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The Road Beyond Suffrage: Female Activism in Richmond, Virginia

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The Road Beyond Suffrage:
Female Activism in Richmond, Virginia

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of history at
the Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Bachelors of Arts: History, Virginia Commonwealth University, December 2009

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	32
Conclusion.....	71
Bibliography.....	88

Abstract

THE ROAD BEYOND SUFFRAGE: FEMALE ACTIVISM IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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This thesis focuses on the continued activism in the YWCA, the Equal Suffrage League and the League of Women Voters after 1920. The work examines the uses of motherhood, social religion, race and traditions as tools for activism and compares the YWCA to the Equal Suffrage League and League of Women Voters after 1920. The date range is roughly from 1915 to 1925.

Introduction

If you were to hear the term “female activism,” what would come to mind? Would you imagine women protesting the Vietnam War, burning bras, or fighting for the passage of the Equal Suffrage Amendment? Would you think further back to women fighting for the right to vote, to Susan B. Anthony, or perhaps even further in the past? Female activism has been expressed in “waves,” with the first beginning in 1840 with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony; the second in the 1970s with the women’s liberation movement and the third in the 1980s and 1990s with “girl power.” This thesis explores the meaning of the term “waves” and why it applies to Richmond's female activism. The term “wave” refers not to the outward expression of the wave, rather the inner workings that are constantly moving under the surface. Although historians have argued that the “first” wave of activism crashed in 1920, Richmond's activist continued their work into the following decades. This paper will examine two organizations, the Young Women's Christian Association and the Equal Suffrage League, which turned into the League of Women Voters. Methods that began early in the organizations, continued beyond 1920.

Female activism in the United States finds its origin in the abolitionist movement, which fought to end slavery. Stanton and Anthony were inspired to fight for women's rights after attending an 1840 abolitionist convention in London, England. At this event, Stanton, Anthony and other women were seated on the second floor balcony, preventing their participation in the convention. Insulted by this treatment, Stanton and Anthony returned to the United States with the desire to change the status of the American woman. In 1848 Anthony and Stanton, among others, organized a meeting where the attendees discussed the plight of American women. The first women's rights convention was open to whoever wished to attend and the topics discussed inspired many women to question their social status and actively work towards expanding women's legal rights. Women struggled to gain the right to hold land and other property in their own name, the ability to gain custody of their children in instances of divorce, and to vote. Women and men in this era were active on many fronts, fighting for women's rights as well as the rights of enslaved African Americans and improving society in general. Stanton argued that "[t]hose active in great philanthropic enterprises [will] sooner or later realize that so long as women are not acknowledged to be the political equals of men, their judgment on political questions will have but little weight."¹ Although women's groups were capable of making changes in legal code, activists who became suffragists argued that they wanted the vote so they would not have to influence men to vote for them. This opinion was not the consensus. Many anti-suffragist women argued they did not want the vote because they felt their position as voteless influencers was successful.

The first "wave" of female activism tied itself closely to the cause of abolition. Women felt that enslaved individuals and women could be freed simultaneously from bondage, whether

¹ Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Norfolk: Bedford, 2005), 275. *Authors quoted Susan B. Anthony*

physical or social, and uplifted to the status of citizen. During the period of the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, attentions shifted from independent activism to problems of national conflict. When the South surrendered to the North, activists took up their campaign once more for citizenship of African Americans and women. The anticipation for equal citizenship caused one of the first breaks in the national suffrage party. The organization split in leadership and membership. Some activists argued that it would be difficult enough for the black man to gain the vote and that women's rights should take a back stage, where as other members argued that women's citizenship ought to be granted along with black citizenship. As a result, two suffrage groups formed. The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Lucy Stone endorsed women's enfranchisement through local activism and the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Anthony and Stanton, supported a national suffrage amendment. "In 1865-1866, as Congress was considering how to word the Fourteenth Amendment, women's rights activists called for woman suffrage to be joined with black suffrage in a single constitutional act of universal adult enfranchisement."² Despite the efforts of the NWSA, its members were disappointed in 1868, when the 15th amendment did not include "sex" in its language, only enfranchising men of color. Women continued their work toward suffrage, but after the initial split of the national suffrage organization women continued to debate the "proper path" to enfranchisement. The NWSA and AWSA finally reunited as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890, only to give rise to the splinter group, the National Woman's Party (NWP) in 1915. One of the main disagreements remained whether to privilege a national amendment over grassroots movements within localized areas. The NWP, led by Alice Paul, was considered "radical" as its members protested outside the White House and

² DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*, 272.

went on hunger strikes in support of a national amendment to the U.S. Constitution. More moderate groups, such as the Equal Suffrage League (ESL) in Richmond, supported grassroots efforts, where states would grant suffrage apart from the federal government. Finally, in 1920, the 19th amendment ensured that no one would be prevented the right to vote based on sex. Virginia did not ratify the 19th amendment until 1952, although the women of the Commonwealth were not prevented because of their sex from voting in any election.

Chapter 1

Women gained the right to vote in late August 1920 and many participated in the elections that year. Voter turnout over the next decade did not increase, however, despite the added numbers of eligible voters. In fact, numbers of voters declined. “Observers in the 1920s, citing declining overall voting participation during the decade (roughly half of those eligible voted), assumed women’s nonvoting accounted for the decline, arguing that women lost political clout as a result.”³ Historians, such as William Henry Chafe maintained as much in *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*. Women, he claimed, failed the “voting experiment” because they were no longer united in a cause. As a result women either did not vote, or lost their effectiveness because they did not vote as a “female bloc.” Prior to gaining the vote, suffragists declared that they could change the world into a better place simply by voting. Chafe found this argument untrue, stating that because women did not vote together, they did not effect any significant change in society. In other words women voted in the same manner as men, based on political platforms or along party lines. When women did not sway the vote, they “gave up” which contributed to the decline of voter participation.

³ Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Duménil, *Through Women’s Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Norfolk: Bedford, 2005), 488.

Chafe declared that gender expectations encroached on many women's voting rights: "because of the nature of sex roles, it was almost mandatory for wives and daughters to follow the lead of a male authority figure when they went to the polls."⁴ The "typical" woman would not have stepped out of ascribed gender roles, despite a change in legislation; women were still subservient to their male protectors. This society, portrayed by Chafe, was dominated by men, both inside and outside of the home. Women would have bent to the wishes of their husbands and fathers because women were dependent on "their" men for financial support. This dependence in a male dominated society undermined the female "bloc" and caused women to fail their experiment in democracy.

Estelle B. Freedman aligned herself with Chafe and argued that only a small portion of women were willing to step outside of gender expectations in order to pursue their political and social goals. Freedman examined membership rosters of activist groups and found that numbers dwindled after 1920. She attributed the decline to female suffrage: "the passage of the suffrage amendment in 1920 subverted women's movements by denying the need for continued feminist organizations."⁵ Gaining the vote meant that women lost a reason to work together. As a result, the popularity of women's organizations faded out and women lost their political sway.

Gender roles played a large part in Freedman's and Chafe's works. Chafe stated that women were dependent on their husbands and fathers and therefore would follow their political wishes. Freedman supported Chafe, but cited close female bonds as the driving force behind the female activist movement and as a source of power. When gender roles began to change in the 1920s, the tide turned against sisterhood. The new gender concepts ostracized women's close

⁴ William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 33.

⁵ Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," in *Feminism, Sexuality & Politics: Essays By Estelle B. Freedman*, ed. Thadious M. Davis and Linda K. Kerber. (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 24.

relationships as they were deemed unnatural. Women were encouraged to spend more time with the opposite sex. “[E]xternal factors affected the movement’s failure, including new Freudian views of women’s sexuality; and the repression of radicalism and reform in general after World War I.”⁶ Women left female exclusive organizations after the 19th amendment in favor of hetero-social groups. Some women felt that the 19th amendment equalized the sexes and no further activism was needed, or desired. “The self-consciously female community began to disintegrate in the 1920s just as “new women” were attempting to assimilate into male-dominated institutions.”⁷ In these “male-dominated institutions,” Freedman claimed, women lost their voice and distinctively female activism. After 1920, women’s gender roles realigned, and once again women were expected to stay in the home and work as good mothers and wives. The organizations that women became involved in were often hetero-social and controlled by voices of men.

Chafe and Freedman agreed that the first American female activist movement receded when confronted with changing gender standards, rising conservatism, and the supposed political failure of female voting rights. Chafe explained that before suffrage there were “blocs” of women who agreed they needed the vote and those who believed they did not. When these blocs broke down after the passage of the amendment, by the influence of men, realignment of gender roles, or rising conservatism, women failed to succeed as voters. Some of these blocs did fall away after 1920. An example can be found in the anti-suffrage group, the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (VAOWS). Although it fought against enfranchising women, once the 19th amendment passed, its female membership registered to vote, believing in the duty of all

⁶ Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy,” 31.

⁷ Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy,” 24.

citizens to participate in elections.⁸ Even after 1920, some women did not believe they should have the vote and, therefore, did not show up at the polls. Blocs existed before the 19th amendment and continued afterward, although lines changed and women failed to agree on all issues.

Freedman asserted that sisterhood trumped ties to the home. She claimed that women were effective because they came together to triumph over the masculine regime. However, women were not liberated from the home because of their activist work. In fact, women used their positions in the home to argue for full citizenship. Members of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) stated that women were more capable of fighting for poor women and their families because they were mothers. These women believed that the societal "mothering" would create a better, Godlier society. Suffrage groups used traditional gender roles to assert that women, as the purer sex, would uplift society by making the right choices with the ballot. In general, women bluntly claimed that they could do a better job with education, childcare, clean food and drug laws, and other "motherly" issues because all men cared about was earning money.⁹ The use of motherhood did not exclude the use of "sisterhood." Often these terms were used together to convey an understanding of universal womanhood and the need of female guidance. The concept of sisterhood was a means of connecting women across religious affiliations and social connections and even through interracial cooperation. Women could extend the hand of sisterhood and teach lower class women how to be proper mothers, or fight for their sisters' maternal rights. These terms were not mutually exclusive and did not fade away

⁸ Sara Hunter Graham, "Woman Suffrage in Virginia: The Equal Suffrage League and Pressure-Group Politics, 1909 -1920," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 101, no. 2 (April 1993): 248.

⁹ M. D. Winn, "Women's Votes Make Better Babies," Folder "Essay: M. D. Winn "Women's Votes Make Better Babies," Box 52, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

after suffrage, as organizations such as the YWCA employed their use well into the twentieth century.

Both Chafe and Freedman claimed that women won the vote in a rousing success and then gave up. Chafe attributed the “death” of female activism to the lack of political clout and as a result women lost interest in the vote once attained. Women did not agree; they failed to change the world with the vote, so activist interest declined. This line seems contrary to the character of groups that sought the vote. Women began fighting for suffrage in the 1840s and did not gain the vote until 1920. Some women, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, dedicated their entire lives to campaigning for votes and women’s rights. Many of the activists were still young when the amendment was passed. Activist women were accustomed to failure but remained dedicated to their work. Chafe and Freedman argued that there was a decline in all female activism because of female suffrage, even in organizations with little connection to the matter. Could a few bad elections deter an entire community of women, with a new right, to “give up” so easily?

Reexamining voter participation over a longer duration showed that women alone were not to blame. Voter turnout had been in decline long before women became voters. “More recent historians...maintain that women’s participation in elections varied significantly by location and election. Women in states that only recently had enfranchised them seem to have participated in fewer numbers than those living in states such as California, where women had longer experience with the election process.”¹⁰ Women were not the only ones who failed to go to the polls. Male participation rates declined as well, “following a long-standing trend of declining engagement in partisan politics.”¹¹ Nancy F. Cott agreed that voter turnout declined before women were able to vote nationally. The low turnout was “a trend continuous from 1896 and

¹⁰ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes*, 488.

¹¹ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes*, 488.

intensifying from the 1910s to the 1920s.”¹² Women, she asserted, “built a tradition of exercising political influence...which continued vigorously once the vote was gained.”¹³

Freedman, in her discussion of the failure of continued activism, suggested that changing gender roles forced women to abandon the bonds of sisterhood in order to join the ranks of men. Freedman asserted that a continued attachment to the "sisterhood" would create questions about a woman's sexuality and an activist would run the risk of being deemed queer, or sexually deviant. Freedman and Chafe both looked at women in general, not specifically activist women. Women who were not dedicated to a cause and had not created strong bonds may have more easily abandoned female companionships. It seems counterintuitive that women in activist groups would do so. Women in the YWCA, the Equal Suffrage League (ESL), and the League of Women Voter (LWV) formed close relationships, often living together because of work or as a matter of mutual support.¹⁴ Adele Clark and Nora Houston were examples of this profound bond of sisterhood. These women met through various Richmond art groups and shared a passion for activism, working together in the ESL and, later, in the LWV. Houston and Clark worked and lived together until Houston's death in 1942.

In more recent examinations of the female activist community, historians have found that women did not stop working towards a better community. While the ESL experienced an organizational shift once voting rights were won, groups such as the YWCA experienced no institutional change and continued their programs uninterrupted. Elna C. Green wrote, “Middle class reformers often saw the ballot as a weapon in their battle against poverty, child labor,

¹² Nancy F. Cott, “Across the Great Divide: Women in Politics Before and After 1920,” in *Women, Power, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 189.

¹³ Cott, “Across the Great Divide,” 161.

¹⁴ When mentioned jointly, the ESL and the LWV will be called the “Leagues”.

alcoholism, and poor working conditions.”¹⁵ She continued, “[e]ven though [women] were disillusioned by the outcome of the enfranchisement of women... suffragists continued their respective club work and reform activities.”¹⁶ In fact, in the South, the YWCA, and other organizations dedicated to improving conditions for women and reforming society grew during the 1920s.¹⁷ Lorraine Gates Schuyler explained that despite low voter turnouts, women activists were still determined to continue their work. “Southern women, who were adept at wringing power from powerless situations before 1920, were no less adept at using the ballot to achieve their political goals after 1920.”¹⁸ Schuyler stated that a part of this continued political involvement included changing the physical conditions of voting. Before women were able to vote, men voted in places considered “unsavory” by some, places where drinking of alcoholic beverages (before Virginia prohibition), smoking, and cursing were acceptable. After 1920, the polls moved to places, such as schools, which were deemed more appropriate for the gentle woman. Women voters also began crusades against voter fraud and other abuses of the voting system.

Suzanne Lebsack found that “a number of suffragists turned up among the South’s most forward thinking white people” after 1920. “In the early 1920s small groups of white southerners joined with black leaders, together arguing that social progress depended on greater social justice

¹⁵ Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 19.

¹⁶ Green, *Southern Strategies*, 176.

¹⁷ Marion W. Roydhouse, "Bridging Chasms: Community and the YWCA," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsack. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993),

¹⁸ Lorraine Gates Schuyler, *The Weight of their Votes: Southern Women and Political Leverage in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 15.

for black people,” and associating through the Commission on Interracial Cooperation.¹⁹

Members of the YWCA also began interracial co-operation, compelled by their national affiliation. Efforts to create stronger ties between the black and white associations began in 1925 in Richmond. Lebsock showed that women who were active before 1920 considered their work incomplete and were encouraged to continue and expand their activism.

Cott also argued that female involvement in organizations did not decline after 1920, as historians like Chafe and Freedman had asserted. She found that women’s participation continued in both mixed-gender and single-gender groups. Hetero-social groups such as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation were dedicated to causes that were traditionally linked to female activism. “While major women’s organizations founded earlier [before suffrage]...persisted, a host of organizations that women could and did join in the 1920s were new ones.”²⁰ The list of budding organizations included the American Association of University Women, American War Mothers, and The Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom, among others. The creation of new organizations and the emphasis on the female role of motherhood suggested that women still considered “sisterhood” as an important tool for continued female activism. Creation and support of female activism was not solely within groups of women after 1920, for individual activism continued beyond this period as well. Katherine H. Adams and Michael L. Keene, in *After the Vote was Won: The Later Achievements of Fifteen Suffragists*, found that women involved in the suffrage struggle did not renounce their roles as public figures after 1920. The work was exclusive to suffragists and did not look beyond to other female activists, isolating the study to a group of important well known women. While the study

¹⁹ Suzanne Lebsock, “Women Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study,” in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1993), 83.

²⁰ Cott, “Across the Great Divide,” 164.

is not all inclusive, it does show that there were women who desired to continue their leadership in female activism.

Recently, Chafe revisited the subject of American female activism and found that female activism continued despite the decline in voter participation. He stated that “a strong argument can be made that women’s greatest political power occurred through non-electorate activity, carried out by voluntary associations of women reformers who organized in separate groups based on self-perception that women had distinctive interests and values.”²¹ Chafe moved the focus from voting women and instead examined women’s activist organizations, which he found continued long after 1920. Chafe showed that women’s activism continued in spirit through the 1920s and into the 1930s.

Freedman also revised her argument for the end of female activism in her “Separatism Revisited: Women’s Institutions, Social Reform, and the Career of Miriam Van Waters.” A well-known social worker, Van Waters later became the superintendent at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women. Van Waters's move from a non-paying activist position to a paid career showed that female positions as reformers became legitimized after 1920. Freedman stated that “both Van Waters’ own career and recent scholarship on the twentieth century suggested the persistence of women’s contributions to social reform in the post suffrage era.”²²

Some Richmond women activists followed the path of Van Waters. Lucy Randolph Mason, worked with the Equal Suffrage League and the YWCA continuing her activist involvement after 1920 with the League of Women Voters and as a secretary for the YWCA.

²¹ William Henry Chafe, “Women’s History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal,” in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Leacock. (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1993), 273.

²² Estelle B. Freedman, “Separatism Revisited: Women’s Institutions, Social Reform, and the Career of Miriam Van Waters,” in *Feminism, Sexuality, & Politics: Essays by Estelle B. Freedman*, ed. Thadious M. Davis and Linda K. Kerber. (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 38.

Later Mason became involved with the National Consumers League and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

This thesis argues that elite Virginia women remained involved in politics both as individuals and in groups, and Richmond, in particular was a hotbed for female activists.

The YWCA, ESL, the LWV, and other organizations were still active. Members of the Leagues and the YWCA, such as Ellen Glasgow and Mary-Cooke Branch Munford, were well known. These organizations also have connections to wealthy or important families, such as Nora Houston and Lucy Randolph Mason. Members of these organizations used their sway and connections to make changes in the city of Richmond and became recognizable as activists, independently of their connections. The infrastructure and methods formed by the local activist movement continued after the suffrage amendment. The city of Richmond provided unique opportunities for female activism. It hosted an active branch of the YWCA that tied many socially progressive causes together. The YWCA was transported from England in 1866 to Boston, Massachusetts. The Richmond branch started in 1887. The YWCA grew intensely during the 1920s in Richmond. The association was dedicated to offering a helping hand to young women, especially factory girls, who were believed to need protection from nefarious men. With the 19th amendment women gained the right to vote and activist women could use their new right to expand their work. The Equal Suffrage League had won its main goal but did not fade away. Instead the organization transformed into the League of Women Voters and continued to teach women how to use their new right. The members of the LWV continued to support protective legislation, some of which had been proposed when they were still under the auspices of the ESL. The spirit of activism continued in Richmond and can be traced through the ESL into LWV, as well as through the YWCA. Women dedicated to activism in Richmond were

not divided among these groups, for membership would overlap or members of one group would help one another. In the process of establishing the Richmond Nurse's Settlement, Mary Johnston sought the support of the best known reformers, including Adele Clark, Lila Meade Valentine, Mary-Cooke Branch Munford, and Kate Waller Barrett.²³ These women were highly respected in the city and lent credibility to the groups that they supported. Passage of the 19th amendment neither dimmed the "clout" they wielded nor put an end to their influence. Their work for the equalization of women in society continued well into the 20th century.

Women of less status were also active in exclusively female groups dedicated to improving the lives of other women. Elna Green argued that many women who had to work to support themselves became a part of the activist spectrum. Although they were not able to contribute wealth as their upper class counterparts could, they were able to give time and effort to their causes.²⁴ Some of them were able to transform their activist efforts into paying occupations.

Virginia's own legacy of activism sheds light on the issue of continuity in female activism. Virginia's history with the 19th amendment differed from the majority of states because the Commonwealth did not ratify the amendment until 1952. Sara Hunter Graham studied the state ESL from 1909 to 1920 and asserted that the failure to ratify did not hinder the continuing activism of this women's group. "The Virginia campaign for the vote failed, but the suffrage movement did not. Women suffrage invited the women of Virginia to extend the boundaries of women's spheres to encompass the world of politics, progressive reform, and feminism."²⁵

Graham examined the ESL only until 1920, but she laid the groundwork for a larger study of

²³ Elna C. Green, "Gendering the City, Gendering the Welfare State", in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 113.3, (2005): 281.

²⁴ Green, "Gendering the City", 281.

²⁵ Sara Hunter Graham, "Women Suffrage in Virginia: The Equal Suffrage League and Pressure-Group Politics, 1909-1920," in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 101.2 (1993): 250.

Richmond's female activist community. Historians now generally agree that women continued to work toward their progressive programs after 1920, but did women continue to use the methods employed before suffrage programs after suffrage was gained? A closer examination of women and reform leads to a better understanding of the methods of women's groups before and after suffrage.

Richmond makes an excellent test case for continued female activism. The city was expanding in both population and industry. Richmond was a Southern city; it had been the capital of the Confederacy during the Civil War and "southern values," conservatism, and the Lost Cause mentality, where women wished to commemorate the Confederate heroes, were strong. Despite the conservative environment, a strong progressive spirit existed in Richmond. The number of factory workers, orphans, indigent poor, and sick was growing. Female activists saw a need to help Confederate veterans, the sick and poor, as well as other women. Prominent individuals created special interest groups in order to protect and aid these elements of the population, and Richmond had a group of women dedicated to the goal of uplifting all levels of society. In her discussion of the Nurse's Settlement in Richmond, Green found that making connections with important people was beneficial to the development of activist groups. Some of these dedicated activists were able to support causes through their personal prominence and access to wealth. Working women, unable to give monetarily, were important in performing day-to-day tasks for the cause. Women became secretaries and social workers in the YWCA. Green found that in Richmond, middle and upper class women came together to work for a better society.²⁶ They believed they could accomplish this goal by uplifting lower classes, and the suffragists believed they would be aided in accomplishing their goal by having the right to vote.

²⁶ Green, "Gendering the City," 281.

The women activists believed Richmond to be a special place. Women, such as Valentine, Clark, and Houston, believed that Virginia and Richmond had historical value and enriched those who lived here. Richmond's history was dotted with visits from founding fathers such as Patrick Henry and William Byrd. The landscape was full of historic and beautiful buildings. Although citizens of other places believed their homes to be special, the activist groups in Richmond thought that the illustrious heritage and spirit of the city would aid them in their goals. This might have been a political move in an era and area where public memory and commemoration of heroes was popular. The women in Richmond, however, were raised with a romantic image of their city and heroes and they were involved in the continuation of the city's public history and myths. Although the use of these prominent figures was a means of justifying their causes, these women also believed they were honoring the memory of a great city by working toward their goals. The Richmond activists believed that their city could be an example for other cities in the South, and throughout the country. As a result, Richmond's activist groups, including the Leagues and the YWCA, became highly respected by making these connections.

The Leagues and the YWCA began as grassroots organizations which joined with the larger national organizations but still operated on a local basis. As such, the Leagues and the YWCA may be compared to a larger movement and to other local organizations to better analyze the continuity of female activism after suffrage was won. The examination of two groups allowed for a deeper understanding of social and political activism. Often the intentions of these groups overlapped, especially when women from the YWCA would join with the LWV, working for the passage of legislation protecting female workers. The ESL, and later the LWV were not single issue pressure groups. Like the YWCA, the Leagues fought for maternity rights, protections of women workers, world peace, child care laws, and more.

The YWCA and the Leagues both worked for social uplift. Women from the YWCA wished to spread “Christian sisterhood,” the understanding that all women were sisters in the eyes of God, to the lower classes. The YWCA offered working-class women child care services, safe living quarters, after-work activities, and education while fighting for working women’s rights, better food and drug laws and protective legislation for children. The ESL fought to secure women’s right to vote but also supported protective legislation for women and children, higher wages for women, shorter work hours, better food and drug regulations and later, when the ESL turned into the League of Women Voters, the group taught women about their new voting privileges. The organizations were created by upper and middle class women to help lower class women and children. Richmond’s female activists were not isolated by their efforts for societal and governmental change. The Leagues and YWCA women were influenced by their own community, and they were connected to larger national movements through their organizations. Women were also influenced by their culture, including print media, which directed women on the “proper” roles of womanhood and expressed ideas of how society should be shaped. Female activists in Richmond shaped these ideas into ways fighting to for suffrage, for protective legislation, or for their right to work outside the home.

While the idea of the “modern woman” was pervasive in the lives of female activists, they may not have openly spoken about their “modern” appeal. The modern woman was a concept that was touted in newspapers and represented in images, such as the Gibson Girl, created by Charles Dana Gibson, supposedly modeled after his wife, Irene Langhorne Gibson, a Virginian. These cartoons displayed the sexuality of womanhood, emphasizing a small waist, long skirts, and big hair. These images also displayed women engaged in activities previously considered inappropriate for women, such as playing golf or riding a bicycle. While redefining

women's sexuality, these depictions created and enforced ideas of women's independence, making the concept available for public consumption. The cartoons and public commentary made the "modern woman" more popular, encouraging more women to take up activities that were deemed modern. As a result, these publicly represented concepts were not only comments on the emerging womanhood, but also shaped the construct. The young women began to reject the old concept that women should remain exclusively in the domestic sphere and began to seek fulfillment through work outside of the home. "For modern women of the late nineteenth century, 'true womanhood' no longer seemed virtuous and industrious but idle and purposeless. 'New women' pushed against the boundaries of woman's sphere to participate in public life."²⁷ Women did not just change in appearance. They began to assert their individual importance. Dubois and Dumenil argued that individualism had once been the sole property of the male in American society. "The classic figure of the self-reliant, self-supporting American man was contrasted with the self-denying woman by his side. Men were individuals with different abilities: women were members of a category with common characteristics."²⁸ As women moved outside of the homes in upper-class society, lower-class women also began to leave the home for work in the factories. The number of women on the street grew and it became more acceptable for women to be seen on Richmond streets.

Although many of Richmond's activists asserted an adherence to tradition, they embarked on the path of the modern woman. By removing themselves from the home, and working with in the public spheres activists were modern compared to those women who remained within the confines of the home.

²⁷ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*, 303.

²⁸ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*, 303.

Richmond changed as the city industrialized. Women saw that the face of the city was changing and that their roles in that city were changing to fit this newly emerging society. No longer were clothes manufactured in the home, or meats butchered at home. Factories were taking up jobs that were once held by women and mass manufacturing the needs of all. Upper class women came to champion the lower class women, who did not have enough power to speak for or to protect themselves. The female activists extended the arms of "sisterhood," a concept that assumed that all women were important as individuals but needed the help of a "sister" in order to protect themselves. The ideas of sisterhood and individuality appear contradictory, but the rising importance of the woman as an individual made all women important. Upper class women wanted to create the bonds of sisterhood because they believed every woman was important. Creating the bonds of sisterhood made it easier for women to be "saved." Each woman had individual strengths and weaknesses; every woman was worth saving and could be helped by a community of women which would lead a better life.

Women in Virginia grasped their individualism and argued that the "old ways" were no longer beneficial to a world that was changing. Lucy Randolph Mason argued in her pamphlet supporting suffrage that it was no longer acceptable for a Christian woman to remain exclusively in the home.²⁹ "Let us awake to the needs of the world about us, to a sense of individual responsibility in meeting those needs, and to our opportunities for serving God and man. Let us make our spiritual vision a reality, a dynamic force that shall serve to lift humanity to ever higher planes, until the Light that came to lighten every man shines in every human heart."³⁰ It was the task of women to extend a hand to their "sisters" in order to uplift society as a whole. "New

²⁹ Lucy Randolph Mason, *The Divine Discontent* and *The Religious and Social Aspect of the Suffrage Movement*.

³⁰ Mason, *Religious and Social Aspect of the Suffrage Movement*, 19, in folder "Lucy R. Mason *The Religious and Social Aspect of the Suffrage Movement*," box 52, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Women” in Richmond argued that the “old ways” of staying in the home were no longer relevant; yet, they did not completely break with tradition. Women of the Leagues and the YWCA wanted to enforce traditional roles they believed only women could fill. Women used these notions of tradition to argue for their new place in society as activists. The traditional understandings were also used to reinforce the notion that women deserved a special place in society and, therefore, needed to be protected by the legislation supported by these activists.

Traditional understanding of women and women’s role in southern society was an overarching theme for women in both the Leagues and the YWCA. Motherhood, religion, and the job of “public historian” were all considered distinctively female roles. Women in positions of power in the Leagues and the YWCA used their role as the keepers and disseminators of history as justification for extending their feminine domain beyond the home. Female activist leaders sought to make connections between themselves and prominent Richmonders and to the illustrious history of the city. Although these action might seem to carry little sway over male society, historian Suzanne Lebsock reminded her readers of the weight Virginia placed on its past. “Another [issue] was the question, would Thomas Jefferson be a woman’s suffragist if he was alive today? Anyone inclined to belittle such questions should keep in mind Virginia Legislators, when speaking before their colleagues, could still count on ritual applause when they invoked the name of Jefferson or Patrick Henry, or Robert E. Lee. Suffragists and antis both hitched their causes to the veneration of revolutionary and Confederate heroes...”³¹ In her oral history interview in 1964, Adele Clark still traced the importance of the ESL through the bloodlines that were connected with it.

³¹ Lebsock, "Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy," 68.

I've often thought that a *dramatis personae* of the women who were at Mrs. Dabney Crenshaw's when the League was organized would be rather interesting. The leading one was Lila Mead Valentine, and in Virginia fashion I'm going to try to sketch a bit of their inheritance. Mrs. Valentine was a descendant of Everud Mead, the general in Washington's army who was commissioned by Washington to take Cornwallis' sword at Yorktown.³² Virginia-fashion, we were always proud to cite the ancestry of these suffrage leaders. Agnes Randolph was another early suffragist, and she was the great-granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson. Lucy Randolph Mason was a descendant of both George Mason, the author of the Bill of Rights of Virginia and of John Marshall, the first Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States."³³

The strategy for the Leagues and the YWCA did not rest entirely on the concept that because these women came from "greatness" their ideas should be immediately ratified. The women, however, gained credibility for their activism. Through these associations women connected themselves to the great heroes of Virginia tradition, men commemorated in statues and other public works. These connections suggested that women activists were Virginians, that they knew what it was like to be Virginian, and they would only do what was best for the commonwealth, as their forefathers had.

The term "traditions" will be used in this work to describe the actions women took to align themselves with the culture of their community. "Traditions" will be an overarching theme

³² It is unclear to whom Clark is referring. Although the surrender of Cornwallis' sword at Yorktown has a confusing history, historians believe it was Benjamin Lincoln who took the sword. Although Clark's rendition was not accurate, she invoked a traditional narrative, connecting the leaders of her organizations with individuals she believed to be important historical figures.

³³ Oral History Interview with Adele Clark, February 28, 1964, Interview G-0014-2. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) Transcription pages 2-3. *Transcription edited by author, as there were some inaccuracies in original text.*

of the paper. Women of the Leagues and the YWCA aligned themselves with the forefathers of the state and the southern ways. These “ways” also included accepted gender roles such as mothering and religious devotion. Activists of the Leagues and the YWCA argued that women needed to extend their “traditional” mothering roles outside the home in order to create a more perfect society. The traditions of motherhood, Christian social religion, and race will be examined more closely and divided into sections.

Motherhood

The term "motherhood" was used by female activists to show that their activist goals were within a gender-appropriate sphere and to create a "universal womanhood," bound by common interests. The Leagues and the YWCA's use of "motherhood" exists under two analytical terms, "maternalism" and "paternalism." The meanings of these terms will be defined in correlation to their use in this thesis.

The Leagues and the YWCA used maternalism as a tool to widen the female sphere beyond the home and create protective legislation for women. Elna Green and other historians define maternalism as a tool to present activism as a female-appropriate gender role. Dubois and Dumenil explained maternalism in *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* by stating

Maternalist thinking had two parts. First, virtually all social and economic issues having to do with women were viewed through their maternal capacity. Every sort of program advanced on women's behalf, even those having to do with women's wage labor, was justified on the grounds that society needed to protect

motherhood. Second, the women who designed and advocated these policies conceived their own public involvement through the lens of motherhood.³⁴

Women argued that as mothers they were better equipped to organize and protect the womanhood and the children of the nation. In Richmond, suffragists offered “proof” that if mothers were given the right to vote, society would benefit from their involvement. In the essay “Women’s Votes Make Better Babies,” M.D. Winn argued that, in countries where women had the right to vote, infant mortality rates were lower. She blamed men’s lack of interest and women’s lack of suffrage for the high infant mortality rates in the United States. She stated “anti-suffrage states send men to Congress who cheerfully vote billions of dollars to study the diseases of hogs, crabs, oysters, muskrat, cattle—in fact, to look after progeny of almost every other kind of animal except the human animal.”³⁵ Winn argued that congressmen did this because they were more concerned with making money than protecting humanity. Winn's argument expressed that women needed to vote because they were women and were better able to vote for women and children who needed to have money allocated to clean food and drugs, education and other causes ignored by men. Winn asserted that women were needed because mothers needed to pursue their gender appropriate roles in all levels of society.

While maternalism was argued to widen the female sphere, authors, such as Winn, explained that women needed to take up roles in government because it was their duty as mothers to do so. Paternalism was also used by female activists in Richmond. As the term has varied meanings to multiple disciplines a discussion of the term and how it fits analytically into this thesis is needed. Benjamin Sevitch in "The Rhetoric for Paternalism: Elbert H. Gary's

³⁴ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*, 416.

³⁵ Winn, “Women's Votes Make Better Babies,” 1. Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Argument for the Twelve Hour Work Day," defined paternalism as "a system under which an authority treats those under its control in a fatherly way esp. [sic] in regulating their conduct and supplying their needs."³⁶ Sevitch discussed paternalism in relation to Elbert H. Gary, the Chairman of the Board of the United States Steel Corporation. Gary, who argued from his position of authority that he knew what was best for the working class man. Women of the Leagues and the YWCA used paternalism similarly. The members of these groups asserted that they knew what the woman worker needed and could use their prominent positions to attain these "needs." Paternalism was a nation-wide phenomenon, but Virginia had a specific form of paternalism. J. Douglas Smith examined race relations in Virginia in the 1920s and 1930s. He found that Virginia had a distinct combination of racism and of elitism. "Perpetually suspicious of democracy and fervently convinced that only the upper orders should govern, white elites in Virginia embraced a concept of managed race relations that emphasized a particularly genteel brand of paternalism."³⁷ Examination of the actions of the Richmond female activists and race relations showed that this term seemed to apply to their thinking about class relations as well. Women in the Leagues and the YWCA expressed a "duty" to protect working class and African American women. Thus, the term paternalism is used in this thesis to describe this specific outlook. Members of the Leagues and the YWCA did not describe their actions as "fatherly," instead these women framed their paternalism as "motherly" or "sisterly." In doing so, female activists claimed paternalism as a gender appropriate role. Paternalism, as described will, play a prominent role in this thesis as it described elite activists efforts to protect women deemed "less fortunate", be they working class or African American.

³⁶ Benjamin Sevitch, The Rhetoric for Paternalism: Elbert H. Gary's Argument for the Twelve Hour Work Day," 15, in *Western Speech* (1971) 35: no. 1, *American History and Life*, EbSCO host (Accessed 21 April 2012).

³⁷ J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

The YWCA utilized paternalism, but the national organization favored a “Christian sisterhood” approach. The official YWCA stance was that all women would be equal in their organization, as they were in the eyes of God. Leaders believed that women of all stations could learn from one another. The YWCA taught that young women should have a “big sister attitude toward younger girls,” and young women would transfer the knowledge learned from their classes to teach younger members.³⁸ Despite emphasis on Christian sisterhood the YWCA employed the maternalistic technique as well. One YWCA pamphlet argued that in 1913, “[w]e must enlist motherhood, potential and actual, in the changing of the present moral attitude.”³⁹ Motherhood was a powerful tool because it was believed this trait transcended race and economic status.

Although upper and middle class women sought to protect the lower and working classes and other individuals deemed needy it did not ensure that the women on the receiving end appreciated their efforts. Moderate female activists argued that protective legislation was needed, but not all “unprotected” women wanted these laws passed. Protective legislation included limited work hours for women, or protection of women as mothers. Female workers may not have wanted their hours limited, especially if they saw a decline in pay. The members of the YWCA and ESL believed they were working in the best interest of women, as a whole, by using motherhood as a tool for social change. To have argued that women needed to be paid more because they were individuals and equal in rights to men would not have had as much leverage as asserting that women needed more money to protect their children, the future generations of America. Women of these groups believed they were protecting the majority of the population--

³⁸ *Report of the Commission on Social Morality from the Christian Standpoint Made to the Fourth Biennial Convention of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States, Richmond, Va. April 9-15, 1913*, 3-4. Folder “YWCA: Materials on, History Background #143”, Betsy Brinson Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society.

³⁹ *Report of the Commission on Social Morality*, 4.

those who were going to have children and needed care for them. The ESL and the LWV did not support equal rights for women and men, feeling that women needed extra protections to secure their relative equality.

Social Religion

Richmond women activists argued that their qualities as Christian women enabled them to engage in “applied religion,” or acting out the Christian ethos in their communities, often referred to as “social” religion. Social religion was characterized by the desire to change the world in which one lived to square with Jesus' teachings. Women used this connection to religion and the emerging desire to be active Christians to argue for social and governmental change. The YWCA was an outgrowth of the emerging concept of social gospel. Nancy Marie Robertson explained in *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations and the YWCA, 1906-46*, that young women could participate in the YWCA without stepping out of proper roles. “The YWCA represented an opportunity for women to express religious commitment and to wield power, without directly challenging beliefs about women’s place in the church.”⁴⁰ Women in the YWCA could band together without the interference of men and create a “Christian Sisterhood” where women of higher economic level could aid those in lower levels of society by teaching and sharing Christian values. Women used the idea of living a Christian life and to teach working class women skills that they would not have learned otherwise, such as foreign languages, literature, and music. Upper and middle class women benefited as a result because working at the YWCA, teaching classes, or running camps, became a respectable occupation for women.

Social religion was not exclusive to the women of the YWCA, for the ESL also used concepts of living a “true” Christian lifestyle in their efforts to gain the right to vote. Lucy

⁴⁰ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1904-46* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 13.

Randolph Mason wrote pamphlets for the Equal Suffrage League in which she explained that women should have the right to vote in order to uplift society, as Jesus did. In *The Religious and Social Aspects of the Suffrage Movement*, Mason asserted woman's spiritual need for suffrage. "There is in the suffrage movement a religious element, a deep strain of spirituality and altruism which gives it a peculiar moral significance and fully justifies faith in its ultimate vindication."⁴¹ Mason justified the fight for female suffrage on the belief that the struggle for the vote was a "divine discontent." Women were dissatisfied with the way society worked, and were inspired by God to change society, thus needing the vote to ensure these changes. Mason argued that women did not desire the vote for their own advancement, rather for the advancement of the entire civilization, emphasizing altruism which was "traditionally" considered a female characteristic. "Personal isolation and shelter are anti-social and therefore anti-Christian; we are learning to sacrifice them to higher ends because we believe that if we would save our lives we must first lose them in the uttermost service."⁴² Social Religion showed that women had a place in what was once a male sphere and offered both suffragists and YWCA workers a means of securing their new roles through a traditional narrative.

Race

Race was an issue that activists in Richmond had to face as a result of the political climate that existed in the post-bellum south. Suffragists did not use racism as a tool to gain the right to vote, and the Richmond YWCA had a separate organization for African American women. The significance of race in these two organizations can be very difficult to ascertain. The members of the groups would have supported the white supremacist argument but many also

⁴¹ Mason, *The Divine Discontent*, 16, in folder "Lucy R. Mason: *The Divine Discontent*," box 52, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁴² Mason, *Divine Discontent*, 16.

wanted to work for better race relations. The topic of racism and suffrage was examined by Suzanne Lebsock who wrote “Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study.” Lebsock asserted that Virginia suffragists avoided the topic of race in their fight for suffrage. Unlike the anti-suffragists, who argued that the female vote would lead to “Negro rule,” suffragists did not argue just for the white woman’s vote nor did they engage in race baiting. “The white women in Virginia who became suffragists did not do so out of a desire to preserve white supremacy, nor did they use any white supremacist argument as their principal argument.”⁴³ The women of the ESL did not take a stance for or against the African American female vote but they did not allow African American women to join these groups. Later women from the LWV visited African American organizations in order to teach African American women the laws surrounding their new rights.

The Richmond YWCA had a separate branch for the African American women in the community. Although the YWCA operated under the understanding of “Christian sisterhood” between social-economic groups and races, the news stories surrounding the YWCA do not speak openly of interracial cooperation efforts. The national YWCA did not integrate until 1946.

The reason for the relative silence on the topic of race may be due to the political climate of Richmond during this time period. Richmond’s racial conditions in the 1910s and 1920s were considered some of the best managed in the nation by white paternalists. Virginia’s racial policy, especially in cities like Richmond, was enforced by elite whites through traditional ideas of paternalism.⁴⁴ Although Richmond’s racial situation seemed to be in better order than in other areas, there were still strong racial tensions. Proposals to enfranchise the African American population would have been strongly opposed at this time.

⁴³ Lebsock, “Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy,” 64

⁴⁴ Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 4.

Although the Leagues and the YWCA were segregated during the 1920s, this paper's focus on white women does not imply that African American women were not activists in their own right. Elsa Barkley Brown examined African American women's activism in "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," which was a community organization composed of both male and female activists dedicated to improving the status of the black community. She argued that African American women were involved in efforts to uplift their own community. Although black women were not identified as suffragists, Brown argued that was because black women were attempting to secure voting rights for both men and women in their community. "Black women like Walker who devoted energies to securing universal suffrage, including that of black men, are not widely recognized as female suffragists because they did not separate their struggle for women's votes from their struggle for the black vote."⁴⁵

African American women were involved in activist efforts before and after 1920, as were white women. African American women were more closely associated with racial issues while white women's organizations were tied to reforms that would improve conditions of their sex. When organizations, such as the YWCA aided African American women, their efforts were usually expressed in terms of sisterhood or motherhood roles.

The purpose of this work will be to examine the methods used by the activist members of the ESL, the LWV, and the YWCA. These methods, traditions, and concepts of motherhood, social religion, and race will be examined from roughly 1915 to 1925 to compare and contrast between the ESL and the LWV and between the Leagues and the YWCA. The Leagues and YWCA are easily compared to each other and can be compared to other groups because they left

⁴⁵ Elsa Barkely Brown "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," *Signs*, 14.32 (1989): 412.

written documentation. Private individuals, such as Clark and Houston, collected letters, documents, and handbills which are now available in libraries and archives. Institutional records are also available for the YWCA, some of which have been collected by Betsy Brinson, a YWCA historian, and are in the Virginia Historical Society Archives. Newspapers were often a platform for discussion on issues such as suffrage, and advertisements were taken out for the YWCA. These documents, used in conjunction with oral interviews, provided a wealth of information for the comparison of the YWCA to the Leagues and to show the organizations over time.

Traditions, motherhood, social religion, and race will be discussed in the following chapter which will be divided based on theme. In the years following 1920, several women were elected as representatives to the Virginia House of Delegates and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution was proposed for the first time in 1923. The election of women to the Virginia General Assembly proved that women politicians were becoming more accepted, although women generally stayed within gender-appropriate positions. The 1923 creation of the ERA by Alice Paul was also significant because it was in direct contrast to the platform for which the Leagues and the YWCA stood. All of the organizations depended on protective legislation that protected women. More moderate leaders like Clark and Mason believed that laws were needed to protect women in their special roles and prevent abuses from corrupted business owners. As these women continued their activism beyond the scope of this paper, a brief biographical synopsis will be given on some of the leaders in the conclusion of this work as will the 1923 and 1924 elections and the introduction of the ERA. The end year of 1925 was chosen as it was the year that Harry Flood Byrd was elected governor of Virginia. His election and the creation of the “Byrd Machine” changed the face of politics in Virginia and would hold sway

over the politics of the commonwealth until the 1960s. The election of Byrd and his interaction with some female activists will also be discussed in the conclusion.

Activist in Richmond were not disillusioned by the "failure" of women to vote. Instead they continued their activism, pursuing the fight for women's rights and female workers' rights. In Richmond two organizations stood out, and serve as a case study, the Equal Suffrage League which became the League of Women Voters and the Young Women's Christian Association. These organizations began their work long before 1920 and developed forms of activism that served them well through the 1920s and into the 1930s.

Chapter 2

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Equal Suffrage League (ESL) began similarly in Richmond, in the parlors of private homes. The YWCA of Richmond, formed first in 1887 in the home of Emily Fairfax Whittle. Eight women came together to discuss the plight of young factory girls and unattached women in the city. The YWCA originally started in England in the 1840s following the pattern set by the Young Men's Christian Association. Later, it was transported to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1866. Other cities followed suit, organizing YWCAs in their own towns. The local organizations began forming regional groups around the 1900s, but a national organization was not formed until 1909. The Richmond YWCA joined the national movement at this time.⁴⁶

In 1909, the same year that the Richmond YWCA joined the national group, the Equal Suffrage League began when a group of women gathered in the parlor of Anne Clay Crenshaw, a Richmond woman. The female vote was being discussed across the nation at this time and organizations often formed on the local level and later joined larger national groups already in existence. The Equal Suffrage League was not the first suffrage group in Richmond. In 1870, Anna Whitehead Bodeker created the first known suffrage association in Richmond, but it failed due to lack of support.⁴⁷ The ESL created in 1909 in Crenshaw's parlor, continued activist efforts

⁴⁶ Betsy Brinson, "Helping others Who Help Themselves: The History of the Beginning of the YWCA of Greater Richmond," box 14, Richmond YWCA Archives, M 177, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁴⁷ Sandra G. Treadway, "A Most Brilliant Woman Anna Whitehead Bodeker and the First Woman Suffrage Association in Virginia," *Virginia Calvacade*. 1994, Vol. 43, Issue 4, 166-177.

until suffrage until 1920, then becoming the League of Women Voters, a non-partisan organization formed in 1920 to educate women as citizens.

As ratification of the 19th amendment grew imminent, members of ESL shared their plans to continue their work into the new decade. The excitement in the ESL during the ratification process was evident in the correspondence between members and communications between the local ESL and the National organization. A letter of 5 May 1920 from the secretary of the ESL concluded, “[h]oping that our 36th state will 'arrive' this week and that Delaware will at last decide to 'behave' herself.”⁴⁸ The writer was hoping that Delaware would vote for ratification of the 19th amendment. The desire for information about women’s new rights made apparent the need for the League of Women Voters. For example, a letter to Adele Clark in October 1920, from Mrs. Wallace Bracey, from Bracey, Virginia, asked “if you [Clark] have any literature pertaining to the voting of women...the women in the rural districts know very little about the new laws and altho’ [sic] there are more that have come forward to register than I really thought would have come they seem to know very little about how to go about voting or registering and if you have anything that would help them before the Election, I will be glad to distribute it among them.”⁴⁹

The ESL did not move into being the LWV smoothly. For one thing the organization lost Lila Meade Valentine, who had served as the organization’s president until her fatal illness made her leave the position. Not all members agreed with creating the League of Women Voters. The author, Mary Johnston, stated, “I do not find myself in full sympathy with the creation of a

⁴⁸ Letter from ESL Secretary to Mary Sumner Boyd, 5 May 1920. Folder “G Correspondence May 1920,” box 47, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁴⁹ Letter from Mrs. Wallace Bracey to Adele Clark, 1 October 1920. Folder “G Correspondence October 1920,” box 47, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

National Body of this nature. I am entirely sympathetic toward an extension of the life of the old Suffrage League...for a year or two longer if needed.”⁵⁰ Johnston objected to an all-female organization: My feeling is against any re-segregation of women in the political and social life of the country.” Johnston's arguments did not sway all members to her way of thinking. In fact, on the back of her letter was written “Write her we are sorry---explain more fully.” Despite Johnston, the ESL converted into the League of Women Voters in November 1920.

The YWCA was made up of groups similar to the League, consisting of middle class women who shared a common concern for young, unmarried women. As such, the groups used particular themes, previously discussed, that were popular in this era to fight for women in their community. Although these groups of women shared an activist spirit, their organizations' purposes diverged. The Richmond YWCA was a Christian institution, a fact that was asserted immediately as the organization was formed in the home of an Episcopal Bishop. The association wanted to enrich women through mental and physical education while providing protection from “corrupting” forces in society. The ESL also wanted to enrich and protect women, however, the ESL believed that to do so women must have the right to vote and use legislation and social activism to create a better society. Although the groups had seemingly different goals, their techniques were not mutually exclusive. Both organizations used motherhood, social religion, race, and traditionalism in order to attain and shape their goals.

The discussion below will be divided into four sections, corresponding to these terms. These terms may have been used in various ways by the female activists studied, but in the context of this work they serve an analytical function. Traditions were an overarching theme. Traditions referred to allusions to the South or Virginia but also includes concepts of

⁵⁰ Letter from Mary Johnston to My Dear Mrs. Cowles, 9 October 1920, in folder, “Voter Registration Correspondence,” box 124, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

motherhood, traditional understandings of race, and connections of women to religion. Although these three topics fit neatly under the header of “traditions” they are distinctive enough analytically that they are separated from each other. Exploring these terms will provide a greater understanding of how women's activism continued in the Leagues as compared to the YWCA.

Traditions

In Richmond, Virginia, after the Civil War, the white populace of the city was bombarded by “traditions.” The word itself is an all encompassing term that has been used by individuals, the city government, historians, and organizations to memorialize the greatness of an area, the richness of the place's history, and the importance of its people. Traditionalism was also a means to accomplish goals of the YWCA, the ESL, and the LWV. By representing ideals of Richmond, Virginia, or the South in general, connections could be made to the heroes of Virginia, and preservation of southern values, these organizations maintained traditions while pushing for change.

The ESL used their illustrious bloodlines as a means of justification and “proof” that their cause was a worthy one. Members were connected to important or well-known names of Richmond--Valentine, Randolph, Mason, Houston, and Johnston. Lucy Randolph Mason was probably the best example of them all. Mason was kin to George Mason and was a direct descendant of Thomas Jefferson. These blood connections to important people in Virginia history gave the causes supported by the YWCA and the Leagues validity as well as protected the members of the association from being ostracized by their community. J. Douglas Smith, in *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, described Mason's ancestral connections as an example of this form of protection. “In a state devoted to ancestor worship, her impressive family tree allowed her to negotiate a narrow path along the

edge of the acceptable.”⁵¹ Women evoked their familial connections to remind delegates and anti-suffragists that their members were women with a firm place in Richmond's society and history. Seth Bruggeman in *Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument*, explored the development of the memory and commemoration of George Washington's birthplace, a site that celebrated his mother. He asserted "that commemoration of any sort reveals agency and, therefore, carefully crafted meaning.”⁵² The “carefully crafted meaning” of the activist women in these groups was to show that they connected to honored individuals in Richmond society. With these connections their causes were respectable for such members could not want to change the traditions that made Virginia great.

Bruggeman stressed the importance of place, where it seemed that one could “catch” greatness much like the common cold. Bruggeman saw the desire to go to these places as a form of pilgrimage.⁵³ Richmond, former capital of the Confederacy, was a useful example of this contagion of place. The YWCA closely associated its work with young women who came to the city and emphasized the need to ensure that “Richmond's Best,” her young women, would be protected into marriage and motherhood. One 1915 flier stated:

Richmond marks her memorable past with many stately monuments, and guards her historic relics behind noble doors.

Who are making Richmond's history *today* and determining what her *future* will be?

GIRLS who live in Richmond homes, go to her schools, walk and ride her streets, work in her factories, offices and stores, and eventually vote for her government.

⁵¹ J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12.

⁵² Seth Bruggeman *Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 14.

⁵³ Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington Was Born*, 14, 29.

How does Richmond guard and guide these potentialities and makers of her future? By a staunch and wide awake YWCA...

Richmond's present and future will be worthy of Richmond's past only as everybody does his best⁵⁴

The elite women of the YWCA argued that, with monetary support, it could continue this tradition of greatness by instilling the importance of these traditions in the young women. The flier also employed paternalism, which asserted that those more capable, the Richmond white elite, should protect those who could not otherwise protect themselves: young working girls.

Bruggeman's argument about the importance of place can also be widened to regions. Richmond activists often came up against opposition that suggested change would deteriorate the southern "way of life," which must be preserved. The suffragists in the ESL responded by introducing "Southern Speakers" who would show that the issue of suffrage was not a foreign concept.⁵⁵

After the vote was insured by a national amendment in 1920, suffragists continued their attempts to connect women's votes to southern pride. Nora Houston, the head of the "Get-Out-the-Vote" department of the LWV and the niece of prominent Richmonder, James Henry Dooley, used songs and slogans that connected voting with southern patriotism. One example was written to the tune of "Dixeland" and stated:

Way down South in the Land of Cotton

Love of Country's not forgotten,

Will you vote? Will you Vote,?

⁵⁴ Flier "Richmond's Best," folder "Activities, Programs, Given By YWCA," box 13, Series III, m177, Richmond YWCA Archives, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁵⁵ Flier "Southern Speakers," folder "Fliers and Handbills," box 52, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Will you vote? Dixieland?
O, Don't you hear your country call you,
Vote 'Lest evil days befall you,
Will you Vote, Will you Vote,
Will you Vote, Dixieland

Get out the Vote in Dixie,
Hurray,! Hurray!
The South will proudly take her stand,
There'll be no slackers in her land,
We'll Vote, We'll vote,
We all will vote in Dixie. ⁵⁶

In this version of "Dixieland" there was a strong emphasis on regional patriotism, but the message was vague. The song stated "O, Don't you hear your country call you/ Vote 'lest evil days befall you," however, there was no discussion of what those "evil days" might be. Using the term "evil" generally, the LWV was connecting itself with the southern patriotism while alienating no one. Evil, being a subjective term, could mean the evil factory owner, the saloon, or any number of other evils. The Leagues were able to make such claims because they were a non-partisan organization that supported legislation to protect women and encouraged individuals to use their votes. The use of "traditions" as a justification for voting or the reason to vote allowed for a looser, more ambiguous interpretation of meaning as well.

⁵⁶ Flier "Get Out The Vote In Dixie," in folder "Get Out The Vote," box 81, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

By arguing that women wanted to keep Richmond the wonderful, historically important city it was by using the vote, women of the YWCA and the Leagues did not have to engage in an explicitly political conversation. Although the public sector of legislation and voting was outside the traditional female sphere, by evoking familial connections and history women claimed to be engaging in a gender-correct activity. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, in *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, described the commemoration of history and the maintaining of public memory as considered to be "a duty peculiarly fitting to women."⁵⁷ Brundage's work examined the creation and maintenance of public history in the south after the Civil War. In doing so, Brundage engaged women's role in commemoration and recitation of history. He found that "[t]his movement to craft a white public memory especially engrossed white women, who donned the mantle of 'guardians of the past' to a degree without precedent in the regions' history."⁵⁸ Women claimed the role of 'guardian' as their own public role. The women who crafted and dispersed this history were not unobtrusive providers of the past rather, these women had agency to purvey distinctive messages about morality and class structure. "Within the boundaries imposed by the prevailing beliefs of the era, the meaning of the history of the white South was open to multiple readings that in turn allowed white women to use it for varied purposes."⁵⁹ Brundage stated that "Although denied the franchise, organized white women looked to history as a means to shape the South. Southern white women understood how power can make some historical narratives possible and silence others."⁶⁰ The case of the YWCA and the Leagues used history and tradition as a tool to enact change but their use of public history and tradition was not exclusively to maintain a society separated by race and class as Brundage

⁵⁷ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash Of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵⁸ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 15.

⁵⁹ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 15.

⁶⁰ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 15.

argued. Women worked within their sphere as “guardians” to manipulate history as a justification for their causes. The YWCA needed financial support to continue Richmond's legacy of greatness and maintain a tradition of paternalism. The ESL argued that women needed to vote to protect the South and justified their claim through their important bloodlines. The “traditions” argument allowed women to widen their sphere, gaining political independence, from a stance well within their gender roles.

The ESL, LWV, and the YWCA used the acceptable gender roles of the 19th century to expand their spheres beyond the home. These gender roles were seen as “traditional,” and thus the concept of tradition was a theme found throughout the activist women’s pamphlets, brochures, and personal letters. Women of the Leagues and the YWCA professed that they were not struggling to change tradition rather, they wished to change society to fit better with their view of tradition. Women activists in the YWCA believed that they could teach working class women how to be "proper" Christian women. These teachings would give these women the power to avoid being corrupted by misguided men. The members of the Leagues believed that they would be better able to create legislation that would protect women, as mothers and as a "special" sex if they were able to vote for these laws.

Motherhood

Motherhood was considered the trait most inherent to womanhood and a binding force between women of all means and races. It was also a trait that was exclusive to women; no man could understand what it was to be a mother and no man was capable of fulfilling this role. Motherhood was used by these groups because women could claim that, as producers of life, they had certain strengths over men. Middle and upper class women argued that as mothers they should be both the protectors of their children and givers of guidance to their community, which

often included unmarried young women in need. Within the YWCA women could take on leadership roles and foster a religious lifestyle to those they considered to be in need.

The ESL expressed its concern as many more young girls were coming to the city to work in factories, as products once made in the home, were being manufactured in factories. “Life is becoming more and more complex with each generation,”⁶¹ argued M.D. Winn, a member of the suffragist cause. Men's failure to protect women and children through legislation made conditions worse. Winn continued, “there are many lines of work today that [women] do well, which man either does not see, or does not care to take upon himself, in fact, it is a part of the Great Plan that he shall not do it for it is her work, which she must no longer shirk.”⁶² Men, in this suffragist argument, were incapable of addressing issues that faced women and children because it was not in their gender “realm.” Women were more capable of understanding and addressing these issue and therefore needed the vote. “Women desire the vote in order that [they] may help correct many existing evils in the life of today which man in his superior (?) [sic] wisdom has over-looked or failed to comprehend as evils.”⁶³ In an attempt to turn the tables on the anti-suffrage argument that suggested that women as mothers should concern themselves with the home and the children, Bove asserted that men were unfit to vote because “the woman might point out that the masculine sex is coarse and unaesthetic that it is passionate, quarrelsome, and given to the use of bad words, that the lack of a shirt button will often set men into quite a rage.”⁶⁴ Bove continued with the assertion that the numbers of men attending secondary school were declining and that women were taking up the scholarly traditions being

⁶¹ M.D. Winn, “Woman's Work,” in folder “Essay Woman's Work,” box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁶² Winn, “Woman's Work,” 5.

⁶³ Winn, “Woman's Work,” 5. *Question Mark the author's*

⁶⁴ B.P. Bove, “A Man's View of Woman Suffrage,” in folder “A Man's View of Woman Suffrage,” box 133, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University, 5.

abandoned men. Employing accepted gender roles, the author argued that women, as mothers, were the opposite of men and, as such, could care for the world better than men, if given the vote. Bowe argued that fatherhood could also be explained in the same light as motherhood. “And when we rise to the higher thought of fatherhood, what sacredness this bestows upon man, and certainly he can ask for nothing higher.”⁶⁵ Comparing stereotypical gender roles of women and men, the suffragists asked why men should be able to make the choices on topics such as schools, health, pure food and drugs, when this was not their role in life. Women argued that, where men were failing, women would succeed if given the vote. Winn argued in “Women's Votes Make Better Babies” that child mortality rates had declined in New Zealand because women voters had made this issue a priority. “Women vote in New Zealand and have done so for many years. Since they were given the vote there, not only has the infant death rate decreased until now it is the smallest in the world, but the birth rate, previously declining, has steadily risen.”⁶⁶ Suffragists suggested that it was because they had the “natural” compassion of mothers, even if they had no children themselves. In “Forty-Five and Comfortable and Nothing to Do,” published in the Norfolk Virginian Pilot after the 19th amendment was passed, Kathleen Norris stated that “I remember my grandmother in the chimney corner knitting and darning—a work most necessary to the comfort and happiness of that generation and I am realizing my grandmother [sic] work for today is helping other women to darn the unsightly holes in the old socks of politics while we knit together the beautiful new threads of intelligent thinking into new socks and stockings for all; new understanding of our fundamental principles of government our groundwork of true Democracy.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Bowe, “A Man's View,” 6.

⁶⁶ Winn, “Women's Votes Make Better Babies,” 2.

⁶⁷ Kathleen Norris, “Forty-five and Comfortable and Nothing to do,” in folder “Forty-five and Comfortable and Nothing to Do,” box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James

Voting women improved all levels of society, from upgrades in sewer systems to declines in infant mortality rates, to better working conditions and a general societal uplift. In a 1910 editorial, Mary Johnston suggested that women “as mothers and teachers” cared more deeply for the plight of young women and children in factories. She quoted Florence Kelly of the Consumers League, who stated:

You speak of the Consumers League, an organization to which I belong. Listen to Florence Kelly, of the Consumers League: "Never before in the history of the human race have children and young women formed as they do to-day an important part of the working force of great industrial communities... Now the health, morals and intelligence of the rising generation are peculiarly objects of solicitude of women, to deprive women of equal share of power to determine laws for these young workers is to give cruelly unequal power to sordid employers."⁶⁸

By using Kelly's quote, Johnson explained that more and more children and young adults were entering into factories and lacked mothers who had the power to protect them. Women, as mothers, needed the vote to protect the "health, morals, and intelligence" of these children or otherwise the factory owners would win. Johnston discussed the failure of enforcing protective legislation for the young members of the working class because of pressure from the “sordid employers,” stating that “[i]t is hard to believe that such wary [sic] effort would be needed if the mothers and teachers were a part of the voting constituency upon whom judges and legislators depend for their political careers.”⁶⁹ Women used examples from New Zealand, Australia, and

Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University. While published in the Norfolk Virginian Pilot, the hand written copy was kept in Adele Clark's papers.

⁶⁸ Mary Johnston, “What Woman Has Done With the Ballot: The Testimony of Experts is Cited,” Richmond Times Dispatch, 30 October 1910, Society and Current Events, 12 , image 12 Library of Congress Online Archives.

⁶⁹ Mary Johnston, “What Woman Has Done With the Ballot: The Testimony of Experts is Cited.”

other states in the United States to show that voting women did not deprive the house of the mother but rather gave mothers to society. Examining England, editorial columnist Grace Vernon argued that “[o]verwhelming evidence has proved that [suffrage] has done much for the woman herself, to make homes happier, to ennoble men, and to dignify politics.”⁷⁰ If women were given the right to vote, society would be improved for everyone; women would bring dignity to politics, and men would respond to this by acting with more decorum in society. Adele Clark drafted a slogan to be used by the ESL to assure the populace that woman voters would continue in their mothering efforts. “For the safety of the Nation, to women give the vote, for the hand that rocks the cradle, will never rock the boat.”⁷¹

After the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920, the ESL began to teach women how to use their new right. The new female voters no longer had to convince society that having the vote was proper, as their voting rights were protected by a national amendment. On the 50th anniversary of the LWV, Selma Myers described the first decade of the organization's existence. She explained, “[t]he Women quickly became active in all public affairs on the local, state, national and international levels.”⁷² Women used the vote to continue their activism. Topics that gained the most attention were considered within the realm of a woman’s knowledge, such as the policy regarding children and women. The use of motherhood continued after 1920 as a means of convincing non-registered women it was gender-appropriate to vote. The LWV used tactics familiar to those of the ESL. One broadside exclaimed “Voting is a Woman's Duty, Women

⁷⁰ Grace Vernon, “Mrs. Henson and Suffrage,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 25 June 1911, Image 42, Library of Congress, Online Archives.

⁷¹ Letter, Undated, in folder, “Undated Material,” box 48, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁷² Selma Myers, “Statement made by Selma Myers on the 50th anniversary of the Organization of the Richmond League of Women Voters—Nov.1970,” in Folder “Richmond LWV, Organizational History,” box 66, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabel Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Today Have FULL CITIZENSHIP.” “During the past hundred and twenty-five years the status of women has completely changed.” It explained that one hundred and twenty-five years prior to woman suffrage, women in the home were in control of making the food, clothes, and candles as well as taking care of the sick and educating the children. As time passed these jobs had been taken over by the factory and moved away out of the house. “Now industrial conditions have completely changed: the thread is spun not in the home but in the mill. The cloth is woven not in the home but in the factory... The bread is baked not in the home but in the bake shop... The girls and boys are not educated in the home but in the schools....”⁷³ The LWV argued that women needed to register and vote because the best way for a woman to regain control of the management of the food and care of children and the sick was to exercise her new right to vote. A flier stated that women should “VOTE!” because “You Can’t Escape the Ballot Box It Follows You Home.”⁷⁴ “If you expect to get proper protection for home and children, for business and property, you must vote and help choose the men who make the laws.” The flier continued, “Votes decide public health, taxes, schools, libraries, roads, police, fire, water, playgrounds, parks, traffics, markets, weights and measures, food inspection, sanitation, garbage disposal, public utilities, reformatories, prisons, charities, peace and war.” The suffragists argued that it was still the role of the mother to protect children but traditional chores were being taken out of the mother’s hands and thus, women needed to use the newly won vote in order to implement much needed motherly protections.

The LWV's leaders did not hesitate to point out the traditional female role of motherhood and caring for children. “The issues before [women] are of vital interest to all--child welfare,

⁷³ “Voting is a WOMAN'S DUTY,” folder “Handbills,” box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁷⁴ Flier “Vote,” in folder “Handbills,” box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

education, health, morals, industrial progress, and world peace. These are an outgrowth of women's particular work; the same business which concerns them in their homes, carried now into their communities."⁷⁵ These letters, written to get support from businessmen and politicians, assured readers that women were not stepping out of their ascribed gender roles. The LWV also reminded the reader that these matters directly affected them and were not outside woman's sphere.

The legislation that women wanted aligned with understandings of women as mothers, both of children and of working class women in their community. In outlines that described the purpose of the LWV, objectives all connected to women or children, even if they were financially based. The committees' organization of the LWV included Social Welfare, which involved subjects such as "Adequate Mother's Pensions; Child Welfare; Protection of Maternity and Infancy; Protection of Young Girls and Boys; Social Hygiene."⁷⁶ They also included a minimum wage board and the promotion of an eight hour work day. Although support of fair wages and shorter days was a step toward laborer's rights, and it could have been argued was out of a woman's sphere, the LWV included these issues in a list that protected women and children, thus claiming this area for women.

Although a non-partisan group, the LWV actively supported legislation that lent aid to mothers and children, especially those working in factories. The League supported the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection act, which encouraged health care centers for women and young children. The passage of this act predated women's right to vote but it went into effect in 1921. The LWV also supported maternity pensions that would support pregnant mothers. In

⁷⁵ Letter, "Dear Sir," July 18, 1921, in folder "G Correspondence 1921," box 67, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁷⁶ "Virginia League of Women Voters: Its Aim and Structure," in folder "Handbills," box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia, the passage of these acts was not as effective as the organizations had intended. The acts were passed on a local elective basis, meaning that local governments could decide if they wanted to implement the protective legislation, and many did not. When the legislation failed in support of mothers the YWCA stepped in, offering child-care and classes for women. The YWCA began in Richmond with a concern for unattached women in the Richmond Area. Young women came from rural Virginia in hopes of finding jobs to support their families. Middle-class women were also coming to the city for education and also had trouble finding respectable housing. An undated letter in the YWCA papers explained the concerns of the founders of the YWCA. "Is it not timely that we who are blessed with wealth, influence and talent should consult together as to what measures we can take for those of our own sex [who are] less fortunate?" The letter continued:

My mind cannot free itself from the sad thought of the young girl of whom I told you, who is obliged to reside in the miserable attics of a lodging house, in loneliness and isolation and in imminent danger of meeting unscrupulous members of the other sex without the protection we would desire for one of our own daughters. Think also of... the daughter of our esteemed pastor in Salem desirous of coming to the city to study but unable to find any suitable abiding place.⁷⁷

Although the origin of this letter was unclear, it was kept in the YWCA archives and shared the concern for young women at the time the YWCA was created. The woman who wrote this letter, Phoebe Brigham, expressed a mothering desire to protect young women less fortunate than she was and to create a place where these women could gather and live without being

⁷⁷ "My Dearest Friend, letter Signed Phoebe Brigham" 1 June, folder "Activities, Programs, Given by YWCA..." Box 13, Series III, M177 Richmond YWCA Archives, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

“corrupted” by the outside world. While written in terms of maternal capabilities, the language expressed a paternal sentiment, as Brigham believed that it was her role as the more capable woman to protect those without her advantages. As a result of this concern, the Richmond YWCA set up a boarding house in 1887. From 1887 into the 1920s, the YWCA expanded operations, adding more houses and several branches throughout the Richmond areas to help support young working women and offer them safe places to live and entertainments deemed appropriate for women. All the programs offered to young girls who attended the YWCA involved the concept of motherhood. In Richmond’s Central YWCA in 1915-1916 the women were offered Domestic Science and Domestic Art classes. These classes were offered to both middle class and working class women. The list included classes from “Advanced Cookery” to “Young Girls Cookery” and even included an “Employed Girls Cookery” where “[a]ttractive dishes are prepared and served at each lesson. Breads, meats, vegetables and easy desserts will be cooked. An opportunity for every girl to learn homemaking...”⁷⁸ The YWCA offered classes to both middle class and working class women that taught them nutrition while providing meals. The YWCA also offered child care services for working mothers. The association also ran a food kitchen which provided food at lower prices.

These activities, homemaking, providing food, and providing child care, were all considered gender appropriate, even if they were outside of the home. The activism that women were performing, however, reinforced the gender normative. The women of the YWCA taught domestic activities that educated women on how to be proper mothers and kept women out of "trouble" that they may find on the streets. Both the YWCA and the Leagues expressed fear over women finding inappropriate entertainment. The LWV argued that women must vote in order to

⁷⁸ “Domestic Science and Art Classes 1915-1916,” in folder “Misc,” box 13, Series III, M177, Richmond YWCA Archives Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

“Help [t]o get more social life. This means better roads, better trolley and bus services, more libraries and meeting halls, and the right to use those we have for social purposes. If wholesome amusements are not provided, our boys and girls will seek the other kind.”⁷⁹ YWCA members argued that women should be prepared for life, stating that a young woman's “thoughtlessness in her dress, conversation or behavior may drive the undisciplined young man to seek and deceive the unprotected girl.”⁸⁰ The YWCA “protected” women by offering classes and an organization that supported conventional ideas of womanhood.

On the surface it seems as if the YWCA and the Leagues were fighting in different realms. The ESL fought for women to vote, an expansion of the female sphere and the League of Women Voters argued that women should vote and step into politics. and vote. The Leagues cited that women needed to vote because of the changing society and thus argued from a conservative activist standpoint. The need for the vote was expressed in terms of motherhood. Women did not argue that they deserved to be equal citizens rather, they needed the vote to become better mothers. The ESL and the LWV also employed a form of paternalism, which drove them to create legislation that would protect women, by limiting working hours, increasing the minimum wage, offering child-care, increasing the minimum working age for children because they believed as the elite class, they needed to do for those who could not do for themselves. The YWCA employed paternalism socially, offering classes that would keep young, unmarried women off of the streets and enrich their lives by learning subjects or hobbies to which they would have no access otherwise. These actions were intended to protect the traditional form of motherhood and were justified as an extension of traditional motherhood.

⁷⁹ Flier, “Citizens! By Voting You Can,” in folder “Handbills,” box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁸⁰ *Report of the Commission on Social Morality from the Christian Standpoint Made to the fourth Biennial Convention of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States, Richmond, Va. April 9-15, 1913.* in folder 144, Betsy Brinson Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society.

Religion

To the 19th-century sensibility, women were the gender most closely related to religious sentimentality. Thus, as with motherhood, women in activist roles in the Leagues and the YWCA used religion as a means of gaining influence and expressing the importance of women's work in political and social arenas. The concept of "social religion" encouraged mainly by Protestant religious leaders called for the lay members of the church to spread the message of God through good works in one's own community. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the YWCA were outgrowths of this philosophy, but other organizations shared a religious message, one being the Christian Temperance Union. The Richmond Leagues, although dedicated to a political change, expressed the need for the vote in religious terms. Although hetero-social groups also used this philosophy, women's groups combined traditional concepts of womanhood with religious messages. Thus, the concept of women as the holders of religious tradition, the purer and more religious gender, pervades the advertisements and organizational philosophy for groups such as the ESL and the YWCA.

Women in the ESL argued that they should have the vote in order to bring about a religious revolution which would make living in Richmond better for everyone. Lucy Randolph Mason, a member of both the YWCA and the Leagues, wrote a series of pamphlets discussing social religion and the need for female enfranchisement. Mason explained that "[w]e are living in an age of immense and fundamental changes, in which is taking place a shifting of the very basis of society and the transference of entire spheres of industrial production and social activity. Nothing is as it was twenty years ago..."⁸¹ The changes in society meant that there were more women and children in need of protection, as they were unable, financially or otherwise, to do so

⁸¹ Lucy Randolph Mason, *The Social and Religious Aspect of the Suffrage Movement*, 5. in folder "Essay, *The Social and Religious Aspect of the Suffrage Movement*," box 52, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

themselves. Many laws that were passed, argued suffragists, benefited only the wealthy corporation owners. A second argument, which was also used as an explanation for mothers needing the vote, was that men were the more corrupt gender. Mason picked up this argument and asserted “[i]t is because of the hardness of men's hearts and the dullness of their understanding, that they have not long ago learned that there can be no separation of duty to God and duty to man—the one necessarily involves the other.”⁸² Men were also to be blamed for the mistreatment of workers in factories as men were the primary owners and managers of factories which mistreated employees. “[The workers] know...the owners and managers of corporations which are grinding employees to death and turning their flesh and blood and very souls into profit, live in sumptuous comfort and luxury.”⁸³

While men in positions of power were construed as malicious or uncaring, women were portrayed in a more positive light. Using traditional gender standards Mason and others explained that women should have the vote because they were naturally filled with the divine inspiration to solve the ills of society. “And all of these [corruptions] fill women with a divine discontent. The truest and most womanly instincts of [female] nature cry [out for a] sweeter, kinder place and to guarantee to the weak as well as the strong, fair opportunity for an honest, free and happy life.”⁸⁴ Mason and other suffragists argued that women were compelled by their instincts and by their churches to take up a more active role in society. “Religion itself is being broadened, deepened and intensified by its application to social life. In the churches more stress is being laid upon the social power of Christianity and less upon individual salvation—to a

⁸² Lucy Randolph Mason, *Religious and Social Aspect*, 4.

⁸³ Lucy Randolph Mason, *The Divine Discontent*, 14, in folder "Essay, "The Divine Discontent," box 52, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁸⁴ Mason, *Divine Discontent*, 14.

thinking mind the first includes the second.”⁸⁵ As women were the greater attendees of church, Mason asserted, women were more affected by this message. Giving women the vote would create a more religious and faithful community as women, being more religious, would base legislation on the positive Christian message. Although anti-suffragists asserted that the suffragists subverted the traditional understanding of religion, pamphleteers attempted to claim the religious message as their own. “One of the most objectionable features of the movement is said to be its attack on religion,” however, “it is because of a deeper perception of the true meaning of religion that thousands of women are responding to the appeal being made to them to join the ranks striving to obtain duties, privileges and opportunities of citizenship.”⁸⁶ In her pamphlets Mason did not argue that women should get the vote in order to be equal to men, rather that women needed the vote to fulfill obligations in which they were already engaged. “Charity and philanthropy have long been the only legitimate outlets for women’s activities outside the home. Sympathy with human want and suffering has led women into social service and curative works of all kinds.”⁸⁷ Mason attempted to shame women who did not wish to join the suffrage movement arguing that they were failing in their lives as Christians. “It is the idle, bored, and restless woman who, most of all, needs awakening, in order that she may see things as they are and learn to do her part to make them better. Such women cannot plead lack of time as a valid excuse of shirking the obligations of citizenship.”⁸⁸ Essayists, such as E. Peabody Dahl, rewrote traditional Christian stories, incorporating women with shared power. Dahl used negative gender stereotypes for men and more positive stereotypes for women to explain that men without women were not effective as leaders. “Back in the dawn of the world came Jehovah

⁸⁵ Mason, *Divine Discontent*, 9.

⁸⁶ Mason, *Religious and Social Aspect*, 3-4.

⁸⁷ Mason, *Divine Discontent*, 9.

⁸⁸ Mason, *Religious and Social Aspects*, 13.

with all seeing vision... and where was the man he had fashioned? Loafing and moping about in the Garden in which He had placed him.”⁸⁹ Seeing Adam's dismay, God decided to create woman. While woman was created from the rib of Adam, Dahl described the creation as “the form of a being well-nigh immaculate, holy” and God “[p]laced it a help meet for man, to assist him as lord of creation, [r]ending rule and dominion o'er all other creatures of Eden.”⁹⁰ Women in this essay are described as equals and, at times, superior to males. “Verily, verily yea; and the training instilled in childhood [e]er should be guarded and guided by her who saw its inception. Truly 'tis said that the hand that rocketh the cradle shall govern, Queen of the home and the realm.”⁹¹ The author again uses religion to celebrate the expectation of the vote stating “[T]he women whom God hath provided, [g]lory and honor and praise to the daughter, of this generation [c]oming at last to their own, to the place where the Lord had intended!”⁹² Dahl's sentiment reflected the idea expressed in the discussion of motherhood, that men could not run a government well without the help of women. Dahl argued that women were not just to guide men from the sidelines but to get involved, which also reaffirmed Mason's argument that true Christian women should become involved in their communities and government in order to create a more perfect society. The use of religious language suggested that a woman's natural place—as decreed by God—was as an activist, equal to men politically. Women were also described as being inspired by Jesus to pursue the vote and help uplift their communities, which legitimized female activism. This argument, based in religious inspiration, was very difficult to counter.

⁸⁹ E. Peabody Dahl, “Suffrage, A Woman's Right and Duty,” in folder “E. Peabody Dahl 'Suffrage, A Woman's Right and Duty,” box113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁹⁰ Dahl, “Suffrage,” 1.

⁹¹ Dahl, “Suffrage,” 2

⁹² Dahl, “Suffrage,” 2

Although the ESL used social religion as a means of validating their need for the right to vote, the LWV did not argue from a religious standpoint. This shift in method cannot be easily explained by a change in leadership, as members such as Mason continued to work with the organization.

Religion was used as a means of social motivation. Religion was being applied to everyday life, and women used these methods to further their sphere within society. The suffrage cause was only one of many causes that touted religiosity. One of the first organizations which argued that Christianity could be applied to everyday life was the YWCA. Women in the organization came together not only under the terms of maternalism, wanting to extend a hand to those in need, but also under the ideal of Christian Sisterhood. Members of the YWCA "referred to women as 'sisters' and consistently invoked what they called 'Christian sisterhood' as an important means to build a better world. The term both conveyed their motivation and legitimized their social activism at a time when women were supposedly relegated to the home."⁹³ Mason referred to sisterhood in *The Divine Discontent*. "Am I my sister's keeper?" is a question that should burn into the brain and heart of the sheltered woman...If it were not for the men and women of industry, the home would not be a place of so much comfort and luxury.⁹⁴ Mason's explanation of Christian sisterhood questioned why upper class women should care about lower class women's lives. Mason explained that women should care and attempt to make the lives of lower class women better because those women sacrificed themselves for the comfort of the upper classes. The mission statement of the YWCA declared that "[t]he purpose of this organization shall be to associate young women in personal loyalty to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; to promote growth of Christian Character and service through physical, social, mental and

⁹³ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 2.

⁹⁴ Lucy Randolph Mason, *The Divine Discontent*, 15.

spiritual training; and to be a social force for the extension of the Kingdom of God.”⁹⁵ The activist members were working with women in order to create more good Christian women and uplift society to a higher level. These messages of faith were apparent in material intended for the public as well as material for private consumption. The Richmond YWCA’s 1924 annual meeting notes began with a Bible passage, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Now Faith means we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see.”⁹⁶ A 1924 advertisement repeated the religious orientation of the group but also emphasized activist intent. It read “Purpose is: To Associate: Young women in personal loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, To Promote: Growth in Christian character and service through physical, social, mental and spiritual training, To Become: A social force for extension of the Kingdom of God.”⁹⁷ The YWCA used religion as a means of binding disparate groups of women to one another. Women of the middle classes were urged to work with women of lower classes and white women were urged to bond with African American women in the name of social uplift, thought to be brought on by applied religion that grew out of an upsurge of Protestantism and the importance of female community. The “YWCA women’s vision of Christian sisterhood drew upon nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood as well as the values of evangelical Protestantism; the importance of those values lasted well into the twentieth century.”⁹⁸ By combining religion and activism the YWCA created a driving force for women to desire change, a religious obligation. While Nancy Marie Robertson, the author of *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1904-46*, examined Christian sisterhood through the

⁹⁵ “YWCA Constitution 1920,” 1, Microfilm, Mss 10 no, 397, Richmond Association, YWCA National Board Local Association, Betsy Brinson Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society.

⁹⁶ “Annual Meeting 1924,” Folder 144, Betsy Brinson Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society.

⁹⁷ “38000, She’s Worth It,” hand-dated 1924, in folder “YWCA Papers,” Special Collections, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁹⁸ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 3.

lens of race, young middle class women were exposed to all levels of society such as working class women, poor factory conditions, working mothers, and racial unrest, which they may not have observed otherwise. Women in the YWCA were taught that changes could be made to society, for the better, by applying religion to their day to day lives. Their activism was also supported by the fact that it was gender appropriate for women to be the more religious sex.

While the YWCA was a religious organization that justified activism through social religion and rising Protestantism, the ESL, and later the LWV were not. In 1920, The ESL became the LWV, and women obtained the right to vote. It was also at this time that the LWV stopped using social religion to support female voting rights. As the YWCA continued the use of these methods, it would not be correct to assume that “applied religion” was generally considered passé. The separation of church and state was one reason which led the LWV to abandon the religious argument. Once given the right to vote, women may have wanted to avoid the topic of religion. While discussions of motherly paternalism and the need for women to protect their fellow females could be turned into protective legislation such as shorter work hours, higher pay rates, child care and maternity benefits, Christian sisterhood and religion could not be regulated by law. As a result, the LWV did not use Christian rhetoric in campaigns to get women, or the population in general, to vote. The YWCA, being at its core a religious organization and dedicated to religious works, continued to use religion as a social motivator and as a connection between women of all classes and races.

While the LWV discontinued use of social religion in their public works, this does not mean the individual members abandoned their commitment to the social religion philosophy. Women, such as Lucy Randolph Mason, maintained their religious commitment to social

activism. Mason continued working for both the YWCA and the LWV, and her Christian message remained strong throughout her career.

Race

Race is a complicated theme in this analysis, because unlike the other themes, the discussion is based on the absence of words rather than the abundance of them. Nonetheless, race was an important discussion to the Leagues and the YWCA and an important topic in Richmond in the late 1900s and 1920s. It is essential to understand how both groups dealt with race, or how they maneuvered around issues of race. The ESL never integrated and the LWV did not do so until after the 1920s. The “Phyllis Wheatly Branch,” the African American branch of the YWCA, organized separately from the white YWCA and operated separately from the other branches until the late 1920s. Although the organizations remained separate in both the YWCA and the Leagues, members of the organizations occasionally made public the organization's opinions or reported to superiors about race conditions in the Old Dominion.

The ESL excluded Richmond's African American women. Richmond's black community during the 1920s was largely silent on women's suffrage. Historians, such as Elsa Barkley Brown, argued that, although not considered suffragists, African American women and men were active in their communities and wanted suffrage for all people not just women. Betsy Brinson argued similarly when discussing the Phyllis Wheatly Branch of the Richmond YWCA. “[T]he early YWCA operated segregated programs and facilities. The origins in both black and white communities were unsurprisingly similar, for Richmond black women of the early 1900s shared the same concern for young “colored” women as did their white sisters”⁹⁹ Brinson explained

⁹⁹ Betsy Brinson, “Helping Others Help Themselves: The Early History of the Richmond YWCA,” 4. in folder “History, The Beginning of the YWCA of Greater Richmond,” box 14, Series M177 Richmond YWCA Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

that like the white YWCA, which was created in the home of a pastor, the black YW was created in the home of Mrs. A. G. Thompson, the wife of the rector of Saint Philips Episcopal Church.¹⁰⁰ While white women were working to uplift their own communities, African American women were working to do the same. On occasion, these spheres separated by race overlapped.

Suzanne Lebsock examined the connections between the ESL and expressions of white supremacy in the struggle for the vote. Lebsock argued that the white supremacy card played a major role in the argument against women's votes but that the suffragists attempted to avoid discussions of race or white supremacy. She argued that white women were not fighting for the vote to maintain white supremacy, but because they believed women should have a say in making legislation. As a result, women did not use white supremacist rhetoric as their mainline argument.¹⁰¹ Lebsock stated that women in the Richmond ESL did not want to argue the white supremacist line because they did not feel that it matched with their other messages. Leaders of the group were hesitant to openly discuss race, because they did not want the ESL to be remembered as stifling African American civil rights.¹⁰² "In the 1920s, as before, the white suffragist negotiated a middling course. After 1920 that course included significant and open cooperation with leading black Virginians who in turn challenged the white women to enlarge their democratic vision."¹⁰³

Lebsock's argument holds up when applied to the documents promoting suffrage for women. The anti-suffrage camp barraged the public with fear tactics, asserting that women

¹⁰⁰ Brinson, "Helping Others," 4.

¹⁰¹ Suzanne Lebsock, "Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy; A Virginia Case Study." in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1993).

¹⁰² Lebsock, "Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy," 62. Lebsock quotes a letter from Lila Meade Valentine, the President of the Equal Suffrage League which expressed her concern over alienating black women.

¹⁰³ Lebsock, "Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy," 89.

voting meant “Negro Rule,” which would lead to the downfall of the southern way of life. The ESL, it seems, attempted to avoid direct confrontation with this argument. When forced to take a stance on the "race issue", the ESL answered that black women could be disenfranchised the same way that the black man was prevented. The ESL's counter argument was that Virginia could disenfranchise black women as well as it had disenfranchised black men. Suffragists used this argument on at least one broadside but it is missing from many other discussions of the suffrage struggle. When the topic of race was discussed, the suffragist used the words of prominent men. As was the case in 9 February 1918 when, as described by “Good Work in Old Virginia," a newspaper clipping in the Adele Goodman Clark papers, quoted the Honorable William Jennings Bryan. The article described ESL members meeting Bryan at the train station and discussing their desire for the vote. Bryan, on his way to address the Virginia General Assembly, made a speech on behalf of the ESL stating:

I for one, am not afraid to trust the conscience of woman, which is the meaning of extending the franchise to her. I understand the fear of the vote of negro women. I have met many Southern women as I have met Southern men, and I have no fear that the Southern white woman will not be able to hold her own against the negro woman as well as the Southern white man has been able to hold his own against the negro man.¹⁰⁴

This document survived as a clipping in the Adele Clark Papers but there was no record of the magazine in which it appeared. It is unclear if it came from a publication intended for suffragist consumption or for the consumption of the general public.

¹⁰⁴ "Good Work in Old Virginia," 9 February 1918, in folder "Newspaper Clippings," box 54, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

The League of Women Voters took a similar stance on race. The LWV remained silent on the issue of race but did not admit black women into the organization until long after 1920. After the vote was won, the organizations continued to avoid direct discussion of race in broadsides and pamphlets urging women to vote. In fact, the broadsides encouraged all members of society during their "Get-out-the-Vote" drives, which occurred once women gained suffrage, but appeared most heavily during election years, such as 1924. Broadsides stated "Be Sure To Cast Your Vote In the Coming Election" and "Vote as You Please—But Vote."¹⁰⁵ Whereas the broadsides and pamphlets make no mention of race, they do not suggest that there should be an exclusion of African Americans. Direct discussion of the "race issue" was absent from these broadsides.

While the official stance of the Leagues was that of near silence, the personal opinions of its members were quite different. In an oral interview, Clark expressed her opinion, stating that she always regretted not integrating the Leagues. She also explained that while she was unable to extend a hand officially to the black community, she could do so individually because of her status in society as an artist which gave her more freedom to widen her circles beyond the "normal" society.

My very intimate friend Lenora Houston, who was an artist...she and I had a studio together—decided that we had to do something to meet colored women, because we were really afraid there'd be riots of sorts. And as we didn't dare ask them to the Equal Suffrage League—this was before the League of Women Voters—was organized because we would have been accused of trying to get the

¹⁰⁵ Flier "Voting," in folder "Handbills," box 113, Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Negro Vote out, we took advantage of being artists (always considered a little erratic) So we had a group of the colored women come to our studio one night.¹⁰⁶

Clark and Houston did not teach the African American women about their voting rights in an official capacity. They used their status as artists to act more liberally on a personal level than they could have as representatives of the ESL. Their roles of authority within the League of Women Voters, however, gave a certain legitimacy to their actions. Douglas Smith described in *Managing White Supremacy* the racial climate in Richmond starting in 1925 and explained that many influential white groups supported the practice of “slow equality.” Upholders of this racial theory believed that blacks were not ready for equality or desegregation and argued that the black community should wait. These methods, used by prominent members of Richmond society, such as Douglas Southall Freeman, endorsed traditional paternal concepts, considered necessary in order to protect the black individual from himself.

Clark's recounting of her meeting with members of the African American community indicated that the black women did not support the theory of slow equality. African American women won the vote just as white women and women, such as Clark and Houston, taught black women how to pass voter registration tests, pay poll taxes, and vote in Virginia. Black women, upon learning this, could spread it to their entire community producing a more informed community and, hopefully making more voting individuals. Clark's and Houston's actions revealed a form of paternalism that existed within the ESL. While their actions supported the black female vote, they believed the black community needed to be protected and taught by the

¹⁰⁶ Oral History Interview with Adele Clark. February 28 1964, Interview g-0014-2 Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel hill, Accessed through Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries

white female activist community. In the same interview Clark explained that she and other LWV members were concerned about racial violence at polling places. In an attempt to prevent an outbreak of violence, Clark and a group of women drove to various polling places to watch, from the car, to ensure peaceful voting. Again the presence of members of the LWV would lend support to African American voters, Clark's actions were again paternalistic. Clark watched black women voters from her car much like a mother watching her children on a playground; if she kept these women in her sight, she believed that they would be safe. Her actions also played into traditional paternalist roles as her presence would prevent violence because it was believed that violence should not occur in the sight of an elite, white lady. Clark and her colleagues used traditional paternalist concepts to protect a very non-traditional occurrence—blacks voting.

The LWV members were of varying opinions. What speaks volumes is that the group chose not to engage in discussions of the racial issues that were arising in Richmond. This could be, in part, because the members believed that Richmond's racial dynamic was in excellent shape, as will be echoed later by members of the YWCA. Perhaps these white women were teaching blacks the voting process in order to improve their own *separate* communities and thus maintain the tradition of white supremacy. In echoing the statements of Suzanne Lebsack, these women could have been much more vocal about maintaining the traditional racial hierarchy, but they were not. The LWV was able to support an ambiguous stance on the topic of race because the organization's purpose was to inform the community, without taking a political stance. Members could argue that they were an organization concerned with maternal issues, such as clean food and drugs, higher wages, and shorter work days, not issues of race. This being said, mentions of race are few and far between in the LWV documents.

The YWCA, like the Leagues, began as a white organization. Unlike the Leagues, the black community came together to create a separate branch of the association in order to enact change in their own community. The African American branch of the YWCA was formed later. Betsy Brinson explained that “[a]ssisted by the Central YWCA and Addie Hunton of the National YWCA staff, the women recruited over two hundred members, thus officially allowing them to establish in 1912 one of the country’s first black branches with the Phyllis Wheatly Branch of the Richmond YWCA.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the Central YWCA's help establishing the Phyllis Wheatly Branch, there seemed to be little connection between the African American association and the other organizations in Richmond. In a report for the National YWCA board, Cordellia A. Winn said in 1926 that there was very little in common between Phyllis Wheatly and the Central YWCA or the other branches.

It has always been considered that Richmond has a good interracial understanding. It has when it comes to staff relationship and the girl relationship. There is no touch with the older groups. The general secretary knows the colored women by name, but has had no touch with their thinking personally; therefore, of course, the Board has no touch with them. There has been no committee on colored work except in name. One was started while I was there and [the groups] function set up.”¹⁰⁸

Winn’s statement that Richmond had a “good interracial understanding” can be seen as reflecting the standing of the groups as well as the standing of the city. Richmond and, largely, Virginia elite white policy toward the black community was not merely one of legal restrictions or Jim Crow laws, but rather a policy of "separation by consent," although African Americans

¹⁰⁷ Betsy Brinson, “Helping Others to help Themselves: History of the Richmond YWCA,” 5.

¹⁰⁸ “Report of Miss Cordellia A. Winn, April 1926”, National Board, Local Association Microfilm, Files: Virginia, Microdex no: 6, Betsy Brinson Papers. Virginia Historical Society.

never "consented" to this separation. Smith explained that "[i]ntent on maintaining order and stability, practitioners of the idea of managed race relations wholeheartedly supported segregation and disfranchisement but rejected the rigid racial oppressions and violence trumpeted elsewhere in the South."¹⁰⁹ Winn's expression of this sentiment leads the reader to believe that she, too, wondered whether Richmond's race relations were in excellent condition. There were also very few rights guaranteed to an African American citizen of Richmond and separate communities, clubs, and neighborhoods may have existed "by choice", but were often extremely unequal because few funds were appropriated to "black" projects. Smith's argument can also be seen as directly reflecting on the organization of the YWCA. "Black and white Virginians crowded into the commonwealth's cities and towns, straining municipal resources, altering traditional housing patterns, and increasing competition for jobs. In response, elite whites joined leading blacks on interracial committees and discussed the most pressing concerns but finessed professions of civility and amity to evade any meaningful reform."¹¹⁰ Winn's words support those of Smith's as she argued that the efforts to aid black workers had just been words and not seriously effective. Winn differed with Smith's interpretation of genteel paternalist Richmond because in this 1926 address to the national YWCA she argued that previous efforts did not bring about any real change and were not effective enough and sought to change this. In Smith's *Managing White Supremacy* it was prominent members of the African American community who began campaigns of passive resistance and vocal discontent in order to draw attention to the inequality that existed in Richmond and Virginia's genteel version of "separate but equal."

¹⁰⁹ J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 4.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 5.

Winn's apparent dissatisfaction with the committees surrounding interracial efforts, despite her concession that Richmond's race relations were good, led her to set up a committee to address the needs of black female workers in Richmond. It is unclear how effective her efforts were, but there were other changes that suggested a larger movement toward actual racial cooperation. Brinson argued that “[a]n important part of the Richmond YWCA's history was its early attempt in improving race relations. Although separate facilities existed for black and white women within the Richmond YWCA until the 1960s, efforts to promote interracial goodwill began in 1925 when a member of the Phyllis Wheatly Committee of Management was invited to sit on the Central YWCA Board of Directors.”¹¹¹ The Richmond YWCA began to incorporate slowly a more equal standing between their black and white members.

The YWCA, much like the Leagues, took a more progressive and liberal stance on issues of race during the 1920s. The YWCA worked with its black membership, first to begin their organization and then, in the 1920s, to create an interracial relationship. This was because the National YWCA pushed for positive race relations in all of their local branches and the national association believed strongly in sisterhood—that all women could learn from each other. Richmond's local associations could have continued their disassociated branches, keeping white from black, but leading members encouraged racial communications and criticized previous efforts that failed. The YWCA, though in the conservative south, was a progressive and activist group and therefore contained more liberal thinking minds. Smith pointed to Lucy Randolph Mason, who was a member of both the YWCA and the Leagues and a prominent member of Richmond society and who believed in racial justice. Mason, who wrote the religious suffragist pamphlets, was the Secretary of the Industrial Department of the YWCA. Smith described

¹¹¹ Brinson, “Helping Others to Help Themselves,” 5.

Mason as “[a] tireless champion of African Americans, women, and laborers, Mason committed her life to ending the oppression that resulted from white supremacy and the South's low-wage economy.”¹¹² Much like the membership of the League, which included Mason, the YWCA had members who believed in uplifting all elements of society in a time when issues of race became more prominent as the Ku Klux Klan grew in popularity. Also like the League of Women Voters, the YWCA had more conservative members who believed in genteel racism and white supremacy.

Smith's work, *Managing White Supremacy*, began in the 1920s. Smith pointed to elements that the members of the Leagues and the YWCA were recognizing before 1929. Smith's work examined the growing discontent with white elites' efforts to placate the black community both within the black and non-elite white groups. This ambiguous situation allowed the Leagues and the YWCA to play a role in racial involvement that both supported the message of “slow equality” and helped create dissent. Individuals within the groups aided African Americans to create a stronger black community. Clark taught black women how to navigate the confusing system of voting rights in Virginia in an era where many believed that the black vote should be limited or prohibited. Mason supported the rights of black workers when the only jobs available to African Americans were unregulated or unsupported by the government, such as domestic service. Smith argued that women such as Mason were known and respected by the black community as supporters of equal rights and fair legislation.¹¹³

Although there were members of these associations whose racial beliefs were considered extreme, there were others, such as Mary-Cooke Branch Munford who demanded “that elites

¹¹² Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 12.

¹¹³ Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 12.

such as herself control the pace of racial and social change.”¹¹⁴ Munford, and others like her, tempered the efforts of those like Mason and Clark. While Munford supported improved conditions for Richmond's black community, she worked exclusively through the paternalist concept of activism, not giving the power of change to the black community but maintaining social hierarchies and making African American activists dependent on white elites. These conflicting concerns both supported the black activists' role in taking care of their own communities and created growing discontent within the elitist activist system in the next decade described by Smith. What is missing from this narrative is the voice of the black activists themselves; a topic which is out of the scope of this work. Clark, Houston, and Mason's recollections of their activist works are one sided, a white woman “giving” the black woman the power. Black women and men were not passive recipients of social change but activists in their own right as described by Elsa Barkley Brown. In white female activists' description, however, these women were able to join with Virginia “traditions” of race activism and suggested that the white woman acted as a “mother” to the black, which would have been more acceptable than a suggestion that black women were capable by themselves.

In examining the ESL's association with white supremacy, Lebsock discussed the organization's racial policy as compared to our present conception of equality. She explained that present historians may criticize the ESL's efforts, as their policy toward race may not be as vocally in support of equality as one may hope. In defense of the white suffragists Lebsock argued that “a number of suffragists turned up among the South's most forward-thinking white people.”¹¹⁵ Smith maintained that the interracial organizations and programs were run by white elites and often stifled true equality. In reviewing the actions of these organizations, both

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 12.

¹¹⁵ Lebsock, “Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy,” 83.

conclusions are true. In an attempt to connect themselves with the “traditions” of Virginia, Richmond activists continued on their path of moderation, asking for change while using the concepts of paternalism and maternalism that had been effective before 1920. Allying themselves with policies of traditionalism allowed women in the YWCA and Leagues to effect change in a manner that was deemed acceptable and would permit more women to join these groups. If these women had been more outspoken, they might have lost their respectability and thus lost their effectiveness in the growing conservatism of Richmond.

Race, Social Religion, Motherhood and Tradition--Revisited

Although the uses of race, social religion, motherhood and tradition are here separated from one another for analytical purposes, they were not mutually exclusive. All of these “traditional” arguments were used, sometimes in the same document, sometimes combined together in one thought. In the YWCA’s report 1913 on *Social Morality from the Christian Standpoint*, a guideline for sexual education, reminded leaders that “Both younger and older girls need to be carefully introduced into the realm of nature, patriotism, and religion in order that their affections may be definitely directed toward ideals by which they are enriched and deepened and at the same time purified.”¹¹⁶ The women of the YWCA and the Leagues knew that by teaching these gender standards, they were able to widen their place in society. Women in these groups, therefore, combined notions of religiosity and motherhood or patriotic motherhood to accomplish these goals. E. Peabody Dahl in “Suffrage, A Woman’s Right and Duty,” combined concepts of religion and motherhood. “Verily, Verily, yea; and the training instilled in childhood E’er should be guarded and guided by her who saw its inception.... Queen of the home and the

¹¹⁶ *Report of the Commission on Social Morality from the Christian Standpoint*, 4.

realm, the woman whom God hath provided.”¹¹⁷ Dahl combined the use of religious language with the traditional concept of motherhood, making women’s place and women’s connection to children holy. Bruggeman found this to be true in women’s use of public history, especially in the commemoration of birthplaces. Birthplaces were closely tied to motherhood and were remembered as places where mothers raised men who became great. By reminding the public that great men had great mothers, women, both within the activist community and outside of it, asserted that women were an important part of any child’s life and, therefore, should be protected, and given the power to protect. Writers seeking to widen their circles of influence wrote about the changing roles. “We are living in an age of immense and fundamental changes, in which is taking place a shifting of the very basis of society,” wrote Mason.¹¹⁸ In arguing that these roles were changing, women could also use the connections between motherhood and history to show that the future leaders of the state, and possibly the country, needed women to have a greater role in society and needed full citizenship.

Although race was a topic on which both organizations kept quiet, Robertson wrote that the use of motherhood and religion connected African American women to the causes of the YWCA. “White women in the YWCA, especially class-privileged women, spoke of womanhood as universal; they argued that ...there was a ‘bond of common womanhood deeper than all racial separateness.’”¹¹⁹ Among the shared traits of womanhood was the need to be mothers and the Christian spirit. Although white elites used these methods to create a “sisterhood” of many women, African American women also employed them in order to encourage racial equality within the YWCA. “Black women in the YWCA used the language of Christianity in their efforts

¹¹⁷ Dahl, “Suffrage, A Woman’s Right and Duty,” 2.

¹¹⁸ Mason, *The Social and Religious Aspect of the Suffrage Movement*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations and the YWCA*, 2. Robertson quoted Lily Hardy Hammond, a southern leader in the YWCA.

to persuade, cajole, and even shame their white sisters into extending the full blessings of fellowship and citizenship to all.”¹²⁰ Although beyond the scope of this paper, Robertson’s work examined the actions of both white YWCA members and black, showing that both groups were active participants in the organization.

Placing one traditional argument alongside another enhanced the activists' arguments. In doing so, female YWCA and League members strengthened gender standards in an attempt to preserve the special position women were believed to have in society. African American women were also able to use the gender standards that united women in “Christian sisterhood” to continue their activist goals. The organizations understood that they were using accepted gender roles and traditions as tools to expand their rights in society. Activist women in groups such as the YWCA taught these traditions to their members, believing that they had a positive effect on the women. Once these lessons were learned, women of all classes would have a connection to one another, encouraging sisterhood and organization.

¹²⁰ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations and the YWCA*, 2.

Conclusion

The Equal Suffrage League experienced a dramatic change in organization when the 19th amendment was ratified. Women in the ESL were dedicated to winning the right to vote for women. Once won, the ESL no longer needed to fight for the right, but many members continued their work in some form. The League of Women Voters was formed in November 1920 to promote citizenship education and for the protection of women's rights. Much of the legislation that was promoted by the LWV began under the ESL. In many ways, the LWV was a continuation of the ESL, which had always been a multi-issue organization dedicated to the protection of women and their legal rights. Members of the LWV continued their campaign to protect women's right to vote and encourage women to vote. This action goes against what many historians, such as William Henry Chafe and Estelle B. Freedman, once argued. Chafe and Freedman asserted that once women won the vote they no longer had a reason to come together in common cause. Since women had no issue to support, the "sisterhoods" that developed during the struggle for the vote faded away. This was untrue of the ESL and the LWV as these organizations were not single-issue groups. The members of the ESL came together to fight for suffrage. Once organized, the elite ESL members found that there were many issues that affected women and children and did not limit themselves to fighting for suffrage. The organization also

supported the League of Nations after World War I, pension plans for mothers, child-labor laws, the 8-hour work days, and clean food and drugs laws. This diversity of interest in the ESL went beyond the ratification of the suffrage amendment and allowed the organization to continue into the following decades. Once enfranchised, it was necessary for women to learn how to use the vote. Virginia's polling policies were complicated. As a result active members of the LWV studied the laws concerning voter rights and registration and taught other women how to maneuver within the difficult system. By studying these laws, the women were also able to argue for changing them. As many ESL members continued their work into the LWV, they were already experienced activists and well versed in the laws, and had connections, either through blood lines or work experience, to make their goals attainable.

The ESL experienced a massive change into the LWV. Suffrage was a major platform for the Equal Suffrage League. Once enfranchised the group had to change its focus. With many of the same members from the ESL, the LWV had a strong, experienced activist membership that could move the organization beyond the suffrage questions and into teaching women their new rights. In doing so, the organization did not drastically change their arguments for or against issues, nor their tactics in achieving their goals. Arguments that were considered at the core of “womanhood” continued.

The Young Women’s Christian Association did not experience such a major change. Obtaining the vote did not substantially change the group's goal, which was the protection of young, single, women in the city. Increasing numbers of women came to Richmond to work and the organization expanded during the 1920s. This increase in women workers led to the increase of female YWCA workers, who became secretaries and researched the conditions of working women, often examining industrial factories and living with wage-earning women. These actions

offered many young, college-educated women the experience of witnessing the lives of factory women, who worked long hours in hot factories, often for little pay. These experiences continued to create a “sisterhood” between middle-class women and their working-class counterparts, even if this “sisterhood” was one sided or romanticized by the middle-class women. The YWCA, which began after-work activities in the 1800s, continued to offer programs that taught working class women accepted standards of femininity. The YWCA continued its activist efforts after 1920 using much of the same means as before 1920. As the YWCA's main goal did not change in 1920 there was no need to “retool” their organization as the League of Women Voters had to do.

From 1915 to 1925 women in the Young Women’s Christian Association and the Leagues continued their activism using many of the “traditional” tactics. Motherhood and public traditions were used from the inception of the groups to well beyond 1920. Motherhood was the justification for women’s activism; women could expand their sphere, which had been considered exclusively in the home, into the public domain. Motherhood was seen as a uniting force, something with which all women could identify, even if they did not have children. It was a common conception, however, that women who were away from their families and their own mothers could easily be swayed by corrupted males in society. Women taking up the role of mother to young working women prevented this potential abuse of women. Upper class women believed it their responsibility to protect young women who did not have the protection of their families. Women continued the use of motherhood after the vote was won because it was an appropriate role for women and one that was believed to be needed.

Beyond 1920 women from the YWCA and League argued that women should protect their female companions in order to maintain their status in society and to protect the rich history and traditions of the area. The organizations wanted to protect women as individuals while

maintaining the traditions of the South. Although both groups were activist in nature they maintained the culture of their society, not attempting to completely change it. The groups taught traditions as a reaction to the changing society. Women wanted the vote in order to regulate these changes and maintain women's position in society, which was considered special and separate. In the "Report on Social Morality from the Christian Standpoint," a report that explained the YWCA policy on how women, based on age, should be introduced to sexual education. "The material to be presented should tend to develop a healthy sense of romance, by means of poetry (such as the story of the Holy Grail), pageantry, heraldry, Old World folk lore, hero tales: to modernize this sense of romance by study of national or community customs and local color, of the "Knights and ladies of today"—their manners and customs; to spiritualized the laws of life, by means, for example, of the Christmas story; to lead to discussion of the fundamental laws of ethics—honor, faithfulness, right and wrong, and helpfulness."¹²¹ Women in the YWCA and the LWV taught women these moralities in order to create a consensus among women and maintain women's role in society.

Race, while discussed less often than the other "traditions" arguments, gained prominence in the organizations after 1920, in the YWCA more so than the LWV. The YWCA increased connections with African American organizations including inviting one of the leaders to participate in the central YWCA's organization. Nancy Marie Robertson discussed the national YWCA's encouragement of improved race relations in *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946*. J. Douglas Smith examined the wider racial situation in Virginia in *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*. His analysis began in the 1920s, continued into the 1930s, and traced the increasing discontent between

¹²¹ *Report on Social Morality from the Christian Standpoint*, in folder "YWCA History Background, Materials On", #143", Betsy Brinson Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

African American citizenship and the programs and social regulations set up by the white elite. Because of the increasing involvement with interracial groups, women in the YWCA and the LWV were encouraged to widen their efforts into interracial activism.

Although social religion and Christian sisterhood ceased to be used as a platform by the LWV, the YWCA continued use of Christianity in activism. Robertson argued that African American women would use the concept of Christian sisterhood in order to sway white leaders in the direction of racial equality.¹²² The Christian focus did not fade away after 1920, and, although the height of social religion faded from prominence, the activist spirit associated with Christianity did not.

The LWV did not use a Christian message in its works in any significant way after 1920. It relied on understandings of motherhood and traditions as its main means of activist expression in this decade. The LWV may have abandoned use of social religion as it did not wish to conflict with the separation of church and state. The LWV was a non-partisan organization and generally only supported laws that protected women and children and provided education on elections and voting.

Although this examination of women's activism in the YWCA and the Leagues ends in 1925, the groups continued their work well beyond that date. The LWV began to focus more heavily on women's work in factories, arguing for protective legislation for these women. Raising the minimum wage was an important cause that women of the League and YWCA supported. Fliers argued that the minimum wage needed to be raised. "Many women struggle to support themselves and their dependents on pay as low as from 8 to 15 cents an hour. Long hours

¹²²Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA 1906-1946*, 2.

and low wages are twin evils, and those who are paid least often work long hours.”¹²³ The League did not just support the cause of women. The organization argued that wages should not only be raised for women, but for men as well. The flier continued “Should men be included [in wage increases]? Eventually, yes. So far state minimum wage laws in this country have been limited to women and persons under 21. Changing public opinion must sooner or later be reflected in the courts, permitting inclusion of men in wage laws.”¹²⁴ “Living Wages for Women Workers” was a flier created and endorsed by the League of Women Voters and The Young Women Christian Association. However, it was also endorsed by the Council of Jewish Women, the Virginia Committee of National Consumers League, the Virginia Federation of Labor and all affiliated Central Labor Councils, and the Railroad Transportation Brotherhoods. This cooperation showed that women’s organizations did not fade away after 1920 and would work with others for a common goal.

The Richmond League of Women Voters offered education on voting rights and political figures but the women of this organization worked to make voting in Virginia easier after 1920. Lorraine Gates Schuyler in *The Weight of their Votes: Southern Women and the Suffrage Question* argued that women continued their activist efforts after 1920 and beyond the “female realm.” Once women attained the vote they began to change the voting practices and encourage the movement of polling places to more appropriate spaces away from male-dominated areas. Women, Schuyler explained, prevented corruption and voter fraud and argued for a simpler voting system. Virginia’s voting system was extremely complicated; voters had to pass literacy tests pay poll taxes to prove that they had paid for registration. In marking the ballot, one would cross out all the candidates for whom one did *not* want to vote, leaving the chosen candidates’

¹²³ Flier, “Living Wages for Women Workers,” in folder “Handbills,” box 113, Adele Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

¹²⁴ “Living Wages For Women Workers.”

name unmarked, making voting even more difficult. The Richmond LWV, like the Virginia LWV, fought against these policies, feeling that they were too confusing for the average voter. In one flier the LWV argued for direct primaries. The flier stated: “[e]ver since women got the vote, the Direct Primary, which enables all voters to take part in making nominations, has been under fire. Its opponents, using recent abuses of the law as a pretext for renewed attacks, seem to be more vocal than ever before.”¹²⁵ In arguments such as this, the LWV did not use the “traditional” stance, instead, the group addressed each objection to the law separately. This technique was not new to the Leagues or the YWCA. The activist women had often used the point-counter-point format to argue their view, but the LWV began to expand their circles further, addressing issues that affected all citizens.

Before 1920, the YWCA and the Leagues seemed to have a very similar mission: to uplift society starting with women. These groups wanted to make Richmond a better place, a city that could be a model for other southern cities to follow. The YWCA encouraged use of religion, sisterhood, motherhood, and paternalism in order to accomplish these goals. The Equal Suffrage League used the same tactics in order to argue for the vote. After the vote these groups continued to use these methods where needed, but the organization expanded its goals, and specified its platform. The LWV focused on voting rights, simplifying the election system in the city of Richmond and in the State, and teaching women how to vote. The Richmond LWV maintained it was a non-partisan organization and defended this stance in public papers and through fliers. The LWV existed to petition and to serve the voters, both male and female. The YWCA expanded as well. It focused on interracial cooperation through the Phyllis Wheatly Branch and in the city. Women also began working as social workers and labor secretaries. These women took on

¹²⁵ “The Direct Primary—Objections Answered,” in folder “Fliers and Handbills,” in box 113, Adele Clark Papers, Special Collections, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

acceptable and paid positions within the YWCA, positions that had been previously unpaid activist work.

The Leagues and the YWCA were created in response to changing times. The YWCA wanted to protect women who came to Richmond to find work. The YWCA offered a place for women who lacked a mother figure and offered protection. The ESL and LWV were organized in response to the changing status of women who were moving from the home into the working world. The League's elite members wanted the vote in order to pass legislation that would protect women and children and other individuals in need. In addition to aiding women workers, the Leagues and the YWCA also created profession positions for women. The League made it acceptable for women to work within the government and, in 1923, two women-- Sarah Lee Fain, of Norfolk, and Helen Timmons Henderson, of Buchanan County--were elected to the Virginia General Assembly. Six women served; on the Virginia General Assembly in 1926, making women's presence in the General Assembly more acceptable and thus an appropriate career for women. The YWCA offered women positions as secretaries. These women did not only sit behind desks, but also went into the field to do research on factory and racial conditions. Women held important positions in the organization, encouraging other women to attend college and become educated for occupations. Despite the increasing number of socially appropriate jobs for women, few women became political office holders, and many only held a job for a few years before getting married.

Some women did make lifelong careers out of their activist ideology. Some activists never married and continued their work well beyond the 1920s. Nora Houston and Adele Clark, important members in the ESL, moved into the work of the League of Women Voters. Houston and Clark lived and worked together in several organizations, some of which reached beyond the

realm of their other activist work. Clark served as the ESL's president, and Houston led the "Get-Out-The-Vote" campaign, which encouraged women to vote. The Adele Clark Papers, now kept at James Branch Cabell Library, show the varied experiences of both women. Both were artists and were involved in the art community for many decades. In 1923, when the Equal Rights Amendment was proposed, Clark spoke in open opposition to it. The *Encyclopedia of Virginia* remembers Clark as:

[A] founding member of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, nineteen years the chair of Virginia's League of Women Voters, dean of women at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, New Deal-era field worker, and an accomplished artist and arts advocate. Clark called politics and art her "creative spirits," and she exemplified the crucial role women played in the social reform movements of the twentieth century, applying her sharp intellect, artistic skills, and fiery determination to championing both women and the arts.¹²⁶

Clark, living to the age of 100, retained her belief that women should remain a protected class, openly speaking out against the Equal Rights Amendment, believing that it would only cause harm to the status of women. Clark led a long and colorful life, dying in 1983. Houston predeceased Clark in 1942.

Lucy Randolph Mason, who wrote the *Divine Discontent* and other material for the ESL, worked as a leader in the LWV and was also involved in the Richmond YWCA. She became the industrial secretary to the Richmond YWCA in 1923 and continued to work for the YWCA until the 1930s when she left Virginia to work for the Congress on Industrial Organization. Mason remained dedicated to the equality and welfare of African Americans, women, and workers until

¹²⁶ Jennifer Davis McDaid, "Adele Clark (1882–1983)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Ed. Brendan Wolfe. 4 Apr. 2012. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. 17 May. 2011 <http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Clark_Adèle_1882-1983>.

her death in 1959. Several works have been written about her life and work, including her autobiography *To Win These Rights*.

Mason, Clark, and Houston are examples of Richmond women who remained in their activist roles in the years after suffrage was attained. These women continued to be well respected in their activist work.

In discussing the activism of women such as Mason, Clark, and Houston, as well as the general membership of the YWCA and Leagues, the question "did these women sincerely believe what they are arguing?" arose. It seems that women in these groups truly believed that women held a special place in society and that their presence in society was needed in order to create community uplift. Mason has been examined by multiple biographers and historians and all seem to share the opinion that Mason was individually dedicated to her activist work for the working classes, women, and African Americans. Mason dedicated her life to these goals, to the point of being considered a "traitor" to her class in Richmond.

Issues of motherhood, social religion, tradition and did not go away after 1920. Activists in the LWV and the YWCA continued to rely on these tactics in their work. The issue of race continued as it had before the amendment and the silences on race by the YWCA and the ESL created an unequal representation within these organizations because of segregation. Some of the leading individuals supported racial equality, but, as this was not the official stance of the groups, it would be difficult to gauge a generalized sincerity for integration and racial equality of the organization as a whole.

The five years after the ratification of the suffrage amendment brought continued activism in the Richmond YWCA and LWV and for the individuals who worked in these groups. Women expanded their roles in government, being elected to political positions in the Virginia

Legislature and in many local positions. In December 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was introduced to the United States' Congress for the first time. Alice Paul, a leading member of the National Woman's Party (NWP), an organization that fought for equal suffrage before the 19th amendment, drafted the amendment. The tactics of this group were considered extreme by the ESL and by its parent organization the National American Suffrage Association. The NWP and Alice Paul were best known for their protests outside of the White House by a group dubbed the "Silent Sentinels," actions which led to the arrest of the members--an act that was considered too extreme by the more moderate groups. Nancy F. Cott stated that the group was "[t]he one organization that openly declared itself feminist."¹²⁷ The members were also known to go on hunger strikes, leading to their forced feeding while in prison. This was a brand of activism that was very different from what the Leagues supported. The ERA, proposed in 1923, stated that: "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."¹²⁸ This amendment supported by the National Women's Party seemed to go against everything that the LWV supported in protective legislation and also would remove the "special" status of women that the YWCA and the RLWV fought to secure. Christine Bolt argued that the "ERA was opposed because it offered a 'blanket cure' to a complicated set of ills; and since it would 'never be adopted,' the time spent on it was seen as wasted time."¹²⁹ Although the LWV spoke out against the amendment, some female workers argued that the protective legislation that the LWV and the YWCA supported hindered their equality in the workforce and made working conditions more difficult. Cott summed up the arguments against the Equal Rights Amendment:

¹²⁷ Nancy F. Cott, "Feminist Politics in the 1920: The National Woman's Party." In *Journal of American History*. no.1: 43- 68. *American History and Life EBSCOhost* (accessed April 8, 2012).

¹²⁸ Christine Bolt, *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain From the 1790s to the 1920s*. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 262.

¹²⁹ Bolt, *The Women's Movements*, 263.

They assumed that an amendment would invalidate sex based labor laws or, at least, throw them (and welfare laws designed for mothers and widows) into the courts for protracted argument, during which time women would lose needed benefits. They argued that sex discriminations would be more efficiently and accurately removed from legal codes by attacking each case. Opponents of the amendment asserted that women workers, wary of employers' freedom to exploit them, valued sex-based labor legislation and that maximum-hour laws for women had benefited men, too, in factories where male workers could not continue operations once female employees had left for the day.¹³⁰

Women in groups such as the LWV, feared the power that the ERA would give to legislators who may not have the best interests of women in mind. Before gaining suffrage, women had argued that men could not understand the special needs of women and children and had supported protective legislation as a means of subverting men's interest in money. In Richmond Clark was a long-time opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment and believed that its ratification would lead to the failure of securing a special status for women that the LWV and the YWCA had secured.

The election of a new governor, Harry Flood Byrd in 1925 changed Virginia politics. Byrd's governorship was characterized as progressive, creating new reforms, some of which had been supported by the LWV and the YWCA. Robert T. Hawkes Jr. in "The Emergence of a Leader: Harry Flood Byrd, Governor of Virginia, 1926-1930," described Byrd as a "young man who...represented a new progressive spirit in the Old Dominion."¹³¹ Byrd worked to simplify the government of Virginia, remove offices deemed "unnecessary," and moved to improve the

¹³⁰ Cott, "Feminist Politics in the 1920: The National Woman's Party," 60.

¹³¹ Robert T. Hawkes Jr., "The Emergence of a Leader: Harry Flood Byrd, Governor of Virginia, 1926-1930," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 82, No. 3, (Jul., 1974): 259.

school and road systems throughout the Commonwealth. Although Byrd's "administration would be the most significant and progressive administration in twentieth-century Virginia", argued Hawkes, it was not always the brand of progressive policy that the women of the League and YWCA supported. Byrd was described as a "friend" to the working man. His record with the working woman was not as sterling. Many women accused Byrd of ignoring female voters. Ronald L. Heinemann in *Harry Byrd of Virginia* wrote "Byrd made a strong effort to involve women in his campaign, despite his very weak record on their behalf."¹³² Heinemann stated that the activists of Virginia had mixed feelings about the potential governor. Mary Cooke Branch Munford conceded that she would give Byrd her vote but argued that many women in Richmond felt he left them out of his campaign. "Adele Clark, president of the Virginia League of Women Voters, was less impressed and supported [Walter] Mapp."¹³³ Although Byrd attempted to gain the vote of Virginia women, his advisors argued that, despite the opinion of some women leaders, there were women who would vote Byrd no matter what.¹³⁴ "Byrd's votes on women's issues clearly placed him among the traditionalists. Throughout his life he treated women in a gentlemanly but condescending manner."¹³⁵ Byrd, as Clark and Munford argued, was not a friend to the political woman. He believed that woman's true place was within the home and not in politics.¹³⁶ Byrd also supported a "traditionalist" view of race and was in favor of segregation. Byrd argued against suffrage for women, stating that the vote for white women would mean the vote for black, which he believed would lead to "Negro Rule".¹³⁷ Although Byrd supported anti-lynching legislation, which would have been supported by Richmond's female activists, he did

¹³² Ronald L. Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 54.

¹³³ Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 54.

¹³⁴ Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 54.

¹³⁵ Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 27

¹³⁶ Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 27.

¹³⁷ Heniemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 27

so to “quell public unrest and preserve a law-and-order image for the Old Dominion that was conducive to outside investment.”¹³⁸ Later in his career as senator of Virginia, Byrd supported the closing of Virginia schools to prevent integration in the “Massive Resistance” campaign. Byrd's election as governor signaled a change for women in the Leagues and in the YWCA as Byrd championed a “progressive” campaign, but not one that championed the issues these groups cared about. “In spite of its noteworthy accomplishments, the 1926 General Assembly was not marked by liberality. It rejected the federal Child Labor amendment (which Byrd opposed), killed a compulsory education bill that would have raised the required school age from twelve to fourteen, and, at the governor’s request, cut in half a special appropriation for matching gifts to the University of Virginia.”¹³⁹ The activist womanhood of Richmond continued their work but faced new challenges coming up against the “Byrd Machine”, and a governor who believed that women’s true place was in the home and not in the workplace or in the halls of legislature.

The 1920s found Richmond's female activists between the Equal Rights Amendment and the conservatism of the new Governor Byrd. This middling course was not new to the LWV, which had struggled between anti-suffrage organizations such as the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage and more liberal organizations, such as the National Women’s Party. Some of these opponents were familiar ones as it was the National Women’s Party who supported the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, and Byrd voted against the Equal Suffrage Amendment in 1920. The YWCA also was capable of maneuvering in these conflicting circles because of its Christian message within the community, although it supported protective legislation for women. The work of these two organizations was supported by local activists and, on larger scale, through the National YWCA and League of Women Voters.

¹³⁸ Heniemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 63.

¹³⁹ Heniemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 62.

This thesis focused on the prominent, white membership of the YWCA, the Equal Suffrage League and the League of Women Voters in Richmond, Virginia. The leading memba of these organizations were women of “leisure”, well educated, from well-to-do families, and who were able to spend their time working for causes they believed to be just. This thesis excluded African American women and how they were affected by the passage of the suffrage amendment, as well as only giving a slight view into the African American activist movements in Richmond. Black women, when discussed in this paper were viewed through the eyes of the white women who were employing paternalist concepts in order to “protect” the black woman. The African American population of Richmond had a strong commitment to community and to activism. Douglas Smith in *Managing White Supremacy: Race Politics and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* described the growing discontent with the white supremacist management of race relations in Virginia around the 1920s.¹⁴⁰ Activism occurred on a day-to-day basis among the African American community in order to test the paternalism that enforced racial segregation. Elsa Barkley Brown also examined black female activists in her work “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St Luke.” Brown discussed what black female activism looked like, analyzed why black women were not considered “suffragists” and looked at prominent African American leader, Maggie Lena Walker who ran on the “Lily Black” ticket in 1921 for the superintendent of instruction and was the first Virginia woman to run for a statewide office.¹⁴¹ Nancy Marie Robertson focused on interracial relations throughout the south in the YWCA from 1909 to 1949. She examined the many ways in which women employed “Christian sisterhood” to unite women across racial lines, as well as how

¹⁴⁰ J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002),12.

¹⁴¹ Elsa Barkely Brown, “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke,” *Signs*, 14.32 (1989): 412.

African American women used “sisterhood” to urge their white female counterparts to expand their interracial relations.¹⁴² Robertson’s study takes place over a forty year period and was not exclusive to one area. While these works expand knowledge of African American activism, there remains a need to examine the particulars of African American female activism in Richmond.

In examining the YWCA and Leagues one only sees the upper class women’s view of these organizations, preventing assessment of the agency of working class women. Working class women were not a rarity in Richmond, Virginia, but their voices are seldom heard in activist groups. Were there any working class activist groups in Richmond? How did working class or lower class women workers ‘use’ the YWCA, how did they respond to the programs of the League of Women Voters, and were working class women suffragists, or anti-suffragists? A more in-depth study of Richmond’s working class women may answer some of these questions.

The wave that came to the shores of Virginia and sparked the female activist movement did not recede in 1920 when women won the vote, activism continued under the surface of the water. Members of the YWCA and ESL did not stop working toward their activist goals in 1925 when Byrd was elected Governor of Virginia. Women in these groups were dedicated to the improved conditions of workers. William Henry Chafe argued in “Women’s History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal” that the progressive spirit continued beyond 1920 and became a form of legislation in the 1930s when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president and his progressive wife Eleanor influenced the “New Deal,” reforms.¹⁴³ Women in Richmond became committed to the New Deal reforms, and Lucy Randolph Mason struck up a friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt that has been documented in

¹⁴² Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1904-46*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 13.

¹⁴³ William Henry Chafe, “Women’s History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal.” in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*. ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsack. (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1993), 273.

letters that the two women exchanged. The Great Depression encouraged more women to engage in further activist efforts. World War II encouraged more women to join in to an activist culture in order to support the troops and “bring the boys home.” Virginia women did not stop being active, especially with leaders such as Adele Clark, who lived into the 1980s, although her understanding of female independence may have seemed passé to 1970s female activists. The lives of the women from the Leagues and the YWCA continued beyond their work in these groups, and the groups continued beyond the lives of the women. These lines should be traced in order for a more detailed understanding of the female activist culture of Richmond.

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