That we believe in leaving the decision of the policy of peace or war to the men of the nation, but in case of war we stand ready to render to the nation such service as American women have always rendered in like emergencies.” In reprinting this resolution in their journal, The Woman’s Protest

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439 “Mrs. Wilson is Not an Anti,” Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News (Jan. 11, 1913), 9. In addition to being an active suffragist, Annie Peck was a renowned American mountain climber. In 1912, upon reaching the 21,000 foot summit of Mount Coropuna in Peru, she planted a “Votes For Women” flag. See “Miss Peck Returns from Andean Climb,” New York Times, Feb. 5, 1912, 18.

440 “Two Studies in Patriotism,” The Woman’s Protest (May 1914), 20. Wilson’s secretary, Joseph Tumulty provided a bland, but polite response to this letter: “The President very much appreciates the tender of services which you make in your telegram of April 23d. He is bringing your message to the
Woman’s Protest, the anti-suffragists contrasted their reaction to the Mexico crisis with that of their rivals. Many leading suffragists had participated in a mass meeting at Cooper Union in New York – the result of which was a resolution calling on the President to withdraw troops from Mexico and “thus with true courage and a high sense of honor repair the harm he has already done.”441 This strategy employed by the anti-suffragists during the crisis with Mexico – trumpeting their patriotism and deference to the “men of the nation” while highlighting the lack of such attitudes by the suffragists – foreshadowed the path that the antis would follow once the United States entered World War I. Catt’s decision to pledge NAWSA to war support in 1917 was most probably influenced by anti-suffragist attacks on the suffragists’ patriotism during the 1914 Mexican crisis.

The anti-suffragists were dealt a major blow in June 1914 when the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) voted to endorse woman suffrage. When NAOWS learned that a delegation of clubwomen planned to call on the President to present the GFWC’s resolution, they responded with a pre-emptive strike. NAOWS President Josephine Dodge delivered a statement to the White House on June 28, 1914, two days before the suffrage delegation was scheduled to arrive. Dodge’s letter to the President read, in part, “The suffragists are already quoting widely that 1,000,000 clubwomen have indorsed woman suffrage, which is absolutely untrue . . . there are

attention of the Secretary of War.” Tumulty to Dodge, Reprinted under “Two Studies in Patriotism,” The Woman’s Protest (May 1914), 20.

441 Ibid.
hundreds of thousands of women who belong to clubs that have indorsed it who are actively opposed to woman suffrage.”

When the delegation of more than 500 suffragists met with the President two days later, reports surfaced that some of the women had grown impatient with Wilson’s insistence that suffrage was an issue to be settled by individual states and his refusal to state his personal opinion on the issue. According to a report from the *New York Times*, some of the suffragists hissed when the President refused to allow them to cross-examine him. Quick to capitalize on this apparent act of disrespect by their rivals, the anti-suffragists fired off a sympathetic letter to Wilson. NAOWS President Dodge, congratulated the President on his “judicial attitude” toward the suffragists, going on to say, “I wish also to express our regret that any body of women should have so presumed on your courtesy in receiving them as to subject you to personal questions.”

In the wake of the 1914 mid-term elections, Dodge sent a more extensive letter to Wilson in which she pleaded with him to withstand the entreaties of the suffragists to support a federal amendment. Citing the failure of suffrage referenda in five out of seven states that considered the question in 1914, Dodge wrote, “We are confident that the Chief Executive of this great nation will not lend his influence to the cause of a small minority of women who seek to gain their own ends by undemocratic disregard of both states’ rights and the will of the people.”

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444 Dodge to Wilson (July, 4, 1914), *LWWP*.

445 “To the President of the United States on a Matter of Public Policy,” *The Woman’s Protest* (December 1914), 5.
reaffirm his opposition to “national legislation designed to throttle the will of the people and the principles of local self-government, and impose upon women a political burden, to remain free from which the overwhelming majority consider and esteem a great privilege.” ¹⁴⁴⁶

NAOWS was clearly concerned in late 1914 that the President might be pressured to support the federal amendment. But a more immediate concern for the coming year was what action Wilson would take on the suffrage referendum pending in his home state of New Jersey. The President of the New Jersey Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NJAOWS), Mary Scudder Jamieson, wrote to her former governor in January 1915 to ask that he oppose the pending legislation. Jamieson boasted of her organization’s 11,500 members, many of whom were “well known in their home State in connection with large, charitable, benevolent and educational movements.” She went on to say, “It would seem that due consideration should be paid to the convictions of women of such character and influence . . . who honestly believe that political equality will not be for the good of the state or for the elevation of the individual.” ¹⁴⁴⁷

Jamieson’s letter illuminates one of the anti-suffragists’ most common lines of attack against enfranchising women. Women like Jamieson and Dodge – both of whom were active in philanthropic work – believed that gaining the right to vote would damage women’s ability to influence change in that it would result in their loss of non-partisan status. Although leading suffragists usually portrayed their rivals as sheltered patricians

¹⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Letter from Mary Scudder Jamieson to President Wilson, quoted in “Suffrage in the President’s State,” The Woman’s Protest (Feb. 1915), 16.
who did not understand the challenges facing most women in the country, this charge was hardly accurate. Many of the anti-suffragists were well-informed, concerned with contemporary issues, and heavily engaged in social welfare work. Instead of seeking reform through the use of the ballot though, they sought to change society through their ability to influence male decision makers. They believed women could be more effective by utilizing the traditional method of non-partisan, non-electoral influence over male legislators.\textsuperscript{448} There is an obvious class bias in this argument. Anti-suffragists realized that, without the vote, only women with the social position and leisure to be involved in women’s clubs would influence their communities. With full woman suffrage, all types of women (i.e. not necessarily the “right types”) would have influence and most of these women, the antis believed, would be swept up in the political machines.\textsuperscript{449}

There is no record of a reply from Wilson to the NJAOWS letter. And he did not comply with the request to oppose suffrage in New Jersey, instead voting in favor of the

\textsuperscript{448} Leading suffragists generally refused to give their opponents credit for developing a sophisticated argument against women’s enfranchisement. In their 1923 suffrage history, Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler portrayed the anti-suffragists as sheltered, elite women who served as pawns of male antis and a front for the liquor interests. See Catt and Shuler, \textit{Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement}, 271-273. This assessment influenced the next generation of scholars who sought to understand both the suffragists and the forces that opposed them. For example, see Flexner and Fitzpatrick, \textit{Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States}, 289. Kraditor was the first to recognize that anti-suffragists indeed accepted that women had a role to play in the public sphere, albeit through the use of informal power rather than the ballot. See Kraditor, \textit{The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920}, 27 and 224-225. This deeper understanding of the anti-suffragists’ argument was further developed by a number of other historians. See O'Neill, \textit{Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America, 56-57.}, Thomas J. Jablonsky, \textit{The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920} (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994), xxv. , Jane Jerome Camhi, \textit{Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920} (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994), 30-32. , Marshall, \textit{Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage, 5.} , Manuela Thurner, "Better Citizens without the Ballot: American Anti-Suffrage Women and their Rationale during the Progressive Era," \textit{Journal of Women's History} 5, no. 1 (1993): 39-40.

\textsuperscript{449} For an excellent discussion of the class bias in the anti-suffrage “loss of non-partisanship” argument, see Louise L. Stevenson, "Women Anti-Suffragists in the 1915 Massachusetts Campaign," \textit{The New England Quarterly} 52, no. 1 (1979): 80. Stevenson’s case study illustrates many of the ideas articulated by Kraditor in Chapter Six of Kraditor, \textit{The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920}. 

suffrage referendum in October 1915. Wilson’s favorable vote in the New Jersey election meant that the antis could no longer claim him as an ally. In fact, his action eliminated their ability to even portray him as neutral. The only thing he gave them to hold on to was the fact that he maintained his states’ rights position – saying that he had voted in New Jersey as a private citizen and that he was still opposed to a federal amendment. The anti-suffragists would cling to this last bit of support up until the time Wilson endorsed the federal amendment in January 1918.

Even though the President had sanctioned the states’ rights position early in his first term and then showed that he personally favored the measure via his vote in New Jersey, the anti-suffragists hoped to stop the Democratic Party as a whole from moving in that direction. In fact, they worked to stop both major parties from endorsing suffrage during the 1916 presidential election. Prior to the national conventions in June, Dodge wrote to members of the platform committee from both the Democrat and Republican parties. She passed on a resolution from NAOWS: “That we request the Committees on Platforms of the Republican and Democratic National Conventions convening at Chicago and St. Louis to make no mention of woman suffrage.” Dodge asked for their support in terms that encompassed all the standard anti-suffrage arguments:

We trust that you will lend your influence to this end, so that our women may retain their present freedom from the maelstrom of politics, in accordance with the desire of the majority of both men and women; so that American women may continue to devote their splendid energies to the advancement of non-partisan and humanitarian enterprises without political bias; and that they may concentrate on the service of womanhood,

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450 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Wilson’s decision to vote in favor of the referendum.

451 Dodge to Thomas M. Bartlett (June 1, 1916), The Suffrage Collection, SSC. Bartlett was a delegate to the Republican National Convention and a member of the Platform Committee.
childhood and the home through with they make their greatest contribution to the country and the common good.\footnote{Ibid.} 

This request, of course, brought the anti-suffragists into direct conflict with both Catt and Wilson, who worked together to ensure the Democratic Platform included support for suffrage as a state measure.\footnote{See Chapter 3.} Later that summer, the antis were rebuffed by Wilson again when he agreed to speak at NAWSA’s annual convention in September 1916, but rejected a similar speaking offer from NAOWS.\footnote{Anne M. Benjamin, \textit{A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895-1920: Women Against Equality} (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 223-225.}

Despite the clear indications that Wilson had allied himself with NAWSA, the anti-suffragists continued to remind him of their presence, dedication, and patriotism. NAOWS beat NAWSA to the punch in offering themselves to war service in early 1917. Just as Catt was sending out a call to NAWSA to take a favorable position on US entry into the war, Dodge wrote to inform Wilson that NAOWS had adopted the following resolution: “That we offer our services to the President and will serve in any way in which we can be of use.”\footnote{Dodge to Wilson (Feb. 9, 1917), Reprinted in a pamphlet entitled “Woman Suffrage in Relation to Patriotic Service by Margaret C. Robinson,” (April 1917), Issued by the Public Interests’ League of Massachusetts, The Suffrage Collection, \textbf{SSC}.} Anti-suffragists later trumpeted the fact that support for this resolution among NAOWS members had been unanimous, as compared to the strife that the war issue created among the suffragists. One anti mocked Catt’s pledging NAWSA for war service: “It should not be forgotten, however, that her offer brought out a storm of
opposition among her followers . . . and that various meetings of suffragists were called immediately to condemn her action.”

The NAOWS’ attitude toward Wilson – and toward the suffrage battle in general - seemed to change somewhat in the summer of 1917. The new NAOWS President, Alice Hay Wadsworth, replaced the deferential tone that was the hallmark of correspondence between Josephine Dodge and President Wilson with a bitter and demanding tone. The wife of James Wadsworth, the ardent anti-suffrage Senator from New York, Alice had previously been the president of the District of Columbia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. Her sudden replacement of Dodge as the leader of NAOWS in July 1917 came as a surprise to many and marked an important turning point in the organization’s history. Under Wadsworth, NAOWS took a sharp turn to the right.

The organization had long insisted that suffrage was linked with radicalism and had often touted the anti-suffragists’ unflinching support for all of the President’s policies as a far superior form of patriotism than that practiced by the suffragists. Still, under Wadsworth, the vitriolic nature of the anti-suffrage attacks attained new heights. As one historian describes it, “anti-suffragism now took on the character of a frenzied religious

456 Pamphlet entitled “Woman Suffrage in Relation to Patriotic Service by Margaret C. Robinson,” (April 1917), Issued by the Public Interests’ League of Massachusetts, The Suffrage Collection, SSC.

457 Historians who have studied the anti-suffrage movement have struggled to understand how Wadsworth happened to replace Dodge so suddenly. According to Jablonsky, there were no signs of a power struggle prior to the presidential change. Still, Dodge’s departure was followed by the departure of a number of other members of the inner circle, signaling that this was more than a routine transition. See Jablonsky, The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920, 98.
inquisition." In *Splintered Sisterhood*, Susan Marshall offers the most plausible explanation for the movement’s rightward lurch. She posits that as Wilson appeared more and more willing to support a federal amendment and as a victory in the upcoming New York referendum appeared inevitable, many of the more moderate anti-suffragists resigned themselves to failure and departed the ranks of NAOWS. Their departure left the most conservative anti-suffragists at the helm of the organization with no voices of reason there to protest when they abandoned any limits in their attempt to derail suffrage momentum with charges of radicalism and apocalyptic predictions.459

If Marshall is correct – and the evidence certainly seems to support her thesis – then it would seem that the nation’s leading anti-suffrage organization had given up on Wilson as an ally by the summer of 1917. Given his increasing support to Catt and NAWSA over the first half of the year, their loss of faith was understandable.460 If Dodge had always erred on the side of deference in the hope that Wilson might still support the antis, Wadsworth took a different tact. She wrote to Wilson in late July 1917 to protest his pardon of 16 NWP picketers. Questioning his decision to permit “women of wealth, family, and position to violate the laws and go unpunished,” Wadsworth demanded, “Can it be necessary that to preserve peace within our borders in this time of stress and imperative need for progress, the machinery of government should be halted that these ‘flies on the wheel’ may bask in the light of publicity?”461 Wilson was


460 For Wilson’s assistance to and collaboration with suffragists in 1917, see Chapter 5.

461 Wadsworth to Wilson (Jul. 23, 1917), *LWWP*. 
apparently taken aback by the letter. He passed it on to Tumulty with the following note: “This is a very awkward letter to answer. I would be obliged if you would write to Mrs. Wadsworth saying that I have asked you to acknowledge the letter and express my warm appreciation of her sincere and candid letter.”

Just a month after this exchange with Wadsworth, Wilson signaled his support for the pending suffrage legislation in New York. When that legislation passed in November and New York joined the ranks of the suffrage states, the President’s congratulatory notes to NAWSA indicated that he would almost certainly endorse the federal amendment at the start of 1918. If the anti-suffragists had sensed that Wilson was lost to their cause during the summer, they were all but certain of his treason by the end of the year. Still, some held on to the hope that he would not take the final step of endorsing the federal amendment.

When the Milwaukee Leader published the story of David Lawrence’s visit to Alice Paul in prison, NAOWS’ General Secretary Minnie Bronson immediately wrote to Wilson and asked him to refute the article. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that the article in question alleged that Lawrence had been sent as a representative of the administration to cut a deal with Paul: stop the picketing and the President will support the federal amendment. Bronson was indignant that a Socialist newspaper had published this unbelievable story. She requested that Wilson “stop any further circulation of this canard, and make it impossible for men . . . to intimate that the President of the United States “secretly favors” suffrage methods he has publicly condemned.”

There is no

462 Wilson to Tumulty (Jul. 24, 1917), LWWP.

463 Bronson to Wilson (Dec. 22, 1917), LWWP.
record of a reply from Wilson on the specific issue of the Lawrence visit to Alice Paul. However, he gave an answer to Bronson’s broader question in early January 1918 when he made his first public statement in support of the federal amendment as it was headed for a vote in the House of Representatives.464

Even though the writing had been on the wall, leading NAOWS members were apparently devastated by the President’s announcement.465 Bronson was so disappointed in the man that she had defended just a month earlier that she issued a public apology on behalf of NAOWS to Alice Paul for questioning the David Lawrence story.466 For NAOWS to admit it was wrong and to issue an apology to the leader of the dreaded picketers demonstrates just how much the President’s betrayal shook the organization. NAOWS did not correspond directly with Wilson ever again following his emergence as a supporter of the federal amendment.467 Neither did they attack him for his betrayal.

Despite their disappointment and frustration, to attack the President during the war would have been too gross a violation of their rigid brand of patriotism.

Several reasons emerge to explain why this well-organized and fairly sophisticated organization of anti-suffragists was unable to maintain Wilson’s alliance. First, NAOWS and its affiliated state anti-suffrage organizations did not see the President as the center of gravity in the suffrage battle. Rather, the antis focused their efforts on


467 Some other anti-suffrage organizations such as the Women Voters Anti-Suffrage Party and MAOFESW did write to Wilson, criticizing his decision to support the Federal Amendment. See “Antis Send Protest to the President,” New York Times, Aug. 12, 1918, 8.
In addition, NAOWS was slow to react to the suffragists’ shift in attention and effort toward the federal amendment. The organization did not even move its headquarters from New York to Washington, D.C. until the summer of 1917. By that time, Wilson’s conversion to the cause of suffrage was almost complete.

Finally, the failure of NAOWS to influence Wilson is explained by a fundamental flaw in their basic ideology. The anti-suffragists consistently argued that women actually possessed more influence without the vote. But this premise simply did not hold up to the political realities of the day. If nothing else, Wilson could calculate political math. The preceding chapters have outlined how the votes of women from the enfranchised states served to push him toward support of a federal amendment. His advisors - and leading suffragists like Catt – warned him repeatedly that he and the Democratic Party would suffer at the hands of women voters if he continued to withhold his support. There were no such warnings about the danger of disregarding the nation’s anti-suffrage women. A pro-suffrage cartoon from mid-1913 perfectly illustrated this flaw in anti-suffrage thinking. Under the title, “Getting Her Pigs to Market,” sit two pictures. In one, an anti-suffragist bearing a club entitled “moral suasion” chases uncontrolled pigs around a yard. The adjacent picture shows a suffragist whose pigs are moving in perfect order along a ramp labeled “the vote.” Despite their belief in the power of moral suasion,
anti-suffragists who did not wield the vote simply did not figure into Wilson’s political calculus.

So, the attempt by the anti-suffragists to prevent Wilson from becoming a suffrage supporter must ultimately be viewed as a failure. Still, the actions of this active movement have important implications for this study of Wilson’s conversion. It is my contention that the specific strategy that Catt employed with the President played a crucial role in winning him over to the cause. Key components of that strategy were developed in response to the challenges posed by the anti-suffragists.471 Specifically, Catt’s decision to disavow the campaign strategy of the CU and, later, the militancy of the NWP and to pledge NAWSA to war service must be viewed, in part, as a product of the battle with the antis.472

Some general observations that support this point can be gleaned from a review of both suffrage and anti-suffrage publications during the period 1911-1920. First, the two opposing camps were obsessed with one another. They clearly scoured one another’s publications, looking for factual errors or faulty logic, and then attacked any such errors.

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471 Catt would later deny that the anti-suffragists factored much into her strategic choices. She wrote, “Probably the worst damage that the women antis did was to give unscrupulous politicians a respectable excuse for opposing suffrage, and to confuse public thinking by standing conspicuously in the lime light while the potent enemy worked in darkness.” Catt and Shuler, Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement, 273.

472 The anti-suffragists shaped the debate in other ways, too, but along lines that were less important to the Catt-Wilson relationship. Two of the most prominent ways that antis shaped the debate included the race argument in the South (i.e. woman suffrage would undermine white supremacy) and the basis for granting women the right to vote (i.e. natural rights versus expedience). For the former, see Lebscoke, Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study, Green, Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question, 11 and 94-95. For the latter, see Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, 42. , Marshall, Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage, 228.
in their own publications or in mainstream media outlets. In The Woman Voter, a monthly publication of the NAWSA-affiliated Woman Suffrage Party of New York City, the editors devoted a section of every edition to the anti-suffragists. Believing that the arguments and actions of the antis actually helped to reinforce the argument for suffrage, The Woman Voter cleverly entitled this monthly piece, “With Our Allies – the Antis.”

The near-obsession that these organizations had with one another raises the question of whether they sometimes focused too much on each other at the expense of lobbying the mostly-male voters who could actually affect the status of woman suffrage. For the suffragists, at least, this may be true. But the amount of attention and the resources they devoted to combating the antis is evidence of the fact that – right or wrong - they viewed them as a real and powerful threat.

The antis were quick to exploit the 1914 NAWSA/CU rift and to attack Paul and her followers for their campaigns to “hold the party in power responsible.” Later, they railed against the NWP’s militancy in the picketing campaign. In most cases, the antis simply conflated NAWSA with the CU/NWP, generalizing their attack to all suffragists.

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473 For an example of this, see the debate between NAOWS and Anna Howard Shaw over use of the term “conservationist” in the August and September, 1913 issues of The Woman’s Protest. In another instance, The Woman’s Protest listed 19 “pertinent questions” about woman suffrage and challenged suffragists to respond. On behalf of NAWSA, Catt accepted the challenge and her answers were published in The Woman Voter. NAOWS then used the following issue of The Woman’s Protest to dissect, refute, and attack Catt’s answers. See “A Challenge Accepted,” The Woman Voter (Jan. 1915), 19; “A Challenge Accepted: Part II,” (Feb. 1915), The Woman Voter, 20; and “‘Votes Can Right No Wrong’ Says Suffrage Leader,” The Woman’s Protest (Mar. 1915), 11.

474 The editors ran a contest for readers in which they were encouraged to send in ridiculous statements by anti-suffragists and/or their allies. The submissions were called “pearls” and the journal awarded a year’s free subscription to the reader who submitted the best “pearl” each month. For just one example of this monthly column, see “With Our Allies – the Antis,” The Woman Voter (Nov. 1916), 22.

475 As further evidence of the close watch each camp kept on the other, see “Woman Suffrage and Its Allies,” a flyer circulated by the Massachusetts Anti-Suffrage Committee (Undated), and Letter from Alice Chittenden to The Editor (Dec. 8, 1915), NAOWS Papers, New York State Library, Albany, NY. Both of these documents contain handwritten critical comments from suffragists who apparently had collected them and sent them back to the headquarters of the suffrage camp.
For example, an anti-suffrage article published during the 1914 mid-term elections asked, “Who are the ‘conservative’ Suffragists, and who are the ‘radical’ Suffragists? In what way can a Suffragist ever be considered as conservative?” The article went on to exploit the divisions within the suffrage movement’s ranks: “The country is confronted with the spectacle of several bands or groups of women quarreling among themselves, unable to determine whom they shall oppose or what they shall advocate, making speeches that contradict each other, and altogether creating a confusion which is sure to fail in accomplishing any definite results for ‘votes for women.’”

NAOWS branded all suffragists as militants following an encounter between CU agitators and President Wilson in New York in May 1915. The CU members interrupted an event at the Biltmore Hotel and confronted Wilson with a letter demanding him to give a straight-forward statement of his personal opinion on suffrage. In relating the event in a full-page article, the anti-suffragists opened with, “The recent militant methods of American Suffragists have created wide-spread comment.” Although the article went on to print Catt’s repudiation of the CU actions, it also stressed that the nation’s suffrage organizations were divided and could not contain the growth of militancy in their ranks.

Attacks like these almost certainly helped Catt make the important decision to distance NAWSA from the CU/NWP. Her relentless campaign to distinguish NAWSA from Paul’s organization becomes even more understandable in light of anti-suffrage

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477 Ibid.
attempts to hold the former responsible for the actions of the latter. Catt’s decision to pledge NAWSA to war service must be viewed in the same light.

The anti-suffragists took advantage of every opportunity to associate suffragism with Socialism and to charge that suffragists/Socialists represented twin threats to America. As has previously been described in this chapter, these attacks became increasingly personal and vindictive once Wadsworth assumed the NAOWS presidency in July 1917. Still, the association with Socialism was present in anti-suffrage rhetoric from a much earlier date. In testimony before Congress in 1913, former suffragist turned anti, Annie Bock, told the Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage, “Woman suffrage will expose the Nation to anarchy. Gentlemen, do you believe any woman desires the vote so much that she will become an incendiary, a dynamiter, a murderer? Is there not some ulterior motive in all this? Sure; it is socialism. The militants work in the revolutionary way; the sly nonmilitants employ the Fabian method.” Bock went on to make the familiar anti-suffrage charge that associated Socialists with treasonous behavior. In reference to a specific suffragist who was also a Socialist, Bock said, “I

479 Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920*, 237. Buhle points out that, despite the large role played by Socialist women in the 1917 suffrage victory in New York, NAWSA leaders were reluctant to give credit to the Socialists because such an admission would play into the hands of the anti-suffragists who worked constantly to brand all suffragists as Socialists and radicals.

480 For example, NAOWS petitioned the Senate to include the nation’s suffrage organizations in its 1918 investigation of the IWW. Additionally, they characterized Catt’s formation of the League of Women Voters in 1919 as an attempt to spread the growth of Socialism. See, “The New I.W.W. The International Women of the World,” Pamphlet issued by NAOWS (Mar. 1919), The Suffrage Collection, SSC. Also, see Marshall, Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage, 207.


482 “Woman Suffrage Address by Miss Annie Bock,” (August 9, 1913), 8; The Suffrage Collection, SSC.
don’t like her politics. She stands for the red. I stand for the red, white, and blue . . .
Gentlemen, where do you stand?”483

As Catt pondered which direction to move NAWSA in February 1917 – with the nation standing on the brink of entering the First World War – she was highly cognizant of anti-suffrage attacks against the suffragists’ patriotism. The dedication of all the major suffrage journals to answering the antis’ charges is evidence of this. Knowing that NAWSA would be castigated by the anti-suffragists if the organization adopted anything less than a “100 Percent Americanism” attitude, Catt urged her organization to support the President’s decision to go to war. Just before Wilson made a formal declaration of war in April, she defended this break with her pacifist past, saying, “I am a pacifist, but not for peace without honor. I’d be willing, if necessary, to die for my country. The women of this country are, as a whole, patriotic, and if war comes they will prove it.”484

Catt’s need to prove that suffragists were loyal citizens was clearly influenced by the active anti-suffrage movement which stood ready to pounce on any chink in the suffragists’ armor. As the previous chapter outlined, Catt and NAWSA’s silence over the violation of the NWP pickets’ civil rights was part of NAWSA’s broader complicity in sustaining the oppressive environment in wartime America. The fact that the pressure of the anti-suffragists further encouraged NAWSA to abandon their better principles and to move toward even greater wartime nativism does not excuse Catt or NAWSA for doing just that.485 Suffragists must be included in those held responsible for one of the ugliest

483 Ibid, 6.
chapters in American history with regards to intolerance for those who voiced dissent. Still, it is important to note that the suffragists’ decisions were driven, in part, by the extreme nativism and narrowly defined patriotism of the anti-suffragists.

The fact that NAWSA did, in fact, decide to pledge itself to war service became increasingly important in 1918 as the federal suffrage amendment made its way to a floor vote in both the House and the Senate. Wilson – along with many suffrage supporters in Congress – repeatedly pointed to the suffragists’ war service as they fought for the amendment’s passage. The President’s actions during this battle in Congress, which ultimately culminated in the amendment’s passage and movement to the states for ratification, is the subject of the following chapter.

485 As noted earlier in this chapter, most suffrage leaders tended towards nativism even before the war. It is entirely possible that NAWSA’s leadership would have colluded in the “100 Percent Americanism” movement even in the absence of the anti-suffrage movement.
CHAPTER 7
WILSON AS AN ADVOCATE, 1918-1919

On January 8, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress and gave one of the most famous speeches of the 20th century. In soaring terms, he outlined America’s war aims and proposed a world peace based on the “Fourteen Points” which included his vision for the League of Nations. The following day he met with a group of Democrats from the House and offered his first public endorsement of the federal woman suffrage amendment. At first glance, these events seem more connected by calendar proximity than anything else. Certainly the former has gone down in history as having much greater significance than the latter. But closer inspection reveals a more considerable connection between the two events than one might expect. As this chapter will show, the war, Wilson’s postwar vision, and the issue of woman suffrage became deeply intertwined in 1918.

After publicly endorsing the federal amendment in January 1918, the President never backed away from full support of nationwide woman suffrage. His newfound enthusiasm was consistent with his behavior throughout the suffrage campaign; it was based on the political value of the issue. By the start of the new year, suffrage had gathered momentum as a powerful political issue through the addition of eight more suffrage states, the war being fought in the name of democracy, and women’s massive participation in the home front war effort. Wilson’s close advisors communicated a very different message to their leader heading into the 1918 mid-term elections than they had in the election years of 1914 and 1916. They expressed concern about suffrage as a
political liability if the suffrage amendment failed to pass under a Democratic Congress. As this chapter will show, Wilson did everything in his power to avoid that liability.

Understanding Wilson’s motivation during this time period is a complex endeavor. His foremost goal, as he told the nation and the world in his “Fourteen Points” speech, was to attain a peaceful, liberal world order. Wilson’s vision included self-determined capitalist nations governed by international law and safe from both traditional forms of imperialism and revolutionary socialism. He believed that America had a mission to extend her national values to the rest of the world – a mission that could only be fulfilled within the stable boundaries of his postwar vision for world order.486 The significance of the 1918 mid-term elections was enormous for Wilson. If the Democrats lost control of Congress, he knew that he would face tremendous Congressional opposition to American participation in the League of Nations – a key component of the postwar order.487 Wilson’s strong desire to win votes for Democrats in order to pursue his larger strategy for the war and the peace that would follow must be seen as the driving force behind all of his decisions leading up to November.

It is precisely because this particular desire was so strong in Wilson that it is difficult to determine the degree to which his personal feelings about women as political beings changed, if at all. As this chapter will reveal, he worked tirelessly to secure the


487 Thomas J. Knock, To End all Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 168-171. Leading Republicans immediately criticized Wilson’s Fourteen Points following his speech on January 8, 1918. By mid-summer, according to Knock, they had made opposition to the League of Nations one of the pillars of their campaign strategy heading into the 1918 mid-term elections.
federal amendment under a Democratic Congress. Was this purely an attempt to strengthen his party in order to pursue his foreign policy or was there a personal conversion involved?

Wilson’s exposure to women in the public sphere had certainly increased during his six years in the White House. The President more and more dealt with women fully engaged in matters of political import, not only in the form of suffragists, but also as members of the Woman’s Peace Party, the Women’s Trade Union League, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. As the nation moved into war, he appointed women to the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense and approved the enlistment of thousands of women in the American Expeditionary Force that deployed to Europe.488

It seems more than plausible to suggest that increased familiarity with women operating in the public sphere bred in Wilson a newfound respect for women’s capabilities. Perhaps he finally tested some of those assumptions about women’s mental limitations that his Bryn Mawr graduate student complained of and found them in serious need of revision. As Victoria Bissell Brown argues persuasively, “In the two decades that passed between Wilson’s stint at Bryn Mawr and his academic and political careers in New Jersey, American women defied, daily, the assumption that domestic life was incompatible with political life.”489 In the absence of any personal writings from Wilson


489 Brown, Did Woodrow Wilson's Gender Politics Matter?, 131. Brown goes on to dispute the idea that Wilson came to support suffrage for political reasons but never truly underwent a personal conversion to the idea of women as voters. She acknowledges that political considerations figured prominently for Wilson as he came to support the state-by-state method and, later, the federal amendment. Still, she argues, political motives are not incompatible with a sincere change of conviction. It is “ridiculous,” according to Brown, to suggest that Wilson was really an anti-suffragist at heart but that he
that indicate a private conversion that matched his public enthusiasm for suffrage, we are left only with the proposition that such a conversion most likely occurred. Setting aside the possibility of a private conversion, though, there can be no doubt about his advocacy for woman suffrage in the public sphere - advocacy that would see both victory and defeat during the course of his final two years in office.

Months before the first suffrage victory in Congress, Wilson had begun preparing for the battle that he knew would have to be fought. Throughout the summer and fall of 1917, he corresponded back and forth with members of his cabinet and suffrage advocates trying to determine where the House and Senate stood if the measure were to come up for a vote. His major concern during the months leading up to the start of the 65th Congress was that the measure would be put to a vote before the necessary affirmative votes were secured. Pro-suffrage Congressmen and Senators succeeded in blocking any premature votes in December, and by the first week of the new year, it was fairly evident that the first vote would come in the House on January 10.

Two days before the vote, the women’s representative of the Democratic National Committee, Elizabeth Merrill Bass, who had been in close communication with the White House for several months, wrote to encourage Wilson to publish a public message of support for the amendment. She made the political implications clear, urging, “Do not let us give [the Republicans] the advantage of our silence to carry with them into the congressional campaigns next year when asking for the votes of the enfranchised

“was willing to jeopardize womanhood, the American family, and the state by supporting woman suffrage and thereby gaining a few votes for the Democratic Party.” Quote from p. 129.

490 See Wilson to Burleson (July 19, 1917), J.A. H. Hopkins to Wilson (July 18, 1917), Gardener to Wilson (July 19, 1917), Maud Wood Park to Wilson (November 30, 1917), and Tumulty to Wilson (December 12, 1917), LWWP.
women.”491 In a theme that she would repeat for the next year, Bass stressed to the President the political importance of a suffrage victory under a Democratic Congress.

Wilson heeded her advice. He made himself available to a group of Democratic members of the Suffrage Committee the following day and voiced his support for the federal amendment. After the meeting, the Representatives handed a statement to members of the press that read, “The Committee found that the President had not felt at liberty to volunteer his advice to members of Congress in this important matter, but 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 the world.”492 The New York Times ran their story about the meeting under the headline “Wilson Backs Amendment for Woman Suffrage.”

The press statement included a list of Wilson’s four reasons for supporting the federal amendment. Again, in the absence of private correspondence regarding his changed position, this statement provides important insight into the President’s rationale. Additionally, the themes articulated in this statement would serve as the basis of Wilson’s advocacy for the amendment for the next two years:

First – The party platform, which declares woman suffrage to be a question for each State to decide was adopted before the present exigencies arose – exigencies which make it all-important that the women be allowed to vote. Therefore, strict adherence to that platform cannot now be expected of Democrats. Second – The President does not regard this as a matter of State rights, therefore it is to be differentiated from the prohibition amendment. He holds that the matter of

491 Bass to Wilson (January 8, 1918), LWWP.


suffrage is primarily a national question and a constitutional question and has been so decided in frequent decisions of the Supreme Court . . . Third – The President insists that if the members of Congress believe that the women should have the right to vote, they should accept the first favorable opportunity to grant them that right. The manner of application of such a principle, he contends, should not be the main question. Fourth – A large part of the civilized world is favorable to woman suffrage, many countries having granted it and England having promised it.494

Not surprisingly, three of Wilson’s four justifications were related to federal versus state action. Wilson had used the party’s “states’ rights” position as a reason for not endorsing the federal amendment for the past two years, so he clearly felt compelled to defend his decision to now move away from that platform. American entry into the war (“the present exigencies”) served as his justification and provided cover for other Democrats to do the same. In this first endorsement, he did not fully explain why women voters were necessary now that the nation was at war, but he would flesh out that argument over the course of the next year. To call woman suffrage “a national question” marked a complete reversal of his 1912 position, when he opined to the governor of Massachusetts that “[suffrage] is not a national question but a state question.”495 The final justification Wilson offered – the fact that other “civilized” nations had granted woman suffrage – reflects his belief that the United States had emerged as a world leader. With that new role came new responsibilities, to include being ahead of others in preserving and extending democracy.

Reaction to the President’s statement was predictable. Suffragists were elated. Catt and Paul both immediately released statements praising Wilson’s new stand.496


495 Wilson to Governor Eugene Noble Foss (August 17, 1912), LWWP. The correspondence between Wilson and Foss was also discussed in Chapter 2.
Within the Democratic Party, Wilson’s conversion to federal action received mixed reviews. Elected officials from suffrage states (almost all of whom were pro-suffrage) were pleased, but a number of Southern Democrats reacted negatively. One Southern congressman blasted the President’s abandonment of the states’ rights position, publicly accusing Wilson of “attempting to coerce Democrats into voting against their party and their personal convictions.” An editorial in the New York Times compared Wilson’s reversal on the federal amendment to the position flips of previous presidents and concluded that Wilson was no better and no worse than his predecessors. Questioning the sincerity of his conversion, though, the Times’ editorialist suggested that Wilson came out in support mainly to “put the Democrats on a par with the Republicans in ‘the suffrage states.’” While criticizing him for his lack of principles, even the anti-suffrage Times concluded that Wilson’s move was good politics considering the importance of suffrage in the upcoming midterm elections. Regardless of the reaction, Wilson’s support was important in what turned out to be an extremely close vote.

The House of Representatives voted on the measure on January 10, 1918. As the table below indicates and as Catt and NAWSA had always maintained, bipartisan support was a key element in the victory:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>165</td>
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<td>Democrats</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

496 “Wilson Favors Suffrage Vote; Says Changed Conditions Call for Federal Amendment,” Boston Daily Globe, January 10, 1918, 2.

497 “House for Suffrage, 274 to 136,” New York Times, January 11, 1918, 2. The Congressman making this charge was Representative Frank Clark of Florida, a staunch anti-suffragist.

The final vote was less than a fraction over the necessary two-thirds. The newest suffrage state – New York – figured prominently into the result. New York’s delegation, with 33 ayes and only 3 nays, played a pivotal role in the first congressional triumph for the federal amendment.\textsuperscript{499} With high hopes for another quick victory, suffragists turned their attention to the Senate. Despite Herculean efforts by the President, their hopes for success in the Senate were not to be realized for more than a year.

From January to October 1918, the Senate vacillated on whether or not to vote on the suffrage amendment. Predictions about the outcome were so close that calling for a vote was extremely risky for both sides. When it looked as if it might pass, anti-suffrage Senators would filibuster to block a vote. When it appeared that it would fail, they would rush to try and get the measure voted on. Wilson campaigned zealously throughout the eight-month period between victory in the House and the first vote in the Senate. The main point he used to try and persuade reluctant Senators to vote for the amendment was that the Democrats might lose control of Congress if the suffrage amendment did not pass before the November 1918 mid-term elections. Wilson repeatedly wrote to Senators that he needed Democrats to maintain control of Congress in order to successfully prosecute the war and ensure a lasting peace in the post-war settlement.

Despite his full desire for the amendment to pass, Wilson was constrained in his advocacy by several factors. First, he recognized that the line between executive interest and executive interference was both highly sensitive and extremely thin. His correspondence with Senators during the spring and summer of 1918 demonstrates that he struggled mightily with how far and how hard he could push without crossing that line.

and creating a negative backlash against the amendment. Secondly, he fully realized the pressure that Southern Democrats were under to protect white supremacy by opposing the amendment. Knowing that they may face dire consequences in future elections, Wilson attempted to provide cover for Southerners who would be willing to support suffrage.

Finally, Wilson was aware that dedication to continued white supremacy was only part of the issue for some Southern senators. Despite the intense efforts of NAWSA and NWP leaders to not allow the suffrage movement to become entangled with other progressive issues, the overlap in membership between suffrage groups and other progressive interests such as the prohibition and child-labor movements made the entanglement impossible to avoid. Leaders of the liquor and cotton textile industries feared that women voters would provide massive support to progressive legislation that would curtail their ability to turn a profit.\(^{500}\)

For Senators who came from states in which those interests had the most power, support for suffrage was political suicide. Though they often publicly emphasized their racist opposition to suffrage over their economic concerns, Wilson was not ignorant of the additional reasons beyond race for their opposition to a federal amendment. Nor did he choose to push those particular senators with as much vigor. As the record shows, he focused his efforts on those Democrats who did not have to answer to powerful industry lobbyists.

In March, Tumulty received word from the Senate that the suffrage amendment would be brought to a vote within the next few days. He wrote a memo to Wilson voicing his fears that the amendment would not pass and that its failure would be laid at the feet of the Democratic Party. Indicating the continued importance of NAWSA’s

\(^{500}\) The role of the “interests” in opposing suffrage is covered in more detail in Chapter 6.
close relationship with the Administration, Tumulty informed the President that Catt had called and expressed hope that the two Democratic Senators from Florida might vote in the affirmative if Wilson asked them to do so. Wilson responded that he “would weaken my influence in a score of directions if I were to depart from the rule I have set myself and send for Senators, but I am eager to advise them to vote for the amendment if they will themselves give me an opportunity to do so.”

Anxious to not violate senatorial courtesy, he encouraged Tumulty to devise a way for the Senators to come to the White House without being “called.”

In a letter that sheds fascinating insight into the lengths to which a president will go to not cross the line between interest and interference, Tumulty wrote back to Wilson with an elaborate plan to get Senator Duncan Fletcher from Florida to come see the President without having it appear that Wilson had ordered him to the White House. Tumulty met with the pro-suffrage Senator Henry Hollis (D-NH) and together they devised a plan that Tumulty then passed along to Wilson:

You [should] send for Senators Fletcher and Ransdell, both of whom are members of the Committee on Commerce, which Committee has recently been investigating the Shipping Board and Hog Island. Senator Hollis understands that you have not talked over shipping matters with Fletcher and Ransdell for some time and that they will be able to give you some valuable information that may speed up the shipping programme. They are both great friends of the Administration and are anxious to serve. You might very properly send for them at once to discuss the speeding up of the shipping programme. If you do this, Senator Ransdell will call your attention to the situation in connection with suffrage and will give you a most excellent chance to discuss it with Senator Fletcher. Senator Trammell [from Florida] has stated that if Senator Fletcher votes for suffrage, he will also. This will enable us to put the matter over this week.

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501 See Tumulty to Wilson and Wilson to Tumulty (March 12, 1918), *LWWP*.

502 Tumulty to Wilson (March 14, 1918), *LWWP*. Senator Joseph Ransdell was a pro-suffrage Democrat from Louisiana. There is nothing in Wilson’s papers to indicate that this meeting ever actually took place, however, a rumor circulated in the press that Wilson had swung over two unnamed Southern Democrats and that the amendment would pass if brought to a vote. Opponents blocked the vote based on
Tumulty’s letter is instructive for a number of reasons. First, it shows that senatorial courtesy was not just an excuse that the President used to avoid openly pressuring Senators to vote in a particular way – a charge repeatedly leveled by the NWP. If Tumulty and Wilson, in their private correspondence, were willing to go to these lengths to respect the need for Senators to at least appear independent, then the fear of crossing that invisible line was surely real and not just a convenient excuse for inaction.

Secondly, it indicates the remarkable amount of coordination that was required among Wilson, his staff, NAWSA leaders, and pro-suffrage Senators to try and secure the federal amendment. Winning suffrage in the Senate was no small task.

The vote in March was blocked by opponents who feared that the resolution might pass. The next time a vote appeared on the horizon was early May. Following a request from Catt and similar urging from Bass, Wilson wrote to seven Democratic Senators urging them to support the amendment. The letters show his struggle to secure their support without alienating them through pushing too hard. To Senator Josiah Wolcott of Delaware he typed, “I am writing this letter on my own typewriter (notwithstanding a lame hand) in order that it may be entirely confidential and may not in the least embarrass you if you should find that you cannot yield to this very earnest request.”503 He went on to make a convincing connection between passing the suffrage amendment and winning Democratic victories in the mid-term elections. His letter concluded, “The next Congress must be controlled by genuine dependable friends; and we may lose it, - I fear we shall

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503 Wilson to Wolcott (May 9, 1918), LWWP.
lose it, - if we do not satisfy the opinion of the country in this matter [of suffrage] now."  

The rest of the letters Wilson sent carried a similar message. The replies he received indicate the many fronts on which he had to fight the suffrage war. Senator J.C.W. Beckham of Kentucky said that he opposed the federal amendment because it violated the principle of states’ rights and because he was personally opposed to women having the right to vote. Senator Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina replied by saying that the women of his state did not really want the vote and that he would not be a party to forcing it on them. A similar reason was offered up by Senator Atlee Pomerene of Ohio who pointed out that he had personally voted for a state amendment when serving in the Ohio legislature, but that the amendment had been defeated in his state. Like Tillman, Pomerene argued that he would be contradicting the will of his constituents if he supported the federal amendment. From Florida came replies from Senator Fletcher that he did not believe suffrage was an issue that would hurt the Democrats in the upcoming election and from Senator Trammell who claimed only that he had already pledged to his constituents to oppose the amendment.

In addition to these objections, Wilson heard from Senator Lee Overman of North Carolina who made it very clear why he could not vote for suffrage. In addition to offering up the same reason as Tillman and Pomerene, Overman wrote, “I am sure it will

504 Ibid. Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, a native of North Carolina, also tried to swing Southern Democrats to the federal amendment. According to his diary, he met with Senator J.C.W. Beckham of Kentucky on May 8, 1918 and Senator Park Trammel on January 25, 1919. Neither were ultimately persuaded by Daniels or Wilson. Cronon, The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921, 303 and 370.

505 See Beckham to Wilson (May 9, 1918), Tillman to Wilson (May 10, 1918), Pomerene to Wilson (May 11, 1918), Trammell to Wilson (May 16, 1918), and Fletcher to Wilson (May 11, 1918), LWWP.
be exceedingly unwise at this time, from a political standpoint, for a North Carolina
Senator to favor the passage of this measure, as our people believe it might result in a
very dangerous inroad into our social condition, if adopted, and would give us a great
deal of trouble in the future.” 506 Overman’s reference to the threat of black voters was
clear. What he did not say, but what was surely a part of his thought process, was the
way the powerful cotton textile industries would be alienated by his support of suffrage –
the passage of which they saw as directly connected to increased federal regulation of
cheap child labor. 507

Wilson, exasperated over the situation, sent an uncharacteristically curt letter to Bass
in late May. Bass had written the President expressing her belief that there were at least
six senators who could be influenced to change their votes if the President would make
an appeal to them. As always, she mentioned the difficulty of winning the mid-term
elections if suffrage did not pass. Wilson wrote back, “It was supposed as you say in
your letter . . . that there were ’half a dozen possibilities’ in the Senate from whom we
might draw sufficient support to put the federal amendment through, but as a matter of
fact I have done my best to draw from that half-dozen and have utterly failed.” 508

506 Overman to Wilson (May 21, 1918), LWWP.

507 For Overman’s connection to the American Cotton Manufacturer’s Association, see Morgan,
Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America, 173. Morgan makes a nuanced
argument about the connection between suffrage and cotton. Pointing out that senators who were beholden
to the cotton barons also opposed woman suffrage “is not necessarily to imply that a vote against Suffrage
meant that the Senator concerned used the States Rights and/or the race issue merely as a cloak for
sectional and personal economic gain. More correctly, it is to catalogue another complex of fears and
hopes stirred by the Suffrage issue.” Quote from p. 175. For an overt discussion of the connection between
woman suffrage and the regulation of child labor, see the exchange between Senator Beckham (D-KY) and
Senator Key Pittman (D-NE) during the debate over the federal amendment in September 1918. Pittman
suggested that women voters would remedy the problem of child labor in North and South Carolina.
Beckham knowledge of child workers in those states and quickly tried to change the subject.
Congressional Record, 65th Congress (September 30, 1918), 10948.
Unable to secure the necessary votes in May, suffragists were able to get their advocates in the Senate to delay the vote again. With this additional time to garner support, they began to push Wilson to support the amendment as a war measure. They hoped that the pressure of a war measure would either cause at least two Senators to change their votes in order to not appear unpatriotic or that Southerners could argue to their constituents that threats to national security were more important than threats to white supremacy.

While Bass continued to communicate her fears about the mid-term elections, Wilson also began to hear the same fear from other corners. U.S. Representative Jouett Shouse of Kansas wrote to convey his concern that a defeat for suffrage in the Senate would do serious harm to the re-election bids of Democrats in the suffrage states. Shouse called for Wilson to make another public statement of his support for the amendment and his encouragement of Democratic Senators to vote in its favor. On the same day, Catt also wrote to the President urging him to make a public statement that granting equal suffrage in the United States was critical to the successful prosecution of the war under the stated aim of making the world safe for democracy.\(^{509}\)

Ultimately, Wilson agreed to make another public statement. He did so through a publicity mechanism provided by Catt. The French Union for Woman Suffrage had written to him in February asking for an expression of his opinion on woman suffrage. He drafted a response that he submitted to Catt for her review on June 7. Catt wrote back indicating her general approval of the letter but asking that he add one crucial sentence:


\(^{509}\) Shouse to Wilson (June 8, 1918) and Catt to Wilson (June 8, 1918), *LWWP*. 
“As America’s answer to this question, it is my earnest hope that the Senate of the United States will pass the suffrage amendment to our federal constitution before the end of this session.” Wilson rewrote his response with the new sentence inserted exactly as Catt had written it, and the letter was reproduced in all the major newspapers in mid-June.510

Hoping to capitalize on the publicity from the letter to the French women, pro-suffrage Democrats tried to call for a vote in late June. Wilson again wrote letters to secure the necessary votes. He did not publicly call the amendment a “war measure;” however, his private correspondence to reluctant senators repeatedly stressed the link between the war and granting equal suffrage. To Senator John Shields of Tennessee, Wilson stated, “I feel that much of the morale of this country and of the world, and not a little of the faith which the rest of the world will repose in our sincere adherence to democratic principles, will depend upon the action which the Senate takes in this now critically important matter.”511

Despite Wilson’s willingness to privately argue for the amendment as a war measure, he had little success with Southern Democrats. In his reply, Senator Shields not only rejected Wilson’s contention that the adoption of the suffrage resolution would in any way contribute to the successful prosecution of the war, but also reiterated that the fear of losing white supremacy was “controlling” him and the majority of his colleagues from Southern states.512 Uundaunted, Wilson wrote back to Shields, “I do earnestly believe

510 See Catt to Wilson (June 11, 1918) and Wilson to Catt (June 7, 1918), NAWSA Records. For the publicity generated, see Bass to Wilson (June 19, 1918), LWWP. For specific examples, see “Must Pay Debt to Women, Says Wilson; President Hopes Senate Will Pass Amendment,” Boston Daily Globe, June 14, 1918, 11; and “Suffrage to Pass, Hope of President; Anxious for the Senate to Adopt Amendment at the Present Session of Congress, He Tells Woman’s Delegation,” The Atlanta Constitution, June 14, 1918, 1.

511 Wilson to Shields (June 20, 1918), LWWP.
that our action upon this amendment will have an important and immediate influence upon the whole atmosphere and more of the nations engaged in the war.”513 His efforts were in vain. Shields voted “nay” in October and again in February and June 1919.

With the vote scheduled for June 27, Wilson made himself available to a group of Senate Democrats who came to ask his opinion on the measure. Like the meeting with House Democrats before the January vote, this meeting was engineered solely for the publicity it would again give to the President’s message of support. The Senators that attended were all pro-suffrage already, but they were able to report to the press afterwards that Wilson had been very enthusiastic about the measure passing under a Democratic Congress.514 Despite these efforts, the public pronouncement did not have the intended effect of convincing any reluctant Democrats to change their votes.

What did have an effect was Wilson’s request to Senator Ollie James of Kentucky to give up his agreement to be paired with an anti-suffrage senator for the upcoming vote. With James’ agreement to give up his pair, the pro-suffrage forces believed they had enough votes to pass the resolution. Thanks to Wilson’s intervention with James, a victory in the Senate appeared imminent. Once again, though, opponents of the measure refused to let it come to a vote for fear that they would not be able to secure its defeat.515 The Senate then adjourned until the beginning of September.

512 Shields to Wilson (June 25, 1918), LWWP.

513 Wilson to Shields (June 26, 1918), Life and Letters, Vol. 8.

514 Appointment books (June 24, 1918), Life and Letters, Vol. 8.

515 Wilson to James (June 24, 1918), Life and Letters, Vol. 8. A paired vote is an agreement between two senators to be recorded on opposite sides of an issue. Pairing is used when one or both members will be absent in order to cancel the effect of the absence. By “giving up his pair” with the anti-suffrage senator who was going to be absent, James added his vote in favor of the amendment and eliminated the possibility of the absent anti from registering any vote.
The Senate’s failure to vote on suffrage beforeadjourning for the summer prompted Paul to resume the NWP campaign against Wilson and the Democrats. It will be recalled from Chapter 5 that, following the release from jail of the final group of pickets in November 1917, the NWP had ceased picketing the White House. Wilson’s endorsement and the passage of the federal amendment by the House in January convinced Paul to maintain a truce while working to secure victory in the Senate. Interestingly, as Catt and other NAWSA representatives corresponded and coordinated with the White House on a regular basis during 1918, the administration refused to collaborate with the NWP.516 Frustrated with the Senate and irritated by the President, Paul ended her temporary truce.

In August, she orchestrated two protest meetings in Lafayette Square across from the White House in which NWP members held up banners condemning Wilson and the Senate Democrats. A number of women were arrested and received 10-15 day sentences for the crime of “congregating in the park.”517 In September, Paul initiated a new tactic: burning the President’s words. Wilson met with members of NAWSA on the morning of September 16 and assured them that he was doing his utmost to bring the amendment to a vote in the Senate. Later that afternoon, NWP protestors rallied in Lafayette Square. Holding up a copy of the President’s promise to NAWSA, the NWP speaker reportedly

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516 In May, an NWP delegation asked to meet with the President to show him a poll they had taken of the Senate. Tumulty advised Wilson against meeting with representatives of the NWP, noting that “Mrs. Catt, Mrs. Gardener, and the women of the other branch have been cooperating with the Administration in a most loyal way.” Wilson concurred. He instructed Tumulty, “Please say to [the NWP representatives] that I have been keeping in touch with the situation as closely as possible and am doing everything that is open to me to do.” See Tumulty to Wilson (May 7, 1918) and Kent to Wilson (May 8, 1918), *LWWP*.


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lit the paper on fire and threw it into an urn, declaring, “The President has given words, and words, and words. Today, women receive more words. We announce to the President and the whole world today, by this act of ours, our determination that words shall no longer be the only reply given to American women.”

Clever visual rhetoric aside, these protests did nothing to move Wilson who was already doing everything within his power to secure the federal amendment. Later in the year, the NWP would turn more of their attention to the Senate, picketing and burning the words of select senators on the steps of the Capitol. In early 1919, they returned their attention to Wilson, burning him in effigy while he was participating in the peace talks at Versailles. Paul also launched “The Prison Special,” a train tour across the country featuring NWP prison veterans. Historian Sidney Bland refers to 1918-1919 as the “pathological phase” of the NWP’s existence. With the exception of the ardent revisionists, most suffrage historians concur with Bland’s assessment and conclude that the NWP became a liability to the cause of suffrage in this time period. Evidence in preceding chapters showed that most Americans disapproved of NWP militancy in 1917 even though the President was still not on record as supporting the federal amendment.


519 Bland, Techniques of Persuasion: The National Woman’s Party and Woman Suffrage, 1913-1919, 173. Bland expounds, “The attacks on Wilson were little short of scurrilous. The gimmicks of ‘watch-fires,’ Senate pickets and the Prison Special were desperation measures not only to stay in the limelight but also to stay alive. Such extreme tactics as these attracted people to the more moderate suffrage reformers in the early days of the NWP, but in the later stages they served almost exclusively to keep the militants happy in the company of each other.”

Evidence presented later in this chapter shows that the American public – and more importantly, potential political allies - moved beyond disapproval to disgust when the NWP continued to target the President after he had publicly and repeatedly declared his support for the measure. While the NWP wrongly and unwisely attacked him for inaction in the summer of 1918, Wilson was actually hard at work securing support in the Senate, a task often made more difficult due to the abhorrence of the NWP among most Democrats.

In late August, Wilson was able to ensure additional support for the amendment by urging the appointment of a pro-suffrage senator to replace Senator James who had died earlier in the summer. Wilson maintained a close correspondence with Governor Augustus Stanley of Kentucky who had the responsibility of appointing James’ successor. In his initial letter to Stanley, the only issue that Wilson mentioned in connection with the appointment was that of suffrage. He wrote, “It would be of great advantage to the party and to the country if his successor entertained views favorable to the pending constitutional amendment.”

Stanley responded that he had appointed George B. Martin to succeed James. He indicated that Martin was not personally in favor of suffrage, but he was reasonably certain that the new appointee would defer to the President and support the amendment. Indeed, Martin helped to break the “solid South” by voting “yea” in October.

When the Senate reconvened in September, the vote on the amendment was scheduled for October 1. In concert, Catt and Wilson made a final push to secure the necessary votes from Southern Democrats. On September 18, Catt wrote to Wilson,

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521 Wilson to Stanley (August 30, 1918), *LWWP*.

522 Stanley to Wilson (September 7, 1918), *LWWP*.  

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“Every Senator knows that the vote of the Amendment depends upon Mr. Benet [of South Carolina] and he, if voting ‘aye’ on the first roll call, would virtually make the announcement that it will pass.”523 She went on to implore the President to seek Benet’s vote that she was certain would swing over several other Southern Democrats.

Wilson did his best. He wrote to Benet on the same day that he received Catt’s letter. Additionally, he coordinated a meeting with Benet and the governor of South Carolina in the Oval Office on September 23. Benet was strongly opposed, but Wilson did not give up. He wrote to him again three days later urging the amendment as a war measure: “On this ground I appeal to you to hold up the President’s hands at the time of all times when his responsibility to his own country and his obligations to the cause of world-democracy weigh most heavily upon him.”524 Again, Wilson’s efforts went unrewarded as Benet voted “nay” just four days later. During his final correspondence with Benet, Wilson also made one last appeal via telegram to five other Southern Democrats, all of whom refused to change their positions.525

The Senate recessed over the weekend of September 28-29 with the vote scheduled for Tuesday, October 1. Knowing that they were two votes short of the two-thirds majority required for passage, Catt dashed off a desperation letter to Wilson on Sunday morning. She informed him that the only way she could see to secure two more votes was for the President to publicly endorse suffrage as a war measure. Catt asked the

523 Catt to Wilson (September 18, 1918), NAWSA Records. Senator Christie Benet of South Carolina was appointed to the U.S. Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Senator Benjamin Tillman. Benet only served from July 6 to November 5, 1918 when an elected successor, William P. Pollock, took office.

524 See Wilson to Benet (September 18, 1918), Appointment Books (September 23, 1918), and Wilson to Benet (September 26, 1918), Life and Letters, Vol. 8.

525 Ibid.
President to write a letter stating his support of suffrage as a war measure so that the letter could then be printed in the newspapers prior to the Senate vote. She hoped, although did not guarantee, that this step by Wilson would swing two senators around in support of the resolution.\footnote{Catt to Wilson (September 29, 1918), \textit{NAWSA Records}, Box 32, Reel 21.}

It was a busy Sunday for Wilson. In addition to receiving Catt’s letter, Treasury Secretary McAdoo personally called on the President to urge him to appear before the Senate on Monday and make a final appeal for the suffrage amendment. Two pro-suffrage Senators came to see him in the afternoon voicing their support for McAdoo’s suggestion.\footnote{Appointment books (September 29, 1918), \textit{Life and Letters}, Vol. 8.} Despite his fear that such an act might cross the fragile line into the realm of executive interference, Wilson decided that it was the only hope for securing the needed votes. He apparently believed that some Southern Democrats would feel safer explaining an affirmative vote to their constituents if they could say that they had been following the wishes of the President.

With only a few hours notice to Congress and to the media, Wilson appeared in the Senate chamber at 1 pm on September 30. He spoke for just 15 minutes, but his speech marked the first public pronouncement of his support for suffrage as a war measure. He said that the amendment’s adoption was “clearly necessary to the successful prosecution of the war and the successful realization of the object for which the war is being fought.”\footnote{Congressional Record, 65\textsuperscript{th} Congress (September 30, 1918), p. 10928-10929. The speech was also reprinted in major newspapers. For example, see “President Demands Ballot for Women,” \textit{Boston Daily Globe}, October 1, 1918, 3; “President Urges Senate to Extend Suffrage,” \textit{Wall Street Journal},} The rest of the world was looking to “the great, powerful, famous democracy
of the West to lead them,” Wilson said, and he warned that “they will cease to follow or to trust us” if the Senate failed to adopt the federal suffrage amendment. He made repeated references to the injustice of withholding the full rights of citizenship from those who had sacrificed so much in their country’s time of need. Noting that most of the allied nations of Europe had enfranchised women, Wilson asked, “Are we alone to ask and take the utmost that our women can give – service and sacrifice of every kind – and still say we do not see what title that gives them to stand by our sides in the guidance of the affairs of their nation and ours?” He concluded with one final and exceedingly personal appeal that linked passage of the amendment with successful prosecution of the war: “The executive tasks of this war rest upon me. I ask that you lighten them and place in my hands instruments, spiritual instruments, which I do not now possess, which I sorely need, and which I have daily to apologize for not being able to employ.”

The speech did not have the intended effect. In his memoirs, McAdoo regretted having the President appear before the Senate. He recalled that the appeal was deeply resented by those who opposed the amendment and even offended some pro-suffrage senators who felt that Wilson had indeed crossed over too many lines of senatorial tradition and respect. Southern Democrats, in particular, rejected Wilson’s attempt to portray a federal suffrage amendment as essential to winning the war.

October 1, 1918, 7; “Wilson makes Suffrage Appeal, but Senate Waits,” New York Times, October 1, 1918, 1.

529 Ibid. Wilson also used the speech as a forum in which he could again distance himself and the mainstream suffrage movement from the NWP. He went out of his way to say that his decision to support suffrage was in no way a result of the “voices of foolish and intemperate agitators [that] do not reach me at all.”

Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi found the idea of woman suffrage as a war measure laughable. He told reporters that “he loved President Wilson as a brother, but when the President told him he could not outmaneuver Ludendorff or capture Palestine unless the women in Mississippi could vote, he declined to agree with him.”\(^{531}\) Specifically raising the issue of race, Williams went on to say that winning the war “had [nothing] to do with the right of negro women to vote in Mississippi.”\(^{532}\) On the floor of the Senate, Senator Beckham of Kentucky also refuted the idea of the federal amendment as a war measure and said that it was, in fact, a distraction from real war measures: “Our whole attention and energy should be directed to the successful prosecution of this war and not to a matter like this which can well wait until the minds of the people are in a calmer and better condition to deal with such a radical change in a fundamental question of government.”\(^{533}\)

Joining with his Southern comrades, Senator Underwood of Alabama predicted calamity should the measure pass. Citing states’ rights as the foundation of the Republic, Underwood described the federal amendment as “this instrument that may be the final overthrow of the very life and integrity of these state governments.”\(^{534}\) When another senator suggested that the Southern states could disenfranchise black women just as easily as they had enfranchised black men, Underwood bristled: “The Senator would buy our votes with an assurance that conditions may remain as they are, and have us abandon the great fundamental principles of government that [Southerners] have maintained from

\(^{531}\) “Suffrage Beaten in Senate by Two Votes,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 2, 1918, 2.

\(^{532}\) Ibid.

\(^{533}\) *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress (September 30, 1918), 10949.

\(^{534}\) Ibid., 10929.
the beginning . . . Our votes are not for sale at any price. We stand for these principles because we believe that the integrity of our race and our Government and the protection of our women require it.”

According to Josephus Daniels, Senator Thomas Martin of Virginia, an intense rival of Wilson’s, but a usually loyal Democrat, “was hot with indignation at the President’s bringing up woman suffrage in the stress of war and trying to persuade Senators that such action would help with the war.”

Whether senators were offended or not, the vote status did not change. As predicted, when the votes were cast on the following day, the resolution fell two votes short of a two-thirds majority:

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<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
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The breakdown of the vote showed that the overwhelming reason for the resolution’s failure was the opposition of Southern Democrats – 19/22 opposed Democrats were from the South. The three additional Democrats that voted “nay” were staunch anti-

535 Ibid., 10931. Sadly, the Senate debate over the federal amendment reveals national acceptance of the disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South. When pro-suffrage senators tried to convince their Southern counterparts to support suffrage, they almost always did so by assuring them that they could just as easily disenfranchise black women. Some even offered up analysis that showed how enfranchising only white women would actually strengthen white supremacy in the South. Senator James Phelan (D-CA) assured his Southern comrades, “So by extending the suffrage to women you do not change the present condition, deplorable as it may be in the eyes of the men of the South. You simply increase the electorate by the addition of women; and if they are less literate than the men, or if they hold no property . . . there is very little likelihood of their ever exercising the suffrage . . . The amendment, I am told, will increase by 20 per cent the voting white population in the South as a whole. So the South will be stronger. Where, then, is the danger?”

536 Daniels, *The Wilson Era: Years of Peace, 1910-1917*, 524. According to Daniels, Wilson and Martin shared a deep-seeded antipathy of one another that stretched back to Wilson’s time as governor of New Jersey. Still, Daniels recalled in his memoirs, “Though he didn’t like Wilson and though as a standpatter he did not approve of many of Wilson’s policies, and personally did not like the most progressive ones, Martin piloted some of the most important Wilson measures through the Senate . . . He followed the lead of the chosen party leader as he expected Democrats in Virginia to [do].” Quote from p. 525. Suffrage, of course, serves as an exception to the tendency outlined above.
prohibitionists.\textsuperscript{537} The need to maintain white supremacy and the power of the cotton textile industry in the South combined with the power of the liquor industry in certain northern states was too strong a coalition for even the President to overcome.

Wilson was well aware of the political liability the failure had created for Democrats from suffrage states facing reelection the following month. He was also aware that his plans for the post-war settlement depended greatly on maintaining a Democratic majority in Congress. In an angry letter to Senator Williams of Mississippi in the days immediately following the vote, he wrote, “I must frankly say that I was very much grieved that the Senate did not respond to my appeal about woman suffrage the other day, because I knew what I was talking about when I spoke of the effect it would have upon our moral influence on the other side of the water and the effect is going to be very serious.”\textsuperscript{538} As the mid-term elections would show, the effect was serious, indeed.

So concerned was Wilson with losing control of Congress that in late October he issued a press statement in which he asked voters to set aside their partisan affiliation and to return a Democratic majority in both the House and Senate. He explained, “This is not time either for divided counsels or for divided leadership.” A Republican majority in either chamber would not only obstruct his ability to prosecute the war, Wilson said, but also, “be interpretative on the other side of the water as a repudiation of my leadership.”\textsuperscript{539} This desperate gamble backfired terribly. As one Wilson biographer

\textsuperscript{537} Morgan, \textit{Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America}, 126. Anti-Prohibitionists were Senator Reed of Missouri, Senator Hitchkock of New Hampshire, and Senator Pomerene of Ohio. For details of their activity as “wets,” see Ibid., 165. It is interesting to note that there is no record of Wilson directly trying to influence two of these three Senators, suggesting that he was sympathetic to their need to not alienate the political support they received from the liquor industry.

\textsuperscript{538} Wilson to Williams (October 5, 1918), \textit{Life and Letters}, Vol. 8.
noted, “No single act of Wilson’s as president would spark more criticism at the time and lead to more retrospective repudiation.” Failure to secure the suffrage amendment was surely part of Wilson’s calculus as he surveyed the Democrats’ chances in the weeks before the election and made the decision to issue such a radical call. Ultimately, it was a call that voters answered in a most adverse way.

Voters went to the polls on November 5 and, for the first time in decades, restored a Republican majority in both the House and the Senate. In the House, Democrats lost 23 seats. Republicans gained a 49-47 advantage in the Senate by garnering six seats and only losing one. Suffrage was an issue in some of the Congressional campaigns, but other powerful currents also caused a backlash against the Democratic Party. Chief among them were Wilson’s post-war peace plans that violated the isolationist sentiments of many Western voters. Democrats also wrestled with the strong perception among mid-Western wheat farmers that the Wilson administration showed favoritism to the South by fixing wheat prices to their detriment but allowing cotton prices to go unregulated to the tremendous profit of Southern cotton growers.

The October Senate defeat of the suffrage bill caused both NAWSA and the NWP to alter their traditional election year strategies for the 1918 mid-term elections. NAWSA launched campaigns against anti-suffrage Senators in New Hampshire, New Jersey, and New York.540

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540 Cooper, Woodrow Wilson: A Biography, 445. While most Wilson historians contend that Wilson’s call to “adjourn politics” just days before the midterms actually inflamed passions of the Republicans and contributed significantly to their midterm victory, Cooper disagrees. According to Cooper, “Wilson’s actions made a bad partisan situation marginally worse, but opposition to him already bordered on and sometimes crossed over into hatred.” Quote from p. 446. Cooper goes on to contend that foreign policy was a relatively minor issue in the midterms. Republicans won in most places based on domestic and local issues.

541 Seward W. Livermore, “The Sectional Issue in the 1918 Congressional Elections,” The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 35, no. 1 (June 1948): 38. Livermore points out that 21/23 of the lost House seats came from the West and mid-West, as did 4/6 of the lost Senate seats. See p. 58.
Massachusetts, and Delaware. Catt made it clear that this was not a break from their policy of remaining non-partisan – they campaigned against Democrats and Republicans alike – but that it was a deeper plunge into the political fray than the National had previously taken.\(^{542}\) A more radical policy shift was that taken by the NWP. While continuing their campaign to “hold the party in power responsible” by urging Western women to vote against Democrats, they also decided to work \textit{for} the election of a Democrat in New Hampshire who was pro-suffrage and running against the incumbent anti-suffrage Republican.\(^{543}\)

Through their combined – though not coordinated – efforts, the two suffrage organizations contributed to the defeat of the Republican Senator Weeks in Massachusetts by the pro-suffrage Democrat David Walsh. When J. Heisler Ball, the Republican senatorial candidate in Delaware, announced his support for the federal amendment just two weeks before the election, suffragists successfully threw their entire energies into defeating the incumbent anti-suffrage Democrat, Senator Willard Saulsbury.\(^{544}\) The required two additional votes in the Senate were now guaranteed for the 66\(^{th}\) Congress.

\(^{542}\) Harper, \textit{The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 5, 1900-1920}, 641. See also, “Suffrage Will Win, Mrs. Catt Declares,” \textit{New York Times}, October 5, 1918, 11. Asked by reporters what NAWSA would do following the defeat of the federal amendment in the Senate, Catt replied, “There will be no idler in the suffrage ranks. Specifically, what we are going to and where we are going to do it, we don’t purpose to say. However, I will say this: We shall do a very considerable amount of campaigning in States where men are running for Congress. We know, of course, the attitude toward suffrage of every candidate for the national Congress, and we shall see to it, as far as possible, that the candidates who are in favor of suffrage shall be elected.”

\(^{543}\) For the campaign to galvanize enfranchised women to vote against Democrats, see Statement of Alice Paul (October 24, 1918), \textit{NWPP}, Reel 2. For plans to support a Democrat in New Hampshire, see NWP Treasurer to Miss Evelyn Ryce (October 19, 1918), \textit{NWPP}, Reel 2.

The question remained whether the Democrats would be able to make one more effort to pass the resolution during the 65th Congress and at least claim partial credit for the victory. The November election also saw state suffrage victories in Michigan, South Dakota, and Oklahoma, which increased the number of presidential electors for which women could vote to 339, as compared with only 92 in 1916. The women’s vote in the 1920 presidential election would be significant and both parties now began to jockey for that vote. Democrats had hurt themselves with their failure to pass the amendment in October. They would inflict further damage to their long-term interests by failing again in February.

Wilson was incensed with the refusal of Senate Democrats to heed his call for passage of the suffrage amendment. The tenor of his correspondence suggests that his anger was not so much about prolonging the injustice of unequal suffrage, but about the political damage done to the party. The most pressing thing in the President’s mind was his plan for U.S. involvement in a league of nations after the war. Without a Democrat-controlled Congress, his ability to execute that plan would be greatly hindered. Without the support of women voters, winning back the presidency in 1920 would be almost impossible.

Even before the mid-term elections, he began to work the Senate again in the hope that the amendment would pass during a later session of the 65th Congress. Less than two weeks after the failed October vote, he wrote to the Governor of South Carolina in an attempt to discern the suffrage stance of the newly elected Senator, William P. Pollock, that would replace Senator Benet, stating, “I was so deeply disappointed in the action of Senator Benet about the suffrage amendment . . . It is a matter of the utmost consequence
that the amendment should be adopted by the Senate, and any representations that I can
legitimately make to Senator-select Pollock, I should like very much to convey.”

An early November memo written by Tumulty for the President outlining the major
issues for the next year further demonstrates the importance of the suffrage issue to
Wilson’s administration. Under the heading “things to be attended to at once,” Tumulty
listed suffrage as the number one issue. He explained, “The policy of the Democratic
Party should be to put [the federal amendment] over now and thus obtain the credit for it.
If we wait, the Republicans will surely put it over in March and we will have the name of
defeating it.” Now that suffrage could serve as a wedge issue between parties, the
stakes over who could claim credit for its passage were considerably raised.

Suffrage leaders encouraged the President to press the amendment on the Senate
before he left for Paris – a request with which Wilson willingly complied. In his State of
the Union message, given just days before he sailed for Europe, Wilson said:

And what shall we say of the women, - of their instant intelligence, quickening every
task that they touched; their capacity for organization and cooperation, which gave
their action discipline and enhanced the effectiveness of everything they attempted.
Their contribution to the great result is beyond appraisal. They have added a new
luster to the annals of American womanhood. 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 in every field of practical work they have entered, whether for themselves or
for their country. These great days of completed achievement would be sadly
marred were we to omit that act of justice.

Publicly, women’s war service figured prominently in Wilson’s appeal, but the
importance of suffrage to party politics was the resounding theme of his private petitions.

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546 Memorandum by Tumulty (November 9, 1918), *LWWP*.
547 State of the Union Message (December 2, 1918), *LWWP*. For NAWSA’s request for mention
of suffrage in the speech, see Gardener to Wilson (November 27, 1918), *LWWP*.
The Governor of South Carolina had assured Wilson that Senator-select Pollock would vote in favor of the federal amendment. Consequently, he needed to secure only one more vote for the measure to pass in the 65th Congress. Before leaving for Europe, he focused his efforts on Senator Williams of Mississippi and Senator Edward Gay of Louisiana, neither of whom agreed to change their positions. He remained in constant contact with Tumulty about the suffrage situation while in Paris, inquiring, “Is there anything else that I can do that might help to bring about the passage of the suffrage amendment?”

A confidential letter from Williams to Wilson in mid-January made it clear that his position was immovable. In addition to the fear of decreased white supremacy in the South, Williams communicated his ongoing displeasure with the NWP’s latest series of protests. A potential candidate to cast the one additional vote in favor of suffrage, Williams responded to the President’s request for assistance by saying that he would never vote for suffrage “as long as they keep up their infantile and asinine bonfire performances in Lafayette Park.” To the bitter end, the post-1917 tactics of the NWP did more harm than good for the suffrage movement.

When the amendment finally came to a vote on the Senate floor on February 10, it was more a formality than anything else. All interested parties were aware that the resolution was still one vote short of the necessary two-thirds. The only changed vote

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548 See Wilson to Williams (November 29, 1918) and Wilson to Robert Ewing (December 2, 1918), LWWP.

549 Wilson to Tumulty (January 10, 1918), LWWP.

550 Williams to Wilson (January 15, 1919), John Sharp William Papers, quoted in Morgan, 136. For details of NWP activities in January and February 1919, see Lewis to Mrs. George H. Day (January 20, 1918), NWPP, Reel 2.
from October was that of Senator Pollock who provided the keynote speech. His address
to the Senate was an eloquent tribute to women’s war service and to the President’s
leadership of the nation during the war. He explained that he felt it was his duty as a
Democrat to heed the President’s call and support the suffrage amendment. Additionally,
he appealed to his fellow southerners by claiming that white supremacy in the South
would not be threatened by extending suffrage to women. Pollock explained, “The black
man could not control the white man, and the Negro man and the Negro woman
combined can not any the more control the white man and the white woman
combined.”

Despite Pollock’s appeal, the outcome was as expected. The amendment failed to
pass by a vote of 63-33, one vote short of the required two-thirds majority. With nearly
three weeks to go before the 65th Congress officially adjourned, pro-suffrage Democrats
scrambled to try and get one more vote. When rumors emerged that they had the votes,
Republicans filibustered to block a vote before Congress adjourned on March 4. Fully
aware of and disgusted with the manner in which party politics were driving the train,
Catt later explained:

Friendly Democrats [contended] that the Northern opposed Senators were merely
postponing action in order to throw to the Republicans whatever political credit
might accrue from the passage of the Amendment in the Sixty-sixth Congress, and
Republican Senators accusing the Democrats of attempting to cover their years of
opposition to federal suffrage action, by the appearance of support at the eleventh
hour. Both accusations contained much truth, and the sorry fact was that the Sixty-
fifth Congress adjourned with the Amendment not yet submitted.

551 Congressional Record, 65th Congress (February 10, 1919), 3055.
552 Catt and Shuler, Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement, 337.
Barring unforeseen deaths of pro-suffrage Senators, the amendment was guaranteed to pass in the Republican-controlled 66th Congress. Its failure during the 65th Congress was a defeat for Wilson personally and for the Democrats as a party.

Both parties wanted an early vote on the suffrage amendment during the 66th Congress. Wilson and his staff took several actions to try and give credit to the Democratic Party for the eventual suffrage victory. First among these was the President’s call for a special session of Congress to meet May 19, 1919. Within two days of convening, the resolution to send the federal suffrage amendment to the states for ratification passed in the House by a vote of 304-89. As usual, the Senate was not as swift.

Wilson was back in Europe by the time the 66th Congress convened. In another attempt to claim Democratic credit for the victory, Tumulty wrote to the President that suffrage organizations were beginning to publicly declare that victory in the Senate was not assured, despite what had seemed a guarantee after the November 1918 elections. Tumulty urged Wilson to secure the vote of Senator William Harris of Georgia, a Democrat who had been elected largely as a result of Wilson’s support during his campaign. Harris was vacationing in Europe at the time, and Tumulty was convinced that, if the President could get his vote and have him make a public statement to that

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554 Wilson had intervened in Georgia’s Democratic primary in the fall of 1918. Condemning the incumbent Democrat, Senator Thomas Hardwick, for consistent opposition to Wilson’s policies, the President urged voters to support Harris. The appeal was apparently effective. Harris carried 114 of Gerogia’s 152 counties. Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*, 436-437. Wilson also inserted himself into a number of other primary races that fall. According to Cooper, “Wilson’s involvement in the 1918 primaries would become the only successful party purge by a president in American history . . . He was playing for larger stakes than just settling scores with opponents in his own party. This was the final, knockout blow in his fight for supremacy among Democrats.” Quote from p. 437.
effect, the newspapers would report that it was the Democrats, rather than the Republicans that had secured the passage of the resolution.\textsuperscript{555}

Wilson met with Harris on May 8, and the newly elected Senator informed him that he would vote for the federal amendment. Leading newspapers from across the country carried stories about Harris’ pledge in the days following this meeting in Europe. As Tumulty and Wilson had hoped, almost all newspaper accounts quoted Democratic sources who claimed Harris’ vote was the one that would put the amendment through in the special session of Congress.\textsuperscript{556}

As the final vote would show, Republicans would not allow full credit to go to their opponents. There were four more votes in favor of suffrage on June 4 than there had been on October 1, 1918. Two votes were from Democrats and two were from Republicans. The debate over which party should get credit did not end in June 1919. Just a few days before the Senate vote, when the actual date had been shifted for the third time, an exasperated Mary Hay summed up the feelings of many suffragists who were fed up with being the pawns in a game of partisan politics. Hay wrote to a comrade, “All men are liars – Rep. and Dem – at least they get that way when they go to the Senate.”\textsuperscript{557}

When the roll was finally called in the Senate on June 4, 1919, the results were as follows:

\textsuperscript{555} Tumulty to Wilson (April 30, 1919) and (May 2, 1919), \textit{LWWP}.

\textsuperscript{556} For Wilson’s meeting with Harris see Diary Entry of Dr. Grayson (May 8, 1919), \textit{LWWP}. For information about Harris’ statement and its coverage in the press, see Tumulty to Wilson (May 9, 1919) and Wilson to Tumulty (May 13, 1919), \textit{LWWP}. See also, “Georgia Senator to Swing Suffrage; Harris Said to Have Informed Wilson That He Will Support the Amendment,” \textit{New York Times}, May 10, 1919, 7; “Suffrage Champions Certain of Success; Senator Harris of Georgia Announces He Will Vote for Amendment,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, May 10, 1919, 12.

\textsuperscript{557} Mary Garrett Hay to Maud Wood Park (June 1919), \textit{Woman’s Rights Collection, Mary Garret Hay Series}, Reel 1, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, MA, available online at \url{http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/lobby/doclist.htm}.
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Senator Pollock’s “aye” vote from February had been cancelled by his successor, Senator Dial, who voted “nay.” The four changes from October were Walsh of Massachusetts and Ball of Delaware – both newly elected with the support of suffragists during the 1918 mid-term elections. These two were joined by Senator Harris who had been persuaded by Wilson and Senator Hale, a Republican from Maine who changed his vote because his state had passed into the ranks of the “suffrage states” since the October vote.558

Victory in Congress, sweet though it was, only meant that suffragists could now turn their attention to the ratification campaign that needed to be fought in the states. The Wilson Administration, of course, did its best to put a positive spin on the victory for the Democratic Party. Both parties, in fact, jockeyed in the press to claim credit for the amendment’s final passage.559 But those who studied the results of the Senate vote could see that it was mostly in spite of the Democrats that the resolution passed.

Perhaps the most interesting thing to take away from the last stage of the suffrage battle in Congress is the fact that Wilson’s ability to influence members of his own party had its limits. When the political survival of certain senators depended more on their constituents who feared any threat to white supremacy or their contributors who feared the economic damage women voters might inflict than it did on the support of the


559 For an example of the debate over which party should get credit for passing the amendment, see “Federal Woman Suffrage,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1919, 12.
President, they placed personal interests above the President’s request for support. As a result, the Democratic Party suffered the backlash of pro-suffrage voters in both the 1918 mid-term elections and the 1920 presidential election.

This is not to say that Wilson’s conversion to the federal amendment was inconsequential. On the contrary, evidence in this chapter reveals that the President helped to secure key votes at critical moments. And his public endorsement of the federal amendment – with its explicit approval for all Democrats to abandon the “states’ rights” platform of 1916 – opened the door for a number of Southern Democrats in both houses to change their positions. But Wilson’s conversion alone was not enough. The single most important factor in the amendment’s ultimate victory at the national level was the series of victories won in the states from 1917-1919. Eleven new states enfranchised women during this two year period, largely as a result of Catt’s “Winning Plan” to simultaneously work for suffrage at the state and federal level. The combination of increased representation from suffrage states and Wilson’s support finally tipped the scales in favor of the federal amendment. The rising “tide” of suffrage that Wilson had described to the assembled NAWSA members in Atlantic City in September 1916 finally crested nearly four years later.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Victory in Congress was not the final hurdle for the federal woman suffrage amendment. In order to become part of the Constitution, the amendment required ratification by 36 out of 48 states. This was no small task. Suffragists across the nation once again strapped on their armor and marched into the political fray for this final battle. The ratification campaign lasted more than a year, ending only when Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify (by a margin of only one vote) in late August 1920.560 Aspects of the ratification process are both fascinating and illuminating, and it is an important part of the overall history of the federal amendment, but President Wilson played only a minor role. He returned from Europe in July 1919, shortly after the suffrage victory in Congress. During the next several months, his primary focus was the battle over U.S. membership in the League of Nations.561 He suffered a debilitating stroke in early October and practically vanished from public life for more than six months.562

Wilson had recuperated enough by the spring of 1920 to offer some support for ratification.563 Most importantly, he answered one of Catt’s final calls for assistance. At


562 For more detail on how Wilson’s physical condition left him incapacitated, see Chapter 23: Disability in Ibid., 535-560. See also, Knock, To End all Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order, 263. , Clements, The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson, 197-202.
her request, he telegraphed the governor of Tennessee, successfully urging him to convene a special legislative session to consider ratification of the amendment.\textsuperscript{564} For this study which is principally concerned with how and why Wilson came to support the federal amendment and with his role in pushing the measure through Congress, the story largely ends with the decisive vote in the Senate in June 1919. Still, the events surrounding the actual certification of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Amendment by Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby in August 1920 illustrate some of this study’s larger points.

Colby certified the federal woman suffrage amendment in the privacy of his own home in Washington, D.C. at eight o’clock in the morning on August 26, 1920. The signing took place without any ceremony or spectators, despite the request of the National Woman’s Party to send a delegation and to have the event filmed by movie cameras. Miffed at the denial of their request, an NWP spokesperson later told reporters, “It was quite tragic. This was the final culmination of the women’s fight and women, irrespective of factions, should have been allowed to be present when the proclamation was signed.”\textsuperscript{565} Colby’s rejection of the NWP demands to be represented at the signing ceremony was no fluke. According to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, NAWSA leaders had explicitly asked Wilson’s cabinet members to ban the NWP from any signing ceremony. Daniels recorded in his diary on August 25, “Mrs. Helen Gardener [NAWSA

\textsuperscript{563} Specifically, Wilson wrote letters to urge ratification upon Democratic leaders in West Virginia, Louisiana, Delaware, and North Carolina. See Wilson to Julius Edgar Frazier and Milton Burr (March 1, 1920), Wilson to Jared Young Sanders (April 10, 1920), Wilson to John Milliken Parker (May 18, 1920), Wilson to John J. Mulvena (June 1, 1920), Wilson to Thomas Walter Bickett (June 24, 1920), \textit{LWWP}. Ratification was defeated in all four of these states.

\textsuperscript{564} Wilson to Albert Houston Roberts (June 23, 1920), \textit{LWWP}. For Roberts’ reply, see Roberts to Wilson (June 25, 1920), \textit{LWWP}.

Corresponding Secretary] phoned that she had asked Colby not to have any of the Picketing [sic] crowd of women present.  

While the NWP received a cold shoulder from Wilson Administration representatives, Catt and NAWSA were afforded their customary warmth from the White House. President and Mrs. Wilson invited Catt and Gardener to the White House on the afternoon of August 26. In reporting on Catt’s visit to Wilson, the *New York Times* noted that the NWP, “known as the militants, and a rival organization to that headed by Mrs. Catt, was not represented.” The President accepted a memorial appreciation book from the two NAWSA leaders. He informed them that he would not be physically able to attend their jubilee meeting that night but had given Secretary Colby a message to read on his behalf.

Later that night, Colby told the NAWSA members who had assembled for the jubilee at Poli’s Theatre, “There never was a man more deeply or profoundly convinced of the justice of the suffrage cause than Woodrow Wilson. And there never was a party leader who held his party with more stern, austere and unbending insistence to the

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566 Cronon, *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921*, 552. Daniels apparently thought Gardner was being catty. The next sentence in his diary reads, “The female of the Species . . .” One can almost see him shaking his head at the fact that – even in what should have been one of the suffrage movement’s most glorious moments – bitter factionalism persisted. Colby appears to have made a conscious decision to avoid the potential fallout from inviting NAWSA but not the NWP. When questioned by reporters, Colby explained, “It was decided not to accompany this simple ministerial action on my part with any ceremony or setting. This secondary aspect of the subject has regretfully been the source of considerable contention as to who shall participate in it and who shall not. Inasmuch as I am not interested in the aftermath of any of the friction or collisions which may have been developed in the long struggle for the ratification of the amendment, I have contented myself with the performance in the simplest manner of the duty devolving upon me under the law.” “Colby Proclaims Woman Suffrage; Signs Certificate of Ratification at His Home Without Women Witnesses,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1920, 3.

performance of a duty dictated by high principle.” Colby went on the relay the following message from Wilson:

Will you take the opportunity to say to my fellow citizens that I deem it one of the greatest honors of my life that this great event, the ratification of this amendment, should have occurred during the period of my administration. Please say also that nothing has given me more pleasure than the privilege that has been mine to do what I could to advance the cause of ratification and to hasten the day when the womanhood of America would be recognized by the nation on the equal footing of citizenship that it deserves.  

Paul and her NWP followers were not involved in NAWSA’s jubilee at Poli’s Theatre. Earlier in the day, though, Paul had released a press statement heralding final certification and predicting that, “August 26th will be remembered as one of the great days in the history of the women of the world and in the history of this republic.”  

She also announced that the NWP headquarters would remain open for the time being while the leaders planned a convention to determine the organization’s future.

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568 Ibid.

569 Ibid. Paul’s prediction of the lasting significance of August 26th did not come to pass. Within both public memory and the historical profession, the history of the woman suffrage movement quickly became a footnote to the overall narrative of American political history. Some of this is due to what historian William O’Neill called “the failure of feminism” – the fact that women did not do as many suffragists promised and use their vote to reform society. Additionally, he argues, they failed to use the ballot as a launching pad to improve their own status in society. Describing the post-suffrage decade, O’Neill writes, “The women’s rights movement expired in the twenties from ailments that had gone untreated in its glory days. Chief among them was the feminists’ inability to see that equal suffrage was almost the only issue holding the disparate elements of the woman movement together. Once it was resolved, voters who happened to be female were released from the politically meaningless category of ‘woman.’ This allowed their basic allegiances to come into play.” O’Neill, Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America, 264. Nancy Cott disputes the idea that feminism lost steam in the 1920s. Instead, she argues that what happened in the 1920s was the emergence of a broader feminist agenda: “What historians have seen as the demise of feminism in the 1920s was, more accurately, the end of the suffrage movement and the early struggle of modern feminism.” See {{8 Cott, Nancy F. 1987/s8-10;}} I would argue that there is more to this story of historical exclusion than women’s failure to “do anything” with the vote. The history of woman suffrage was initially ignored and later relegated to the fields of women’s history and/or social history because political historians did not see gender politics as real politics. One of the chief aims of this study, building on the work of a generation of suffrage scholars, has been to show just how much gender politics played a crucial role in the broader political developments that took place during Wilson’s two terms. By integrating suffrage history with the standard political histories of Wilson, I have attempted to answer the call made by Victoria Bissell Brown for political historians to take gender politics more seriously. See Brown, Did Woodrow Wilson's Gender Politics Matter?, 153-154.
The events of August 26, 1920 serve as a metaphor, to some extent, for the final years of the suffrage battle. From the newspaper accounts, it is clear that Wilson was a staunch advocate of the federal amendment. Colby’s speech at the jubilee – and the message that he relayed from the President - illustrates the desire of Democrats to claim responsibility for the passage of the amendment, indicating the way in which woman suffrage had developed into a key issue between political parties. It is also clear that Catt and NAWSA maintained a positive and mutually supportive relationship with Wilson and his administration while Paul and the NWP remained antagonistic to the end. Gardener’s note to Daniels highlights the depth of the rift between NAWSA and the NWP. All of these issues – Wilson’s conversion to suffrage in the midst of his larger turn toward progressivism, his increasing tendency toward national solutions, the amendment’s rising stock as an issue of political value for both parties, and the different political strategies of NAWSA and the NWP – have served as the basis of this study.

Few scholars disagree with one of this study’s fundamental points: Wilson was converted to supporting the cause of the federal suffrage amendment early in his second term. Exceptionally, Victoria Bissell Brown dates his conversion even earlier, arguing that Wilson’s affirmative vote for suffrage in the New Jersey state referendum in October 1915 signaled his acceptance of the fact that women were in public life to stay. Brown argues:

The story of Wilson and suffrage, between his vote in the New Jersey referendum in the fall of 1915 and his support for a federal amendment in January 1918, is not a story about whether the president believed in woman suffrage . . . The post-1915 story is about method, timing, and tactics; it is about deference to the racial and gender politics of the South and the direction of the Democratic party; and it is about war and protest and the rage Wilson felt at suffragists who were unwilling to keep the home fires burning and his loyalty to those suffragists who were.570
I could not agree more with Brown’s eloquent assessment of what the post-1915 story is really about. But implicit in her argument about the significance of the October 1915 vote is the idea that once Wilson voted yea in New Jersey, his transition from a states’ rights suffragist to federal amendment advocate was a foregone conclusion. I disagree. Wilson was unwilling to advocate for the federal amendment as President and the leader of the Democratic Party until he was convinced that a majority of Americans wanted woman suffrage and that it would hurt his party to stand in the way of its eventual passage. And he only became convinced of those things once NAWSA and its state affiliates began to win more states in 1917. In other words, there appears to be a misplaced sense of inevitability in this part of Brown’s argument.\(^{571}\) Regardless of the timing, the real disagreement among scholars begins with the questions of what brought about Wilson’s conversion and what effect his advocacy had on the amendment’s eventual passage. This study has attempted to answer both of those questions.

Prior to the 1918 mid-term elections, suffrage was not an issue with enough power to swing a significant number of voters in one direction or the other. With only minor concessions to the suffrage movement, Wilson was able to win re-election in 1916.

\(^{570}\) Ibid. 142.

\(^{571}\) This may seem like quibbling, but there is a larger point here about the danger of suggesting that anything associated with the federal woman suffrage amendment was inevitable. Remember that the final roll call in the Senate in 1919 only passed by one vote. And remember, too, that ratification turned into a larger and closer battle than many anticipated. Only 13 out of 48 states needed to reject ratification in order for the amendment to fail and when the nine states of the solid South almost immediately did so, suffragists were left with a margin of only four states. My point is that getting a federal women suffrage amendment during Wilson’s administration was a close call at every turn. Without engaging in too much counterfactual history, it is probably not unreasonable to suggest that – should the amendment have failed under Wilson – the largely pro-suffrage Republican Party that swept the 1920 elections would have quickly facilitated passage and ratification of the federal amendment. Still, that is impossible to know for certain. And even if it is a valid assumption, delaying woman suffrage for another presidential election cycle would certainly have brought with it important second and third order effects. Any suggestion of inevitability obscures the Herculean challenges faced by – and more importantly, overcome by - the suffragists.
His vote for the New Jersey suffrage referendum, his support for the states’ rights plank in the 1916 Democratic platform, and his proclamation of openness to a federal amendment at the Atlantic City NAWSA Convention in September 1916 were enough to convince most pro-suffrage Democratic voters that he was an ally. Those same actions were moderate enough to not alienate anti-suffrage elements within the Democratic Party, especially Southerners fearful of the federal amendment’s potential to undermine white supremacy in their states.

In a direct rebuke to the NWP campaign strategy in 1916, enfranchised women in the West demonstrated that they were not single-issue voters. Evaluating Wilson and Hughes across the spectrum of their policies and beliefs, the majority of women voted in line with their traditional party affiliations. Those who broke ranks tended to support Wilson because of his efforts to keep the United States out of the war in Europe and his increasing support for a number of progressive measures.

What changed between the November 1916 election and the start of the 1918 mid-term election campaign season that made suffrage a more powerful political wedge? First, and perhaps most importantly, the United States became directly involved in the war in Europe. NAWSA leaders, following Catt’s guidance, made a critical decision to commit their organization to war service alongside suffrage work. Their contributions to national defense through home front service strengthened the arguments they had been making for decades that equal sacrifice deserved equal citizenship. This is not to say that they explicitly altered the basis of their demand for suffrage. They continued to ask for
suffrage on the basis of natural rights, but they were not above using women’s reform work and/or patriotism as an additional reason.\footnote{For an excellent discussion of how the argument for suffrage evolved from one based on natural rights (the argument from justice) to the claim that woman suffrage would benefit society (the argument from expediency), see Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, 43-74. Importantly, Kraditor notes that both types of argument persisted throughout the suffrage struggle: “The claim of women to the vote as a natural right never disappeared from the suffragist rationale, but the meaning of natural right changed in response to new realities, and new arguments enumerating the reforms that women voters could effect took their places alongside the natural right principle that had been the staple plea of the suffragists in the early days of the movement.” Quote from p. 44-45.}

Helen Gardener articulated this dual reasoning to Wilson in a letter sent a few months before the first vote in the Senate. She explained:

We do not ask, and do not want [suffrage] given as a ‘reward’ for war work and war sacrifice. Those are our loyal duty and pleasure to give even under the humiliation of disfranchisement, but how much more whole-heartedly, cheerfully, joyfully we can and will make those duties our first thought and pleasure when we can feel that we are a part of the government which we gladly sacrifice so much to protect and to make safe! I doubt if even you can grasp how deep that feeling is in women.\footnote{Gardener to Wilson (June 17, 1918), NAWSA Records, Box 32, Reel 21.}

Whether women wanted suffrage as a reward or not, that is certainly part of the reason why male elected officials decided to grant it to them. Wilson increasingly emphasized women’s contribution to the war when he urged members of Congress to support the federal amendment. Likewise, the Congressional debates on the amendment are filled with pro-suffrage Congressmen heaping accolades on the sacrifices of women engaged in war service.

The other significant change during 1917 was the increase in the number of suffrage states. Eight more states had granted women either full or partial suffrage, and it was clear to both parties that, unlike in 1914 and 1916, enfranchised women would make a significant difference in the 1918 mid-term elections. The increase in the number of suffrage states was in no small way connected to Wilson’s support. In close coordination
with NAWSA - the only suffrage organization still working on state campaigns - Wilson encouraged state legislatures across the country to pass suffrage referenda. Shedding his hesitance to become involved in internal state affairs, he wrote letters, gave statements to the press, and encouraged individual legislators and governors to extend the franchise to women.

Members of the NWP, and the revisionist scholars who emphasize the importance of the NWP strategy, would argue that the other significant change in 1917 was the militant picketing campaign and subsequent publicity surrounding the pickets’ arrest and imprisonment. The actions of the NWP, they insist, made it impossible for Wilson to continue to talk about fighting a war for democracy abroad while denying democracy at home. According to this argument, the civil disobedience of the pickets was so embarrassing to the Wilson Administration that the President realized the only way he could remove the NWP thorn from his side was by supporting the federal amendment.

This study challenges that revisionist position. Wilson was troubled by the pickets mostly because of the embarrassment that they caused to the suffrage movement as a whole. His correspondence with members of Congress, NAWSA leaders, and the press all indicate that he hoped the general public’s distaste for the pickets would not create irreparable harm to the suffrage cause, which he increasingly supported. Moreover, press coverage of the pickets, especially outside of New York and Washington, D.C., was primarily negative. Only a tiny minority of Americans pressured Wilson to stop the arrests, imprisonments, and forced feedings of NWP members. Despite the pickets’ willingness to suffer injustice at the hands of the government, there
was no great public outcry at their mistreatment. Wilson’s conversion over the course of 1917 came largely in spite of the actions of the militants.

Once Wilson for the first time asked Congress to pass the federal amendment in January 1918, he never wavered from that position of support. Illustrating the limits of executive influence, though, the amendment failed to pass in the Senate two times before finally succeeding under a Republican-controlled Congress in June 1919. This study has established two factors that constrained the President’s ability to influence Congress.

First, he had to wrestle with the thin line between executive interest and executive interference. Senatorial courtesy required him to tread carefully on the sensitivities of those he sought to influence. In addition, the solid base of the Democratic Party was located in the South where woman suffrage seemingly posed a threat to white supremacy. Wilson recognized that Southern Democrats were under immense pressure from their constituents to protect white supremacy at all costs. The reality of the situation was that woman suffrage posed little threat to the Southern political system. In fact, as even some suffragists unfortunately argued, had black women been as disfranchised as easily as black men had been, the power of white voters would have doubled when women were given the vote. Nonetheless, fear outweighed fact. Anti-suffragists convinced voters that woman suffrage would destroy white political hegemony. Public perception mattered more to Southern Senators than the political reality. Despite his best efforts, Wilson was

574 Wilson, himself, was no champion of black civil or political rights. A southerner by birth and by ideology, he held similar views of the need for white supremacy in the South as did the members of his party in Congress. Still, his work on behalf of the federal suffrage amendment indicates that he felt confident that white supremacy was not threatened by granting women the right to vote.
largely unable to overcome their fears of losing future elections by supporting the federal amendment. 575

Paul repeatedly argued that Wilson was not pushing his party hard enough. Her rationale for targeting the President, first in the 1916 election and later with the picketing campaign, was that he had the power to compel his party, which up until 1918 controlled both houses of Congress, to support the federal suffrage amendment. Close scrutiny of Wilson’s actions as an advocate of the amendment from 1918 all the way through final ratification in 1920, though, indicates that Paul failed to grasp Wilson’s limitations on this particular issue with Southern Democrats in the Senate. Owing more to the white constituents that elected them, those Senators were immune to pressure from the President. Wilson’s efforts to swing their votes in favor of the federal amendment - and he indeed expended great effort with these men - were ultimately in vain.

In many ways, the contrasting approaches of NAWSA and the NWP represent two very different understandings of the nature of federal authority – and, in a broader sense, the national state – in the early 20th century. By 1916, NAWSA and NWP leaders alike recognized the need for federal action if all women were to be enfranchised. And this was in keeping with the post-Civil War trend for citizenship to be determined at the national rather than the state level. But NAWSA leaders remained more realistic about

575 In a telling exchange that illustrates this dynamic, Senator Lee Overman (D – NC) sent the following response to a Wilson entreaty for him to urge ratification upon the members of the North Carolina state legislature: “Now, Mr. President, as you know, I have been loyal to you and supported you in everything, except upon the question of woman suffrage . . . If you were fully acquainted with the conditions as they prevail in this state I am sure you would understand my position and not request of me to exert my influence for ratification of the amendment. I went before the people [in a primary election in early June 1920], being opposed by a gentleman who was a most ardent suffragist who advocated the ratification of the amendment. The result of the primary was that I received 94,000 and my opponent only 23,000 – the largest majority any man ever received in this state. My position was endorsed by the people; therefore, I cannot, in justice to myself and to my people, take a contrary position so soon after the primary, all of which I know you will fully appreciate.” Overman to Wilson (June 25, 1920), LWWP.
the persistence of states’ rights ideology and more aware of the limits of federal power and authority. Paul and her followers built a strategy more based on how things ought to be than on how they actually were. The interaction among local, state, and federal authorities has received considerable attention in recent works of political history.576

While this study does not directly dialogue with those works, the experience of the suffragists has much to offer as historians continue to grapple with the evolving nature of the state in the 20th century.

Why did Wilson eventually become willing to push for a national solution to the issue of woman suffrage? In the end, his personal acceptance of the principle involved coupled with party politics and simple electoral math made suffrage an issue worthy of Wilson’s attention and devotion. His transition on suffrage paralleled his principled yet expedient transition on other progressive measures such as the Adamson Act and the Keating-Owen Child Labor Bill. Under Catt’s leadership, NAWSA played the bipartisan political game more effectively than the NWP. Without alienating the Republican support that would be required to win in Congress and, later, in the state ratification campaigns, Catt endeared NAWSA to the President and gained his support in critical battles for state referenda, the creation of a separate House Suffrage Committee, and, finally, the federal amendment itself. NAWSA wisely decided to continue pursuing state referenda. Additionally, they distanced themselves from the actions of the NWP and simultaneously engaged in war service and suffrage work. As a result, NAWSA leaders

put the suffrage movement in a position to secure the federal amendment before the end of Wilson’s second term.

A political analysis of the suffrage movement leads to a version of the story that sometimes lacks inspiration. Wilson, more often than not, acted out of cold political reality rather than out of a sense of justice. Catt, seeking all expedient means to further her cause, was more than willing to ignore the civil rights violations committed by the government against the NWP pickets. Paul wrongly pursued a policy of militant harassment of the President even while he was exerting his utmost influence to secure the federal amendment. Perhaps most egregiously, both the President and the two suffrage organizations were willing to sacrifice the rights of black citizens in order to gain suffrage for white women. Fortunately, history is not necessarily concerned with identifying heroes and villains. As one historian explains, historical judgment “requires attention to the nuances of context and to an awareness of limits.”

Sitkoff offers this insight in the midst of his assessment of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s record on civil rights for African Americans during the New Deal. On the Roosevelt Administration’s failure to do more to improve race equality, Sitkoff writes, “[Their failures] stain the record of the Roosevelt Administration, as well as that of every individual and organization that should have done more to seek to alter the situation. The odds against their succeeding do not constitute a sufficient excuse for their timidity, half measures, and concessions. In moral terms, the horror of racism makes a mockery of lauding anyone as a humanitarian who compromised with its existence, as Roosevelt did repeatedly.” This is a scathing indictment – and one that could easily be tweaked to apply to Wilson on his hesitant approach to woman suffrage. But Sitkoff goes on to discuss the context in which FDR sought to make even minor positive changes in the status of blacks, specifically noting that “For three centuries racism had infected the national mind as well as the body politic.” (p. 330). He does not offer excuses for FDR, but does provide sufficient context to help understand why FDR made the decisions that he did. Sitkoff’s assessment is an outstanding model for balanced historical judgment and I have done my best to emulate his approach in this study.

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577 Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 329. Sitkoff offers this insight in the midst of his assessment of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s record on civil rights for African Americans during the New Deal. On the Roosevelt Administration’s failure to do more to improve race equality, Sitkoff writes, “[Their failures] stain the record of the Roosevelt Administration, as well as that of every individual and organization that should have done more to seek to alter the situation. The odds against their succeeding do not constitute a sufficient excuse for their timidity, half measures, and concessions. In moral terms, the horror of racism makes a mockery of lauding anyone as a humanitarian who compromised with its existence, as Roosevelt did repeatedly.” This is a scathing indictment – and one that could easily be tweaked to apply to Wilson on his hesitant approach to woman suffrage. But Sitkoff goes on to discuss the context in which FDR sought to make even minor positive changes in the status of blacks, specifically noting that “For three centuries racism had infected the national mind as well as the body politic.” (p. 330). He does not offer excuses for FDR, but does provide sufficient context to help understand why FDR made the decisions that he did. Sitkoff’s assessment is an outstanding model for balanced historical judgment and I have done my best to emulate his approach in this study.
Even without actively seeking heroic figures, though, one cannot help but come across them when studying a movement that was, at its most grassroots level, about political liberty and democratic principles. I continue to find myself inspired by letters like the one from a young suffragist campaigning alone in Montana who wrote back to the NWP headquarters, “Often I ride all night from one town to the next. It is very uphill work here in Montana. Every place I go seems harder. Sometimes I wonder if it is worth all the money and effort, but Miss Burns said it was one of the most important states so I suppose it is worth while.”578 Likewise, one cannot help but be moved by the report from another suffragist that she was sure a certain senator had told her he would vote “yea” on the amendment, but that she could not remember any of the specifics of their conversation because he was just one of 14 members of Congress she had interviewed on that particular morning.579

Even if it was the result of political compromises and pressures and capitulation to racism in many cases, that magical day that Beulah Amidon imagined when writing to her comrades in jail in 1917 did come to pass. Her words, meant to inspire those unjustly imprisoned for petitioning their government for a redress of legitimate grievances, travel through the years to remind us of the true basis of the battle: “Can you imagine how it will be when that amendment actually passes? Sometimes, when I am too tired to think, I just take a long breath and try to dream of a whole nation politically free --- and then there is nothing too hard to do to make the dream come true.”580

578 Clara Louise Rowe to Mrs. Jay Webster (May 31, 1916), NWPP, Reel 1.
580 Amidon to Picket-Prisoners (August, 23, 1917), NWPP, Reel 2.
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