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Libby Jean Cavanaugh
Iowa State University

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Opposition to female enfranchisement: the Iowa anti-suffrage movement

by

Libby Jean Cavanaugh

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Program of Study Committee:
Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, Major Professor
Christopher Curtis
Kimberly Conger

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2007

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INTRODUCTION

All foundational change within American society has occurred with a struggle. The challenge of change derives from the dichotomy of groups promoting and opposing a shift in traditional values and roles. The debates, struggles and changes that occurred from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first few decades of the twentieth century caused profound shifts in American society. Established institutions which valued the importance of the family and the division of roles for men and women were disputed. As a result, one important debate challenged the roles of women across America: woman suffrage.

During the nineteenth century, the changes of industrialization shifted the roles of men and women, altering their placement within society. With this change in economic opportunity, men began to work outside the household, while women remained in private at home. Thus, a restraint was placed on women's public roles as men advanced into public involvement. As a result, each gender became subject to different work rules and discipline. As the decades of the nineteenth century continued, the respective gender roles became even more separated. Women felt increased pressure to view their roles as mothers and housewives as fulfilling social and political goals, however, some Americans opposed this strict divide.¹

By the mid-nineteenth century, groups of Americans sought to adjust this divide by opposing the legality of male-only enfranchisement. These men and women believed suffrage for women would provide females equal access into the political arena. As the years progressed, an increased number of men and women supported female

enfranchisement. This growth meant some Americans were willing to shift the nineteenth century ideas of exclusive male involvement in public politics. Thus, female enfranchisement meant an increased role for women involved with politics and away from their role in the home. This changing attitude caused concern for many other Americans who viewed woman suffrage as detrimental to society. These Americans grouped together to form an opposition group: the anti-suffragists.

Through the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous Americans opposed female enfranchisement. The national opposition to woman suffrage started with small groups of wealthy women within Eastern states and spread westward. This anti-suffrage activity began as a reactionary measure against national suffrage organizations and actions also started in the East. As each state across America debated the issue of woman suffrage, the results became national concern. With the growing debates, each state had residents who formed their own defense, including Iowa.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, middle and upper class Iowa women formed informal societies opposing woman suffrage. They used multiple sources and methods to spread their arguments. Until the last few years of the nineteenth century, Iowa anti-suffragists abstained from public speaking based on ideas of female propriety, but still claimed to enter public debates with regret. Some of the sources used by Iowa anti-suffragists derived from the national anti-suffrage organizations. These national groups became important sources of information and aid to anti-suffrage societies in Iowa. This assistance given by the national organizations, however, created some internal problems for anti-suffragists during Iowa's woman suffrage referendum vote in 1916. These problems derived from contradictions found within Iowa anti-suffrage

arguments and national anti-suffrage rhetoric, and illustrate a shift within the entire anti-suffrage movement.

“Woman suffrage is going, not coming.”² In 1916, a group of Iowa women and their supporters—anti-suffragists or antis—argued vigorously against female enfranchisement. Across the United States, anti-suffragists worked to maintain the status quo; however, the arguments these anti-suffrage groups used varied by date and demographic. For Iowa anti-suffragists, the question of woman suffrage emerged most clearly during the 1916 referendum vote. This referendum debate not only provoked arguments between anti-suffragists and suffragists, but also brought out some revealing differences between Iowa anti-suffragists and their national anti-suffrage supporters. These differences give us a clearer sense of how opposition to woman suffrage could relate geographically, whether as a suffragist, anti-suffragist, Easterner or Iowan.

Starting in the 1860s, the Iowa legislature discussed the “woman question.” Men and women in Burlington, Des Moines, Dubuque, and Monticello, Iowa formed local suffrage groups to push suffrage amendments in Iowa.³ Despite countless suffrage defeats, the question of female enfranchisement appeared on the agenda of almost every Iowa General Assembly until passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. The first suffrage amendment proposal in Iowa, which would have stricken the word “male” in the Iowa Constitution, passed during the Thirteenth General Assembly in 1870, but failed to pass in the consecutive session two years later. Decades afterwards, in 1915, yet another proposal arose, but succeeded in passing this hurdle, and therefore submitted to a referendum vote during the June primary the following year, 1916.⁴

This unprecedented action started a burst of anti-suffrage campaigning. Unlike suffragists, who had been formally organized in Iowa before 1916, the local anti-suffragists had only used small societies to defeat suffrage legislation since the 1870s. Thus, anti-suffragists worked hard at the start to form a more cohesive campaign by creating and acquiring literature, teaching and sending out speakers, forming organizations and building membership. Despite these efforts, fewer Iowans joined anti-suffrage societies than joined suffrage groups. This lack of numbers rarely became a problem because anti-suffragists had enough logistical support to defend against the state by state approach used by the suffragists. Thus, as in previous Iowa Assembly votes, Iowa anti-suffragists only became involved during consideration of suffrage legislation, since they only needed a small number of dissenters demonstrating women's opposition to female enfranchisement.⁵

Underlying arguments for national and Iowa anti-suffragists during the nineteenth century stressed that suffrage threatened the Victorian ideas of womanhood. The overall anti-suffrage arguments revolved around two categories: the unique nature of women and the special role played by women in sustaining the family, and ultimately, civilization. Anti-suffragists believed they were the defenders of family, home, community and nation. If women did not fulfill their natural role, then all would fail. The anti-suffragists used the traditional understanding of Victorian womanhood in their rhetoric, arguing women were completely different from men—physically, morally, emotionally and intellectually. The biological and moral arguments provided by anti-suffragists illustrated their deep fears of the changing roles of women. In addition to new scientific

theories mixed with past beliefs, the nineteenth century anti-suffrage arguments were based on Victorian values, democratic ideals and the Bible.

As the decades progressed into the twentieth century, national anti-suffragists noted a shift in American society and recognized a need to adapt. Twentieth century Americans saw a change in the role of women along with the advent of the Progressive Era. The mentality of Progressivism pushed to create reform for the common good of the nation, creating different methods of reform for social issues.⁶ Along with these social reforms, some women believed they could make changes, or stop changes, through public activism. The Progressive mentality highly influenced national anti-suffrage activity and rhetoric. To promote their political cause, national anti-suffragists became more involved in the public arena as well, arguing women could provide better service to their nation without the ballot, contradicting nineteenth century arguments of women's place in the home. As a result, national anti-suffragists shifted their arguments from biological and moral, to moral and pragmatic. While nationally, anti-suffragists shifted arguments, Iowa anti-suffrage rhetoric did not fully parallel. Iowa anti-suffragists still argued lingering nineteenth century rhetoric for the biological nature of women along with moral and the new national pragmatic arguments. This difference in rhetoric caused problems for anti-suffragists during the Iowa debates as both national and Iowa speakers and pamphlets circulated through Iowa.

While these Iowa anti-suffrage organizations created their own arguments and materials during the referendum debate, the national anti-suffrage organizations remained a strong influence. Members of these national anti-organizations believed the Iowa referendum held an important influence to defeat the suffrage cause nationally, as the

Iowa referendum occurred first in 1916 before two other state referendums. Thus, for national anti-suffragists, Iowa had the ability to create momentum for three suffrage defeats or suffrage successes.⁷

Iowa anti-suffrage history illustrates not all anti-suffrage groups shared the same goals, values and mentalities during the debates against female enfranchisement in America. Rather, diversity existed among anti-suffrage groups and their rhetoric. Throughout the decades from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, many anti-suffrage groups noted a change in their actions based on a shift in their argumentative rhetoric. Historians argued that by the early twentieth century all anti-suffrage groups had shifted away from past biological arguments, however, this did not occur in Iowa. Instead, Iowa and national anti-suffrage groups simultaneously argued contradictory rhetoric during the Iowa 1916 referendum. This lack of cohesive arguments and actions caused confusion and conflict for the anti-suffrage movement during the end of the woman suffrage debates. Regardless of the contrasting arguments, anti-suffragists defeated the 1916 referendum vote. This Iowa defeat, however, became the catalyst which led to the shift in national suffrage strategy and the ultimate demise of the anti-suffrage movement.

¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

² "Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage," Pennsylvania Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, 1915, "Anna B. Lawther Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 4.

³ Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 223.

⁴ Ruth A. Gallaher, *Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa: An Historical Account of the Rights of Women in Iowa from 1838-1918* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1918), 200-201; Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: The

Iowa State University Press, 1969), 257-261; Lee Ann Osburn and Steffen W. Schmidt, eds. *Issues in Iowa Politics* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1990), 14; Schwieder, 222.

⁵Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 3; Robert P. J. Cooney, Jr., *Winning The Vote: The triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement* (Santa Cruz: American Graphic Press, 2005), 316; Gallaher, 219; Schwieder, 227.

⁶Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xi-xiii.

⁷Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movement in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 184.

CHAPTER ONE

Mid—Nineteenth Century: The Start to Suffrage Opposition

Arguments for and against female suffrage largely started in the mid-nineteenth century. The origins of some of these arguments, however, derived centuries before. Regardless, many men and women who opposed female suffrage would continue to use these older values and beliefs as their main arguments until they no longer worked for their cause. Through the nineteenth century, national and Iowa antis argued biological and moral arguments to convince the voting population no good could come from woman suffrage. The different anti-suffrage groups continued a cohesive front, arguing parallel rhetoric across the country.

Nineteenth century rhetoric commonly referred to females as the inferior sex. The origin of this perception of female inferiority stemmed back centuries to the development of the Bible as well as to men such as Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle. These were only a few men who made medical and biological justifications of female inferiority based on their physical nature. Americans also largely justified women's inferiority based on Biblical teachings. Some argued women's dependent nature derived from Eve as she originated from Adam, making her ultimately dependant. Similarly, because of woman's second creation to man, this made man the original being and woman only a lesser form of the original, and thus, less perfect. Many who argued against female suffrage during the nineteenth century used the argument for women's inferiority based on Biblical and scholarly teachings.⁸

Victorians continued to use these beliefs to fit into their changing world. The advent of evolutionary biology created even further use for these arguments about the

inferiority of women. This became especially true in the mid to late nineteenth century as the intellectual and emotional centrality of science increased steadily. Victorian science argued that female and male roles differentiated due to evolution.⁹

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution described a process toward greater biological variation and differentiation. Scientists argued that men and women were growing farther and farther apart. As a result, groups like anti-suffragists used this conclusion during the nineteenth century as a foundation for their attack upon woman suffrage. Scientists believed the differences in male and female roles originated from evolution, so anti-suffragists argued that to change this process would violate natural laws of biology and result in the degradation of civilization. Some Darwinist theorists argued that the evolutionary pattern concerning sexual differentiation in species least evolved exhibited female superiority and the most evolved exhibited male superiority. Thus, these scientists argued equality of the sexes only showed an intermediary stage which would lead to the regression of civilization. These scientific arguments rationalized and legitimized the changes occurring in Victorian life.¹⁰

Industrialization also changed economic and social forces in American society, creating an altered environment for the roles of men and women. Economic opportunity and economic change placed men in the public workplace and women in private at home. This created separate work and social rules for each gender, particularly restraining women in public. As a result, some women began to question their roles within the society. Thus, many people, mostly men, initially worked to preserve the existing social relationships by employing medical and biological arguments rooted in the anatomy and physiology of women to rationalize gender roles.¹¹

Many had perpetuated the justification of female inferiority based on misconceptions of the female body. Most men studying the female body did not understand menstrual cycles and its effect on a woman's body. As a result, many practicing as physicians in the mid-nineteenth century believed the cycle caused "hysteria," an irrational state of mind. As a result of the cycles and pregnancies, many believed women were less able to perform the physical and mental labor of men. One nineteenth century doctor claimed that the uterus completely controlled women's bodies, causing mental imbalances.¹² This argument only reiterated women's inferiority and worked to restrict women to their prescribed roles and characteristics.

Victorian ideals of women's natural morality, domesticity, passivity and purity were assumed to have a large biological basis. The scientific community used arguments to support and legitimize all of these characteristics of women. The basis of these arguments derived that men were different from women: women were frailer, had smaller skulls—thus less intelligence—had more delicate muscles, a different nervous system, and women were more prone to have fits of "hysteria" and become more irritable.¹³ All of these arguments related only to women and their reproductive systems.

Women's reproductive system was the rationale for their social and labor role, the cause of their characteristics, and reason for their health problems. Physicians argued that God had made women solely as the producer and raiser of offspring and nothing more. Many tried to justify this medically as they assumed the uterus connected directly to the central nervous system, causing women's 'reflex irritation'— a very commonly diagnosed disease in the mid to late nineteenth century, as a hysteric or uterine disease.¹⁴ Doctors argued that any problem with a woman could be due to the imbalance,

exhaustion, infection or other problems related to her reproductive organs. These medical claims also argued women who did not marry would have more physical and emotional diseases than a married woman because their reproductive organs were not used. If left empty the uterus would cause more diseases in the body. Thus, many argued women's attributes, including physical weakness, sentimentality, purity and virtue, made them unfit for public life.¹⁵

While many viewed Victorian women as the weaker sex due to their menstruation and pregnancy, these women did possess something worthwhile. The population viewed Victorian women as more moral and spiritual than men, thus, closer to the divine. Despite these positive characteristics, women were viewed less in *control* of their morality, less intellectual and prisoners of their animalistic characteristics. Regardless of the fact that men praised women's bodies for their function, women were told to feel shame during pregnancy. Once women's reproductive use had passed, menopause caused a sense of purposefulness. Victorian women's bodies defined their personalities and limited their roles in society.¹⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, some women grew dissatisfied with their prescribed roles. Economic changes allowed more women to move into a middle class lifestyle. These economic changes freed middle class women from subsistence living, and yet confirmed their role in the home as housewife and mother.¹⁷ Biological arguments worked against women's demands for change within higher education, family limitation and political suffrage. While some females called for change, particularly through woman suffrage, other men and women responded in opposition with these biological and physiological arguments. Doctors argued that for women to have a formal

education and perform duties outside the home would use up energies needed for their natural bodily functions, resulting in women who could not achieve their “true womanhood.”¹⁸

This debate against women’s new roles included nineteenth century anti-suffrage individuals and groups. Nationally, anti-suffragists aimed their efforts toward the well-being of women, children, the home and the community. These prominent issues, however, brought anti-suffragists into a more public role. Suffragists and anti-suffragists argued over the appropriate roles of women starting in the late nineteenth century. Many of these women used motherhood and their moral authority as a means to compensate for their exclusion from full access to the public influence.¹⁹

Thus, during the nineteenth century, many women expanded their domestic sphere into the public arena through community service and areas not fully ascribed to men’s or women’s spheres. Women used their own methods to influence politics, regardless if they were suffragists or anti-suffragists. While Victorian women’s attributes included physical weakness, sentimentality, purity and piousness, these emotional characteristics made women perfect as community and moral leaders. While men and women agreed the “home” as the place for women, during the late nineteenth century, for some, the definition of the home spread. Some women argued that the “home” became wherever children and women resided.²⁰

Many women were opponents of suffrage because they wanted to maintain strictly separate spheres. These women wanted men to partake in and rule over the public sphere of politics and business and women in the private or domestic sphere in the home. Suffrage opponents argued men and women had been created for different tasks and roles

in life that should be respected.²¹ Historian Paula Baker explained the extent to which separate spheres aided women. “Many women had a stake in maintaining the idea of separate spheres. It carried the force of tradition and was part of a feminine identity, both of which were devalued by the individualism that suffrage implied. Separate spheres allowed women to wield power of a sort.”²² Thus, for anti-suffragists, the idea of woman suffrage conflicted with and threatened the nineteenth century idea of separate spheres. This led them to their strongest arguments: the belief that woman suffrage would cause women to disregard their homes, families and morals.²³

Based on this main premise of suffrage threatening nineteenth century tradition, the anti-suffragists began to organize. Anti-suffragists organized first on the East coast, with the earliest unofficial organization started in Massachusetts. This group informally organized as a temporary reaction to the suffrage legislation debated within the Massachusetts legislature.²⁴ Suffragists had proposed a sixteenth amendment for woman suffrage in 1868, which brought anti-suffragists together to take action. This first anti-suffrage petition largely grew from Lancaster, Massachusetts and two hundred women from across the state who opposed woman suffrage. After the defeat of this proposed sixteenth amendment, anti-suffragists founded the Woman’s Anti-Suffrage Association officially in Washington D.C. around 1870.²⁵

In 1882, the anti-suffragists from Massachusetts who aided the defeat of the 1868 proposed suffrage amendment officially formed as the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, MAOFESW. Throughout the existence of the organization, its members continually sent money to other states in support of the cause. Two years after their formation, the MAOFESW sent Oregon

financial aid and literature in an attempt to defeat a proposed state suffrage amendment. With these tactics, the organization found success in defeating many proposed state suffrage amendments. After these initial suffrage defeats, the group declined somewhat, but revived again by 1895 with the advent of multiple state proposals for woman suffrage. After its revival, the MAOFESW provided not only finances and literature, but also speakers to multiple states, resources which would eventually reach Iowa.²⁶

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, anti-suffrage organizations began to form rapidly throughout the East coast and spread West. They reached much of their power and influence during the years around the turn of the century, though overall remained a strong force during 1919 and 1920. While these groups eventually became powerful and serious players in the suffrage debates, they started small. They generally originated from public disapproval through church preaching, press, or individual statements of disagreement. Only with the growth and success of the suffrage movement did the anti-suffrage organizations start to appear.²⁷

While Iowa women voiced their concerns in later decades of the suffrage debate, during the nineteenth century Iowa men publicly initiated the anti-suffrage rhetoric. As early as 1838, when Iowa became a territory of the United States, the issue of woman suffrage arose. Males of Iowa argued that woman suffrage would overthrow the whole social system, meaning one of male power, influence and hierarchy. Some men in Iowa argued that just as African Americans should not have the vote, women also should not have enfranchisement. Many believed both of these variables would upset the natural order for white men. This concern over new voters started when white males began drafting the Iowa Constitution and disagreement arose over the issue of African

American male suffrage. They appointed a committee to investigate the matter and concluded that both black male and female suffrage was inconceivable.²⁸ These findings were summed up in the Journal of the Constitutional Convention which noted,

Females by the arbitrary rules of society are excluded and debarred from many things which males consider rights and high privileges—such as the elective franchise, holding office... No one thinks of sympathizing with them in their deprivation. The negro is surely no better than our wives and children, and should not excite sympathy when they desire the political rights which they are deprived.²⁹

The white, male members argued they did not want to disrupt society and the social order by allowing African American and female enfranchisement.

While many Iowans held this mentality, decades later some male and female Iowans recognized changes occurring around the nation and wanted to support woman suffrage. These Iowa women who worked to change this system of male-only enfranchisement had been doing so since the mid-nineteenth century. Starting in 1868, a suffrage group organized formally in Burlington. A year later, Dubuque and Monticello also formed suffrage groups. In 1869, the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association organized under the Attorney General of Iowa, General Henry O'Connor, along with members Colonel John P. Irish and five other men and women. By 1870, Marshall County suffragists had also organized.³⁰ These groups formed during this time largely because of a change in the United States Constitution allowing African American male enfranchisement through the Fifteenth Amendment. Many suffragists, including those in Iowa, wanted to rid the United States and Iowa Constitutions of the gender restriction.³¹

Not until the last few decades of the nineteenth century did men and women who opposed woman suffrage start to organize more aggressively in Iowa. The women involved in these Iowa anti-suffrage organizations were represented by middle to upper-class Iowans. While these women were generally in support of progress in the status of women in society, particularly for their social class, they did not support woman suffrage.³² Overall, most anti-suffrage leaders were relatively well-to-do with members including wives, mothers, wage earners and professional women.³³

During the nineteenth century, Iowa women opposed to female enfranchisement did not organize formally, but met only when upcoming suffrage legislation required activity. A small group in central Iowa formed and met under their wealthy president, Mrs. Ellen Flynn of Des Moines.³⁴ This group worked to defeat the idea of suffrage that had been growing in their state, and in particular worked to defeat the proposed amendments in the legislature. Early Iowa anti-suffragist groups used their influence quite effectively through the state via informal channels of reform clubs and through the written word in pamphlets and newspapers. These anti-suffrage groups took these routes of action as nineteenth century decorum dictated female public speaking was inappropriate and unladylike.³⁵ Nonetheless, anti-suffragists needed to continue using these methods to defeat amendments in the Iowa General Assembly, as the legislature passed its first suffrage amendment in 1870 and considered proposals in almost every General Assembly until 1920. Iowa anti-suffragists worked to defeat all of these proposed amendments.³⁶

During the early stages of woman suffrage debates in Iowa, a piece of suffrage legislation gave Iowans an example of female enfranchisement. In 1871, Clarinda, Iowa

changed its local voting restrictions. The Clarinda registry board decided that women over the age of 21 could vote. Thus, all women who were of age were listed on the registry for the next electoral vote. Through local media, several local male citizens heard about the change and erased their wives' names; some women also arrived at the polling station to erase their own names. As a result of this apparent opposition to female suffrage, during a local vote in March of 1871, only males voted.³⁷

With the suffrage debates occurring at all levels of government, Iowa anti-suffrage groups organized to defeat the proposed amendments in the Iowa Legislature. While these women felt it necessary to oppose any suffrage amendments, most nineteenth century female antis used other methods than their own public speaking to argue their beliefs, including pamphlets and male allies. This silence became a challenge to anti-suffragists as both male and female suffragists spoke their views publicly. Suffragists held slightly different philosophies about proper behavior for women. While suffragists did not argue women should be involved in all aspects of the public sphere, they believed public speaking was necessary and acceptable to promote their cause.

One of the key suffrage supporters and spokespersons became Colonel John P. Irish, a former military man turned legislator as well as an editor of the *Iowa City State Press*. In 1870 and again in 1872, Colonel Irish organized and pushed forward the first woman suffrage amendment in Iowa.³⁸ Throughout the duration of these proposed amendment hearings between 1870 and 1872, unlike the suffragists, none of the anti-suffragists spoke for their cause. Nonetheless, the Iowa antis argued against the proposed suffrage amendment through pamphlets and male voters.³⁹

This first proposed resolution of the Thirteenth Iowa General Assembly in 1870 which would have stricken the word “male” in the Iowa Constitution passed in both houses by a vote of 54 to 35 in the House and 32 to 11 in the Senate. The Republican State Convention met in Des Moines in July of 1871 and approved submitting the amendment to the voters. This early resolution coincided with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, allowing African American male enfranchisement. By 1872, however, the Fourteenth General Assembly voted differently. During the required second vote by the General Assembly, the House passed the resolution by a vote of 55 to 39 while the Senate defeated it by a vote of 22 to 24.⁴⁰ Some historians today believe the legislators may have simply passed the first resolution as a means of political log-rolling when there had been no real danger of passing a suffrage amendment. Iowa legislators may have used their first vote on the woman suffrage amendment to gain support from other legislators to pass a different amendment, but then rescinded their alliance on the second suffrage vote. The next proposed suffrage amendment in 1874 passed in the Senate and the House, but again, did not pass the second mandatory vote two years later. The 1876 vote, however, became the closest vote for woman suffrage in the Iowa legislature.⁴¹

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Iowa legislatures continuously proposed suffrage amendments. In 1882, however, while the Nineteenth General Assembly legislators passed a resolution for equal suffrage, the House of the Twentieth General Assembly not only opposed it, but ‘indefinitely postponed the measure.’⁴² While this postponement ended that suffrage measure, it did not stop all proposals. Suffragists and their supporters continued to address the suffrage issue in the

legislature. This caused a problem for the anti-suffrage groups as many anti women were too reserved to speak publicly, but instead used male representatives, presumably to avoid the embarrassment of speaking themselves. In Iowa, the first antis were so publicly reserved that they simply signed their name as “remonstrance” or “many ladies.”⁴³

In 1894, a significant change occurred within the realm of female enfranchisement in Iowa. The Iowa General Assembly debated a bill granting women partial suffrage first in the House and then the Senate. The bill eventually passed in both legislatures, with Iowa adopting a law that gave women the right to vote at municipal and school elections that involved the issues of bonds, borrowing money or increasing taxes.⁴⁴ This new limited voting pattern did not appear to concern anti-suffragists too much, however, as they did not feel their overall cause had been defeated. While antis worked to defeat complete female enfranchisement, school elections, antis argued, still resided within the sphere of women’s influences of child education and the home.⁴⁵

By 1898, many female Iowa anti-suffragists had shifted their ideas about public speaking as they realized their arguments, particularly about the majority of women not wanting the vote, were unheard. As a result, they spoke for the first time to a legislative committee. In 1898, the Iowa General Assembly met on February 3rd to give women a hearing before the House and Senate committees on constitutional amendments. This amendment would again have worked to strike male” from the constitution. For the first time, both Iowa suffragists and anti-suffragists spoke to the legislative committee.⁴⁶

Iowa anti-suffragists had never before been reported to speak publicly in legislative sessions. Surprised by the new action, Iowa suffragists critiqued their opponents for contradicting their arguments. The Iowa antis, however, protested they

were only appearing and speaking in public out of a deep sense of duty to keep the legislature from being misled and their minds biased toward equal suffrage. Antis argued they would have preferred to remain quietly at home.⁴⁷ The Iowa anti-suffragists who spoke during this hearing included Miss Emilie Stowe, Mrs. Ellen Flynn and Mrs. H. A. Foster, all wealthy women of Des Moines. Mrs. Emilie Stowe declared that the anti-suffrage women would all rather be home knitting than in front of the legislature, but came simply because they did not want the legislature to believe all women wanted enfranchisement.⁴⁸ By taking these first public actions, the women in Iowa who opposed woman suffrage argued they were ultimately preserving society by keeping women outside the public sphere.⁴⁹ Mrs. H. A. Foster argued that she left home reluctantly to speak for those women who were content wives and mothers, who believed their full purpose was in connection with the home. She claimed that all arguments raised by the suffragists were “illogical.”⁵⁰

After each side argued their rhetoric, some legislators then explained their viewpoints on the woman suffrage debate. One representative, P. Stillmunkes, of the Iowa General Assembly argued common nineteenth century beliefs.

I have always been taught and Scripture says, God first made man and afterwards he took a rib out of man’s side, out of which he made a woman. Now it seems to me a disgrace and an injustice to let that *rib* dictate to men in any way, shape or form whatsoever in regard to the law making power in this State. Therefore, I vote no.⁵¹

Other representatives were shocked at the suffragists’ “lack of womanliness” for campaigning for the ballot, saying all women should go home and “have babies.”⁵²

Regardless of these opinions, the Republicans in the Iowa General Assembly still argued women needed to support the political system, and could do so by urging their husbands

to vote. They argued that even if women had to work in the fields or do other manly jobs for the day, it was the role of women to make sure their men voted. In this way, they argued, these actions enabled women some form of enfranchisement.⁵³

Woman suffrage amendments decreased in popularity in the legislature during the 1890s, compared to the years of Reconstruction, largely because of some concerns that the United States government had given political rights to African American males prematurely. As a result, the political rights given to African American males were being unofficially taken away. By the 1890s, national sentiment argued that to confer political rights upon other unfit groups was a mistake.⁵⁴ This state of mind only aided antis in their quest to oppose woman suffrage. Though the arguments and reasons for opposition were different among politicians and female anti-suffragists, the desired outcome was the same.

During the debate over female enfranchisement, businesses and political interests also worked to defeat woman suffrage, but for different reasons than female antis argued. These predominantly male led groups wanted suffrage defeated for their own political and business purposes. They viewed female suffrage as a threat to their business practices, political power and social standing. Because the numbers for the national anti-suffrage groups never matched those of suffrage groups, antis were partly dismissed as pawns of big businesses and political interests. While many anti-suffrage groups gained support from wealthy husbands and their businesses, anti-suffragists did not view themselves as simply pawns of wealthy men. Female anti-suffragists argued their own reasons opposing female enfranchisement. Anti-suffragists saw themselves as defenders of traditional American values. Speaking to the press and congressional committees,

these antis stressed they were the spokespersons for women, arguing most women did not want the vote.⁵⁵

The central ideology of anti-suffragists during the nineteenth century argued that the sexes were fundamentally different and that dividing society into separate spheres showed the natural order and a desirable reflection of these sex differences. A change in these roles would be detrimental to society. This idea revolving around the separation of spheres reasoned that women would work in the domestic areas of home and children, while men would work in the public world with politics and business, and that each sex should exercise control and responsibility for their sphere only.⁵⁶ The idea that women belonged in the home became the base argument for nineteenth century anti-suffragists. They argued women should exercise moral influence which would ensure national virtue and a strong social order.⁵⁷ Based on this worldview, national and Iowa anti-suffragists of the nineteenth century argued they were the true defenders of motherhood, womanhood and the family. Thus, the nineteenth century suffragists threatened this ideal.

The nineteenth century anti-suffrage arguments revolved around two categories: the unique nature of women and the special role played by women in sustaining the family, and ultimately, civilization. Overall, the antis used the traditional understanding of Victorian woman in their rhetoric, arguing women were completely different from men—physically, morally, emotionally and intellectually. Victorian antis used Biblical rhetoric, paralleling the mischievous suffragists to the first woman, Eve. Just as Eve desired the fruit because it was forbidden, so antis argued, suffragists wanted the vote simply because they could not have it—not that they need it. Using this argument caused

a contradiction, however, as women were supposed to have the best moral compass. Yet, anti-suffragists claimed some women were selfish. Antis also argued enfranchised women would be more likely to use human sexual desires to achieve political influence.⁵⁸ In this way, antis argued that women's pure nature and moral compass complimented society within their private sphere, but would be ruined in the public sphere.

Antis used the physical nature of women in their argument as they claimed woman suffrage caused women to become more masculine, and the men who supported woman suffrage to become weak and effeminate, which would cause the deterioration of society.⁵⁹ This largely coincided with Darwin's theory of evolution, which had been transformed by Americans into the idea of the "survival of the fittest." Antis argued that the increased specialization between men and women in their respective spheres indicated a sign of positive evolution.⁶⁰ Thus, anti-suffragists used this scientific theory to argue that any change in this line of evolution would lead to degeneration and chaos.

Anti-suffragists also worked into their arguments the nineteenth century mentality of family and the home. They argued that men were untamed and women needed to maintain the home to civilized men after surviving in the public sphere. In this way, they argued, women did have much control and influence in their sphere. Anti-suffragists argued that if women were unhappy with the way men ran the government, rather than attempting to change women's role in society into the public arena, women should exert their influence over their private sphere and create the men they want in government out of their young boys at home. They argued that women 'have it in their power to revolutionize the opinions of the world in the course of a single generation; and they could do it so quietly that men would hardly know it has been effected.'⁶¹ Thus, women

needed to find contentment with their amount of power and level of influence in their sphere. If women were involved in politics, it would ultimately ruin the family. As a result, antis aligned the growth in divorce rate with the growth of woman suffrage involvement.⁶²

Other anti-suffrage arguments revolved around the preservation of society and class fears that women were unfit for public life. Anti-suffragists viewed the vote for women as a threat to Victorian tradition: that the vote created an unnatural situation for women. Antis realized the vote would mix men and women together, thus ruining the social networks created by these elite women. This world created by women provided them a place where they found support, encouragement and even their own sense of power. While anti-suffragists saw their role as being involved with their nation and improving its social condition, they objected as to how women would fulfill these goals of serving their country socially. During the nineteenth century, anti-suffragists argued that women should not fulfill this goal within the public sphere.⁶³

This argument arose during the first big campaign of national anti-suffragists against the proposed sixteenth amendment. It arose out of class biases that female voting would lessen the influence of the intelligent and real women—presumably the upper classes. National anti-suffragists argued that not only would women's social networks be ruined, but that their elite authority would be challenged. These women ultimately feared their influence and position within their female sphere would be destroyed. Thus, they argued the vote would lessen their moral influence overall.⁶⁴

As anti-suffragists worked to further their arguments, they also worked to gain new allies. One unexpected ally for Iowa antis became the Catholic Church. While the

anti-suffragists worked to gain the support of the Catholic Church, the underlying antifeminist arguments of the church worked well for the nineteenth century anti rhetoric. Thus, the Catholic Church allied with anti-suffragists on some fundamental points. The church's main argument against woman suffrage derived from a divinely ordained woman's subordination. The church argued woman suffrage would fail because of the traditional subordination of women to men provided in Scripture. They argued men and women needed to maintain these roles in order to continue harmoniously. Some priests also used new scientific theories of evolution to justify the need for gender differences. Overall, the church's position argued that any change in the current religious beliefs would become catastrophic to the order of the universe.⁶⁵

In a pamphlet published by the Pennsylvania Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, Joseph Gilpin Pyle argued against woman suffrage. According to Pyle, the debate over woman suffrage held "Christian civilization...in the balance."⁶⁶ Over two thousand years of Christianization had shifted men from their brutality and made them civilized. Through these arguments, he reestablished that male voters needed to oppose woman suffrage as it would reverse natural trends. Pyle argued that "Nature [had] differentiated woman for high and holy purposes, and she will take care that they are fulfilled."⁶⁷

The arguments of the national anti-suffrage groups largely reflected the arguments of local Iowa groups. One way the Iowa antis were able to express their arguments was through newspapers. As mentioned, before the turn of the century, few women spoke out in public against suffrage. Instead, these female anti-suffragists used their male supporters, pamphlets and newspapers to share their point with the Iowa public. In the

middle to late nineteenth century, this worked for anti-suffragists as the Iowa newspapers largely sided with anti rhetoric. During the 1870s, Iowans were largely Republicans and as a result, Iowa anti-suffragists had support from the *Daily Iowa State Register*, a Republican newspaper, in circulation greater than 3,000. Another Republican newspaper, the *Burlington*, had a circulation greater than 2,000. In general, Republicans, and their affiliated newspapers, openly opposed woman suffrage in the nineteenth century. In 1886, only one known paper in Iowa, the Democratic *Keokuk Constitution*, supported woman suffrage.⁶⁸ During the 1890s, as the suffrage debates increased, some Iowans grew more favorable to woman suffrage, changing the viewpoints among some Iowa newspapers. Nearing the end of the nineteenth century, while most Iowa newspapers, Republican and Democratic, still did not openly support suffrage, they began printing suffrage articles.⁶⁹

Anti-suffrage organizations also expressed their views through letters to newspapers, speeches and legislative petitions. For the most part, the views of the national organizations paralleled to those anti-suffragists in Iowa.⁷⁰ Iowa anti-suffragists continually reiterated that women would become more effective and influential if they solely reigned over domestic matters. If women did not follow their roles, it would create family problems and ultimately lead to the demise of the family, community and nation.⁷¹

Many of the arguments provided by Iowa anti-suffragists revolved around the understanding that the majority of Iowa women opposed suffrage, regardless if they were active in opposition. Iowa antis also used fear to create support for suffrage opposition. They argued Iowa suffragists, like their national associations, advocated political equality with “free love.” These suffrage “extremists” argued for “free love,” an open

relationship philosophy advocated by the infamous Victoria Woodhull.⁷² By the 1870s, Woodhull lived in New York City, and worked as a stockbroker and journalist. By this time, she had become largely involved in the suffrage movement. Woodhull became a proponent of sexual freedom and birth control, shocking positions for public nineteenth century society. These beliefs gave budding antis some public reasons to fight against the suffrage movement. While Iowa suffragists worked hard to separate themselves from the idea of free love, claiming the shocking argument circulated outside the suffrage mainstream, Iowa anti-suffragists worked hard to use this argument to their advantage.⁷³ Iowa antis argued woman suffrage equaled “free love” and argued this mentality would ruin all Iowa women. They argued that once men and women had many “free” sexual relations that marriage, family and human civilization would be ruined.⁷⁴

The *Iowa State Weekly Register*, still a supporting newspaper of the anti-suffragists published in Des Moines, printed a letter in 1871 by a concerned citizen that described equal suffrage as the end to the institution of marriage. As a result of this fear, the citizen argued anti-suffragists needed to act publicly for their cause, regardless of the belief that public speaking was not acceptable.

Tis true, that anti-suffrage women in general, shun notoriety and are not willing to have their names go before the public, but a sacrifice must be made, if we would preserve inviolate the Republic... Allow the principles that suffragists are promulgating to take firm root in society, become the law of our land, and our choicest treasures...will before the close of the next decade become a prey...⁷⁵

The arguments of Iowa anti-suffragists coincided with the mainstream arguments of national anti-suffragists. They argued for the sanctity of the home and of family. This particularly included the maintenance of the roles of women within their respective

sphere based on women's unique nature. Thus, the important argument of both national and Iowa antis circulated through the nineteenth century became that the ballot would undermine true womanhood, marriage and the family. National and Iowa anti-suffragists also argued that the ballot would corrupt the unique physical nature of women by forcing them to the polls and causing women to become manly. Overall, Iowa anti-suffragists argued if women were distracted from their families and home duties, then the institution of the family would fall apart along with society. Thus, anti-suffragists not only claimed to be defenders of the family, but also the nation.

After hearing different anti-suffrage arguments, suffragists decried their validity. Suffragists argued women of Iowa did not understand the suffrage cause. As a result, many national suffrage associations worked hard in Iowa, believing Iowa had a good chance to achieve woman suffrage as the state had a low "bum" population as a result of having relatively small cities. These suffragists believed Iowa voters would largely consist of intellectual elites who would rally around woman suffrage. National suffragists chose Iowa as a good location of support because of the growth of suffrage supporters already in the state, and also because Iowa had a "small a percent of illiteracy and the ignorant classes always oppose equal suffrage."⁷⁶ Thus, the suffrage movement campaigned throughout Iowa in the late nineteenth century. This extended action taken in Iowa by national suffragists only created a stronger force of anti-suffragists, resulting in highly contested ground within the Iowa legislature. These suffragists argued only those who were ignorant would oppose woman suffrage.

During the influential debates of the 1898 legislative session, not only were Iowa and national suffragists in attendance, but also Iowa and national anti-suffragists. While

the suffragists had worked hard campaigning verbally within the legislature, near the end of the sessions, anti-suffragists also requested time to speak for their cause; they received their request. The *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette* noted the suffragists believed their legislation had been close to passing in the House before the anti-suffragists from the East arrived to voice opposition to the measure.⁷⁷ Thus, while Iowa anti-suffragists spoke to the committee, the influence of the national groups also proved important in the results of the Iowa General Assembly. Both national anti-suffragists and suffragists realized the importance of Iowa in the larger picture for their objectives.

During the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, as the suffragists organized more groups, so did the anti-suffragists, and the cycle continued from the East coast all the way to Iowa. As the two sides grew in organizations and numbers, each grew more vocal about their arguments.⁷⁸ As a result, national anti-suffragists used more forceful tactics such as describing suffragists as women who only wanted to dominate over their submissive husbands. These different turn of the century actions and tactics taken by national anti-suffragists possessed similar shrewdness to the activities of the political men they argued women needed to avoid along with politics and the ballot.

The shifting tactics of national anti-suffragists along with the biological and moral arguments used by national and Iowa anti-suffragists illustrated their deep fears. In addition to new scientific theories, the nineteenth century anti-suffrage arguments were based on Victorian values, democratic ideals and the Bible. These arguments worked as anti-suffragists feared social and political disorder and the potential threat to women's position as society's moral compass.⁷⁹ Woman suffrage posed a direct threat to the assumptions anti-suffragists had made about their role in society.⁸⁰ Much of this fear

arose from the increased female suffrage activity due to the rapidly changing nation. The late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century showed an increased role from the federal, state and local governments in social welfare and economic life, thus, the Progressive era ensued.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Iowa females and males who opposed woman suffrage worked to spread their ideas. They used newspapers, letters, pamphlets and lecturers. The idea of females speaking out in public to oppose female enfranchisement became a new transition for the female Iowa anti-suffragists. While the arguments of the unique nature of women and their role as the defenders of the family, home and community published in pamphlets and lecturers had been well-established, they continued to work for the anti-suffrage cause. Not until these arguments no longer worked to evoke concern and fear in the public, would anti-suffragists need to formulate new arguments. Even as other anti-suffrage organizations shifted their arguments, Iowa anti-suffragists continued to perpetuate these biological and traditional Victorian arguments through the twentieth century.

⁸ Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993), 7-9.

⁹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Sept. 1973), 332.

¹⁰ Tuana, 39-40; Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 332.

¹¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 332-333.

¹² Tuana, 98.

¹³ Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 333-334.

¹⁴ Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 335.

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- ¹⁵ Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780—1920," *The American Historical Review* 89, No. 3 (June 1984), 620; Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 335-336.
- ¹⁶ Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 338.
- ¹⁷ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*.
- ¹⁸ Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 338-340.
- ¹⁹ Baker, 621-625.
- ²⁰ Baker, 625-631.
- ²¹ Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movement in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 179; Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 6-10.
- ²² Baker, 635.
- ²³ Baker, 368.
- ²⁴ Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920*. *Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New*, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 2-15.
- ²⁵ Robert P. J. Cooney, Jr., *Winning The Vote: The triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement* (Santa Cruz: American Graphic Press, 2005), 51.
- ²⁶ Cooney, 175.
- ²⁷ Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, *Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New*, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 2-3; Buechler, 183.
- ²⁸ Ruth A. Gallaher, *Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa: An Historical Account of the Rights of Women in Iowa from 1838-1918* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1918), 172-173.
- ²⁹ *Iowa Journal of the Constitutional Convention, 1857*, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, 241-242; Gallaher, 173-174, 186.
- ³⁰ Jan Beran, *The League of Women Voters of Iowa*, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, 6; Gallaher, 184.
- ³¹ Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 223.
- ³² Camhi, 2.
- ³³ *The Mansfield News*, 5 February 1899.
- ³⁴ Anne M. Benjamin, *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895—1920: Women Against Equality* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 250.

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- ³⁵ Jablonsky, 1-4.
- ³⁶ Lee Ann Osburn and Steffen W. Schmidt, eds. *Issues in Iowa Politics* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1990), 14.
- ³⁷ Gallaher, 180-181.
- ³⁸ Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1969), 142; Benjamin, 251.
- ³⁹ Benjamin, 251; Noun, 142.
- ⁴⁰ Gallaher, 179-181.
- ⁴¹ Gallaher, 186-200.
- ⁴² Gallaher, 189.
- ⁴³ Jablonsky, 25.
- ⁴⁴ Gallaher, 201.
- ⁴⁵ Jablonsky 1-4, 24-26.
- ⁴⁶ Jablonsky 1-4, 24-26.
- ⁴⁷ Jablonsky, 25; Noun, 244.
- ⁴⁸ Gallaher, 209.
- ⁴⁹ Camhi, 2.
- ⁵⁰ *Iowa House Journal, 1898*, State of Iowa Historical Society, Des Moines, Iowa, 185, 216, 378; *Iowa Senate Journal, 1898*, State of Iowa Historical Society, Des Moines, Iowa, 240; Gallaher, 210.
- ⁵¹ *Iowa House Journal, 1898*, State of Iowa Historical Society, Des Moines, 758.
- ⁵² Frank E. Horack, "First to Consider, Last to Adopt May Be Iowa Suffrage Record," *Constitutional Amendments on the Commonwealth of Iowa*, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa Woman's Suffrage Collection, Des Moines, Iowa.
- ⁵³ The Iowa State Register, 25 October 1895.
- ⁵⁴ Gallaher, 200.
- ⁵⁵ Cooney, 51; Jablonsky, xxv-xxvii.
- ⁵⁶ Buechler, 179.
- ⁵⁷ Baker, 620.
- ⁵⁸ Mara Mayor, "Fears and Fantasies of the Anti-Suffragists," *Connecticut Review*, April 1974, vol. 7, no. 2, 64-66.

⁵⁹ Mayor, 68-69.

⁶⁰ Mayor, 69.

⁶¹ Mayor, 70-71.

⁶² Mayor 71-73.

⁶³ Jablonsky, xxv-xxvi.

⁶⁴ Cooney, 51.

⁶⁵ Camhi, 111.

⁶⁶ Joseph Gilpin Pyle, "Christian Civilization in the Balance," Pennsylvania Association Oppose to Woman Suffrage, "Anna B. Lawther Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1.

⁶⁷ Pyle, 3.

⁶⁸ Gallaher, 195.

⁶⁹ Gallaher, 191, 212-213.

⁷⁰ Schwieder, 226.

⁷¹ Schwieder, 225-227.

⁷² Gallaher, 181.

⁷³ Gallaher, 181-182; Schwieder, 224.

⁷⁴ Mayor, 72.

⁷⁵ *Iowa State Weekly Register*, 16 August 1871.

⁷⁶ *The Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, "Equal Suffrage," 19 November 1897, 3.

⁷⁷ *The Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, "Women Disagree," 29 January 1898.

⁷⁸ Schwieder, 224-225.

⁷⁹ Baker, 620.

⁸⁰ Mayor, 73.

CHAPTER TWO

1900—1915: The Anti-Suffragists' Struggles

Early twentieth century American society witnessed rising questions, conflicts and changes. One of the big questions that created much conflict revolved around the new role of women. This rising conflict became epitomized through the debate on woman suffrage, which changed the nation during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Suffragists and anti-suffragists worked to find an answer to this question as they communicated and debated their multiple arguments to the American public. The forms of media used by anti-suffragists to illustrate their arguments had included some public speaking by the end of the nineteenth century. The growing public debate between anti-suffragists and suffragists also displayed the differences among anti-suffrage organizations. Previous to the twentieth century, anti-suffrage societies had been cohesive, claiming to support the physical and moral status of women, but as the century progressed, those arguments shifted among the different anti-suffrage organizations. Many newer anti-suffrage arguments formed to combat suffrage critiques of past anti-suffrage rhetoric. Not all anti-suffrage organizations, however, completely modified from the older anti-suffrage arguments during the early twentieth century.

The changes that occurred during the early twentieth century drew largely from the new, progressive mentality of many urban, middle class men and women. This ideal of progressivism pushed to create reform for the common good of the nation. Reformers argued for change based on problems derived from the growth of industrialization, immigration and urbanization. Progressivism allowed different methods of reform action on social issues. Many Progressive supporters worked to reform areas of the society

revolving around the lives of women and children. Prohibition and woman suffrage were highly influential reforms based on the progressive mentality of public action.⁸¹ The rise of the Progressive movement enabled a rise of women in public, including women in the anti-suffrage and suffrage movements.

Suffrage and anti-suffrage organizations grew to greater numbers around the turn of the century, largely due to the new ideals spread through Progressivism. National female suffrage and anti-suffrage supporters believed they could make changes, or stop changes, through public activism. These women reformers in the Progressive Era, however, dealt with conflicts of lingering nineteenth century ideals for women. These ideals established that women possessed purity, virtue, sentimentality and domesticity.⁸² This conflicted with the new role some novel reformers, particularly suffragists, desired to uphold. Many reformers believed to be taken seriously in public as professional reformers, they needed to have confidence, self-assertion and demand action. Problems with these new open characteristics arose, however, as suffrage and anti-suffrage women struggled to find their role.⁸³

The anti-suffrage women who took on the role and worked to defeat woman suffrage fit into a particular upper-middle class demographic. Nationally, anti-suffragists were generally in the upper classes of American society, being largely urban, wealthy, native born, Republican and Protestant.⁸⁴ These anti-suffrage leaders were privileged urban elites who did not need to work outside the home, but held social positions and political power within female groups based on familial relations. These relations were based on male relatives in high government positions that enabled the women roles in regulating social issues regarding women and children. These forms of leadership gave

well-to-do anti-suffrage women a fairly public status as unofficial experts during the Progressive Era.⁸⁵

Thus, many elite, national anti-suffrage leaders did not foresee a need for the ballot themselves. Rather, like many men of their class, female antis regarded mass voting rights as a threat to their way of life. Woman suffrage challenged the elite anti-suffragists' authority and leadership. The anti-suffragists derived their arguments from the concerns and fears that their society volunteerism would be mixed with different classes of women if female enfranchisement passed. Although anti-suffragists outwardly claimed they did not want females in politics, they were nonetheless women activists during the Progressive Era, thus, illustrating that not all twentieth century women in public politics were liberal and feminist.⁸⁶

National female anti-suffragists had a vested interest in preserving the political influence that they received from their male family members and private connections of philanthropy and service as public appointees. Their public actions within the Progressive reforms influenced their decision to join in the suffrage debate. These national antis did not want to lose their influence based on their social class standards. Instead, they desired to thwart Progressive reforms as these reforms threatened a loss of position within their elite networks. The anti-suffragists had also used their social networks to mobilize efforts, which helped them to defeat suffrage for over seven decades.⁸⁷ These new public actions taken by the national anti-suffrage organizations contradicted their main arguments. While they partly reflected anti-suffrage beliefs, these arguments of female domesticity were also devised to hide the true extent of national anti-suffrage political activism, thus contradicting their argument against the

vote. National female anti-suffragists engaged in the protection of their female class interests; they saw suffrage as a threat to their own positions of privilege.⁸⁸

Before 1911, national and local anti-suffragists worked to defend their interests through the defeat of woman suffrage with informal organizations. They worked quietly to distribute pamphlets to the public and raised money privately through family and friends. While some women had spoken out publicly by this time against suffrage, many women still hired male supporters to speak for them. These anti-suffragists argued for social propriety, restricting women from a public presence. By 1911, however, after a number of anti-suffragists realized the need to defend their arguments more formally and more publicly, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, NAOWS, formed. Their level of influence over other anti-suffrage organizations and state referenda shifted through the years. Some historians argue the NAOWS reached its peak of power and influence between 1895 and 1907, though the organization was still a force during the constitutional debate of 1919 and 1920.⁸⁹ Others reported that the NAOWS peaked between 1911 and 1916, as the exclusive female membership of the national organization grew to 350,000 members.⁹⁰ Regardless of the degree of impact through the years, historians have agreed that this and other large anti-suffrage groups worked in multiple states during the twentieth century for the anti-suffrage cause.

A year after female antis formed the NAOWS, their male counterparts formed the National Man-Suffrage Association, NMSA. This organization furthered the cause of the national female organization, but did not rule over them.⁹¹ While many individual men and different male anti-suffrage groups spoke out against woman suffrage, female anti-suffragists were not simply fronts for male groups and their agendas. Women antis

organized and conducted the vast majority of anti-suffrage organizations nationally and statewide, including in Iowa. Not only were these female groups not pawns, but as the twentieth century progressed, national elite anti-suffragists became more deeply politically involved in the male agenda, more than they publicly acknowledged.⁹²

The early twentieth century anti-suffragist ideology derived from the nineteenth century arguments reiterating that men and women were different biologically and morally which led to natural roles for each sex. At the start of the twentieth century, national anti-suffragists were still concerned with separate spheres for men and women. Men partook in the public sphere of politics and business and women in the private or domestic sphere in the home. Early on, anti-suffragists argued men and women had been created for different tasks and roles in life that should be respected. They reiterated a fear of the American public, that any change in the current roles of men and women would create utter chaos. Anti-suffrage men and women argued repeatedly that the social consequences of a woman's increased role in public affairs would cause detriment to society and civilization.⁹³

Similar to female anti-suffragists, Joseph Gilpin Pyle argued that the suffrage movement would only accomplish the "degradation of women."⁹⁴ He argued in a pamphlet that women held the best, most respected place in society. Women aided human civilization as they "influenced men away from their brutality and made them civilized."⁹⁵ Pyle argued that to support suffrage would equal the downfall of civilization and the loss of women's elevated role in society. Throughout the article, Pyle argued that woman suffrage would fail in small and large societies and that nature would eventually prevail, keeping women in a differentiated place, one, which he argued, was elevated

above men morally. Therefore, women needed to find happiness and satisfaction in their place. The subservient role would enable them to receive what they truly desired, family success.⁹⁶

National anti-suffragists proclaimed their mission and success would protect the purity of true womanhood. As this implied women needed protection, so these anti-suffragists advocated that male voters would protect women from the degradation of politics and the misguided minority of suffragists. During the first few years of the twentieth century, the majority of anti-suffragists argued that females defended womanhood, motherhood and the family. Women had a special responsibility for their private sphere.⁹⁷

Everett P. Wheeler, a corporate attorney from New York, and founding member of the National Man-Suffrage Association, argued that if women went into the public sphere there would be neglect at home which would ultimately ruin the American family and, thus, the United States. He argued that for centuries women stayed home and had been protected and treated as queens. He also explained that women were “the vital force that [gave] sweetness and beauty, dignity and sacredness to life,” and should not shout in the streets trying to fight men for public office.⁹⁸ Many male politicians, like Wheeler, were similarly hostile to women, fearing they would alter the organization of politics. These politicians feared women would demand civic reforms and attempt to change the system that had worked for over a century.⁹⁹

These beliefs led anti-suffragists to argue that the ballot would burden women, corrupt them at the polls, make them manly, but most importantly would undermine true womanhood, the nineteenth century tradition of marriage and family values. Thus, at the

turn of the century, all anti-suffrage groups still used women and the family as their primary arguments. If women did not keep the family together, then the family—ergo society—would fail. The antis not only claimed to be defenders of the family, but also the nation. Fear of other social changes like socialism and feminism also created multiple arguments for anti-suffragists during the twentieth century. Thus, anti-suffrage attracted multiple controversial fears that threatened the social order of American society.¹⁰⁰

While suffragists and anti-suffragists had similar roots for women's role in the future, they each had a different answer as to how this would occur, with the suffragists and their “new woman” and the anti-suffragists with their “true woman.”¹⁰¹ Antis worked hard to combat their opponents' arguments and claims against them. Anti-suffragists argued against the suffragists' claim that ‘woman is an adept at house-cleaning;’ and that ‘city government is only a larger home,’ that ‘needs mothering.’¹⁰² With the Progressive mentality, national suffragists argued woman suffrage in the United States would take women's skills of cleaning the household and move them into the public arena with cleaning up politics. Many viewed the political arena as a dirty and corrupt environment, but one not suited for ladies. This sense of municipal housekeeping became a largely contested idea with anti-suffragists. National anti-suffragists did not want to cede their influence in this arena. Largely, these groups of women already had influence in reform and philanthropic areas. They feared with the advent and passage of woman suffrage, they would have to cede their influence in this area to well-educated, professional women working in reforms. These well-to-do female anti-suffragists did not want this to occur. Antis argued that suffrage “facts” were incorrect, noting that many

Western communities with the suffrage vote showed homes that were not being mothered which caused “...much of the evil of the community.”¹⁰³

To support their claim that women were better off without the ballot anti-suffragists needed to provide evidence to show disenfranchised women could have “reform successes and social efficiency.”¹⁰⁴ Their evidence came in the form of testimonies from past social workers, reformers and activists saying they accomplished much without the ballot and would never have achieved all they did with enfranchisement. The anti-suffragists also strongly used ‘empirical evidence’ from the states with woman suffrage. Anti-suffragists frequently used charts showing a comparison of suffrage Colorado to national anti-suffrage states. National antis argued reforms cleansing the United States of social evils like prostitution, child labor and inadequate public health were occurring more frequently in states without woman suffrage than in the predominately western suffrage states. They also cited statistics and evidence to note the full decline of women’s civic reform associations in suffrage states. Most anti-suffragists blamed the poor voting statistics on indifferent voters.¹⁰⁵

According to historian Manuela Thurner, the national or “progressive antis,” provided two reasons why they were so active in the public realm, but still did not want the ballot.¹⁰⁶ One: women were already overburdened ‘with the demands of society, the calls of charity, the church and philanthropy constantly increasing.’¹⁰⁷ These women argued females were too busy for political life and all it entailed, including voting, jury duty or running for office. Also, if women were spread too thin that would decrease the female influence and “sacrifice quality for quantity in their attempt to add another

weighty task to their already packed agenda.”¹⁰⁸ These arguments were largely directed toward the well-to-do anti-suffragists who argued them.

The second argument by national anti-suffragists stated that woman suffrage would hurt their current social work. As the decade wore on, national antis argued that by having political enfranchisement, women would no longer have political neutrality, costing them influence over both legislative parties. They argued this non-partisan influence had led to the large numbers of reforms pushed by women.¹⁰⁹ National antis claimed that they wanted distance from politics in order to have a voice in politics. Printed in the April 1912 edition of *The Anti-Suffragist* journal, antis argued “the more reform movements are separated from politics the better for them.”¹¹⁰ Thus, when women’s reform clubs started supporting woman suffrage, the anti-suffragists were hurt and argued it ruined the effectiveness of reform organizations because it split women’s influence between different parties. Progressive Era ideas, Thurner argued, caused a shift for all anti-suffrage organizations during the early twentieth century.¹¹¹

Thurner argued that into the twentieth century, anti-suffrage arguments were having “less to do with woman’s place in the home than with her appropriate role in the public realm.”¹¹² While national antis shifted into this new, public argument, Iowa antis still proclaimed older arguments. Throughout the early twentieth century, national anti-suffrage leaders constantly urged women to leave the home to involve themselves in outside activities.¹¹³ One anti-suffragist noted, ‘Do not mistake me. No woman should spend all her time at home. Public needs and social duties must be attended to.’¹¹⁴ These new public action arguments contrasted with arguments used by anti-suffrage organizations just a decade earlier. While these new twentieth century ideas were argued

by the national anti-suffragists, Iowa anti-suffragists did not concur on these arguments. Thurner's article explained a history for national anti-suffragists, but not one as easily for Iowa anti-suffragists.

Iowa anti-suffrage supporters who argued Iowa rhetoric fit into a particular upper-middle class demographic. While Iowa women held different class standards compared to antis around the nation, Iowa anti-suffrage leaders were nonetheless above middle class living. The national anti-suffragists typically originated from the upper classes of American society, being largely urban, wealthy, native born, Republican and Protestant. These urban characteristics caused problems for Iowans because in the early twentieth century, most Iowa citizens lived in rural areas.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, based on annual incomes, Iowa anti-suffrage leaders would be considered middle to upper class. This overall contrast of Iowa anti-suffrage groups with the national groups set the stage for some foundational differences between the Iowa antis and their national counterparts. Regardless, the anti-suffrage organizations were run by white, well-to-do women from more populated or urban areas with supportive male groups.¹¹⁶

Generally, anti-suffrage support started small, through general public disapproval of woman suffrage. Church, press and individual communities noted the dangers and warned of the consequences. By early 1910, Iowa had created and maintained an informal state anti-suffrage organization, led by Mrs. Ellen Flynn, a wealthy Des Moines resident.¹¹⁷ Initially, to support their cause, anti-suffragists only went into the public arena during legislative considerations of an amendment or bill. As the frequency of the suffrage debate drew anti-suffragists further into the public arena, many antis felt it possible to remain a true lady while speaking publicly. These public appearances

increased for some anti-suffrage groups after the turn of the century and only increased further as the century progressed.¹¹⁸

An Iowa anti-suffragist, Mrs. Earl S. Cullums, the wife of a Des Moines physician, “denounced woman suffrage during the progress of a public hearing.”¹¹⁹ During this hearing in March 1911, the newspaper reported the chambers were packed with senate members and the galleries with suffragists and “some antis.”¹²⁰ Mrs. Cullums had asked to speak to the forum and her request was granted. She read a prepared speech “which astonished women in the audience, for it was not suspected that the antis were prepared to be heard, and Mrs. Cullums was a stranger to the suffragists in the hall.”¹²¹ Mrs. Cullums illustrated a transition in the public appearances by Iowa anti-suffragists in the 1910s which would only increase as the decade continued.

As anti-suffrage women became more apt to speak publicly and anti-suffrage organizations began to form, suffragists took note. In a Des Moines newspaper, *The Register and Leader*, the suffragists announced the organization of a formal anti-suffrage group. The suffragists, however, claimed this new opposition did not worry them, but argued they viewed this new anti-suffrage committee in Iowa as a reason for suffragists to rejoice. Iowa suffragists argued this meant their movement had gained strength, so much so that an anti-suffrage committee needed to be formed.¹²² The advent of new anti-suffrage organizations originated from the growing suffrage support. While the Iowa suffragists were unlikely as calm as they claimed about this new opposition, they were correct in noticing their accomplishments caused the need for the new organization.

Overall, anti-suffragists grew in membership and political involvement after suffrage organizations increased in membership and public activity. In Iowa, when

suffragists worked politically in an attempt to change the Iowa constitution by striking out the word “male,” it increased anti-suffrage involvement and organization. Once the proposed amendment failed, anti-suffragists largely withdrew from public action. The overall strength of the male and female anti-suffrage organizations derived not from the outstanding logic of their arguments, but from their support of the status quo. Anti-suffrage men and women did not need to win debates to be effective; they merely needed to cause a possible doubt for female enfranchisement to prevent a suffrage victory. This main strategy provided anti-suffrage success in Iowa for almost two full decades of the early twentieth century.¹²³

Women led most anti-suffrage organizations with marginal support from male groups. In fact, one historian argued that male anti-suffrage groups appeared to have been highly influenced and even controlled by the women’s organizations. The twentieth century female anti-suffragists represented the anti-suffrage organizations in legislature and congressional committees far more than men.¹²⁴ Women in the anti-suffrage movement were the biggest opposition to the suffrage movement, as they were the majority of the writers and intelligence behind the twentieth century anti-suffrage rhetoric.¹²⁵

Many male opponents of female suffrage spoke out in public without a formal organization like the NMSA behind them. One of these vocal male opponents of female suffrage during the early twentieth century had started out as a proponent of suffrage. Colonel John P. Irish, editor of the *Iowa City State Press* during the late nineteenth century, supported and promoted woman suffrage during the 1870s in the Iowa General Assembly. A decade later he left Iowa and moved to California, but moved back to Iowa in 1911. During those few decades away, he shifted to an opponent of woman suffrage

because of the awful conditions of women and society he witnessed in California, and so worked professionally to defeat any woman suffrage legislation.¹²⁶

As a whole, males opposed to female enfranchisement were not largely involved with the debate process. Many Iowa males simply saw it as a disagreement among women. One Iowa newspaper reported that during anti-suffrage debates among women, men watched the “sprightly contest” and studied “the conflict from a safe distance.”¹²⁷ It appeared female Iowa anti-suffragists preferred, and were given, the opportunity to argue their rhetoric themselves during the early twentieth century. Both genders, however, created their own organizations to support the same cause.

Anti-suffrage success also derived from a variety of groups that opposed female enfranchisement, including immigrants. While many Iowa antis did not want to align with Iowa’s immigrants, the two groups informally joined forces. Immigrants did not generally align with the anti-suffrage movement based on the biological or moral arguments expressed by anti-suffragists. Rather, immigrants believed anti-suffrage success would preserve the livelihood of some immigrants, including liquor production and sales. Many believed woman suffrage would lead to prohibition laws, causing a decrease in some immigrant incomes. Thus, while the immigrant brewers joined the antis in working and voting against suffrage, they did not necessarily care about woman suffrage or anti-suffrage arguments. Rather, the immigrant brewers used the active women’s movement as a means to an end.¹²⁸

During the 1910s, a popular author from Iowa, Alice French—pseudonym Olive Thanet—aligned her support with the anti-suffrage movement. Iowa anti-suffragists were overjoyed to include her on their list of Iowa anti-suffrage vice-presidents. French

advocated “anything that [would] limit the ballot rather than extend it.”¹²⁹ She also argued every immigrant should have to wait twenty-one years, the same as a native, to vote as this would solve some “dangers” involved with immigration.¹³⁰ Fears of immigrants reoccurred frequently in some anti-suffrage rhetoric, causing mixed messages among the two groups. While some anti-suffragists feared immigrants, others realized the strength immigrants could add to their campaign against woman suffrage, regardless of their reason for opposition.

With the influence of Progressivism on the national anti-suffrage movement, anti-suffrage organizations, particularly from the East coast, shifted their arguments for a more public movement. Members of many of these national organizations traveled to other states to support and spread news of the anti-suffrage cause. These groups largely influenced and “helped” to “educate” non-Eastern women on the anti-issues.¹³¹ “The women of the other States of the Union came to know of the organized opposition to woman suffrage; and, as a result, many requests were made for information and literature.”¹³² The Albany Association in New York had 153,050 leaflets published to distribute to other states. They continually received thousands of request letters, so eventually put the pamphlets into book form in “libraries where the public may have access to them.”¹³³

National influence over the suffrage issue in Iowa had been prevalent in the nineteenth century but increased during the early twentieth. As early as 1901, *The Des Moines Daily Leader* reported that Mrs. Clara Bell Brown, anti-suffragist from Washington D.C., worked throughout Iowa and Des Moines giving speeches to promote the anti-suffrage cause. Brown and other national suffragists noticed that a number of

Iowa women were “interested in hindering the equal suffrage movement.”¹³⁴ The efforts by national women like Clara Bell Brown created an apparently stronger anti-suffrage sentiment which caused Brown to be “well satisfied with the progress being made in organization.”¹³⁵ While anti-suffragists worked as a reactionary countermovement, they also worked proactively when the political climate was right.¹³⁶

Throughout her visit across Iowa starting in 1901, Mrs. Clara Bell Brown continued to organize small community anti-suffrage groups. Brown stated, “I hope to get the Iowa State Anti-Suffrage association organized within the next ten days.”¹³⁷ Brown mentioned Mrs. Simon Casady as a possible candidate for the organization’s presidency as well as “two other well known Iowa women...”¹³⁸ Mrs. Brown appeared optimistic about the anti-suffrage movement in Iowa as she reported that, “I find a high class of people in Des Moines opposed to suffrage for women upon very high grounds.”¹³⁹ Using flattery, Brown worked the egos of women in Des Moines to support the anti-suffrage cause.

The activities of national anti-suffragists as they opposed female enfranchisement outside their home states and into the public sphere created heightened animosity between the local anti-suffragists and suffragists in Iowa. *The Davenport Daily Republican* reported this intense dislike between the women in the two groups over the suffrage debates. “It is nothing unusual for men to get into political tangles, but here in Iowa the women are having a free-for-all scrape on the suffrage question...”¹⁴⁰ The newspaper reported this heightened animosity derived from a recent visit by Brown to organize anti-suffrage societies. Through her time in Iowa, she proceeded to form numerous informal organizations through the state. Brown noted she did not believe in

equal suffrage, and argued she had the “sympathy of most married men and most of the good mothers in Iowa.”¹⁴¹ At this time, Mrs. Brown argued “that active citizenship would be a burden to women, and [regarded] woman as more powerful through love than through the ballot box.”¹⁴² Thus, at this early date of the twentieth century, the main national anti-suffrage argument remained that women’s primary role was in the private, domestic sphere, regardless of the contradiction between the anti-suffragists’ arguments and actions. Mrs. Brown continued to argue that, “women [were] unfit for civic duties imposed by the rights of suffrage.”¹⁴³

This overarching involvement of national organizations increased with the 1915 defeat of suffrage referendums in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Massachusetts. Successes with those state referendums only perpetuated the activities of national anti-suffragists in Iowa. These multiple victories led the anti-suffrage organizations to desire further success into 1916 with the hopeful defeat of three new woman suffrage referendum votes: Iowa in June, and South Dakota and West Virginia in November. Thus, in 1915, the NAOWS predicted that the Iowa contest would be a particularly hard fight and solicited funds for campaign literature, advertisements, organizers and speakers. That same year, the Massachusetts Association, ordered one hundred thousand copies of its campaign book for Iowa. Also, the Cambridge anti-suffrage group sent a copy of its *Antisuffrage Notes* to every Harvard graduate in Iowa.¹⁴⁴

This growth of shared information from the national anti-suffragists and suffragists to the Iowa anti-suffragists and suffragists occurred more frequently in the months leading to the referendum. Throughout the roughly fifty years that Iowa’s suffragists fought for the suffrage amendment they had done so largely without outside

assistance. In the Iowa General Assembly, anti-suffragists had found success as each amendment failed to pass both houses in two consecutive sessions—causing each to fail enactment. Thus, the Iowa antis had consistently kept suffrage out of law.¹⁴⁵ In 1913, as in previous years, the Assembly passed a proposed equal suffrage amendment. This time, regardless of the determined campaign effort by anti-suffragists to defeat the second vote two years later, the Thirty-sixth General Assembly passed the amendment again. These consecutive votes pushed the proposed amendment for a general electorate vote in 1916.¹⁴⁶

After the second passage of the proposed suffrage amendment by the Iowa General Assembly, national anti-suffragists worked to provide Iowa anti-suffragists with support to defeat the 1916 referendum vote. This support included funding, speakers and pamphlets. The Dubuque anti-suffragists received and passed out multiple pamphlets originating from anti-suffrage organizations in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New York. While the masses of information aided the smaller Iowa groups, the influx of information from the national organizations and campaigns created problems for Iowa anti-suffrage organizations and rhetoric. The rhetoric shift undergone by national anti-suffragists over the previous years became more obvious and problematic when compared to the Iowa pamphlets.

While the main argument by national anti-suffragists leading through 1915 surrounded the belief that women could provide a better public service to their nation without the ballot, other arguments surfaced during the Iowa debates. Iowa antis held on to nineteenth century beliefs of the female sphere. These arguments circulated by Iowa antis reiterated older anti-suffrage arguments. Iowa anti-suffragists argued in a 1916

pamphlet that the biggest problem with female suffrage was “from the indifferent and the emotional vote.”¹⁴⁷ The argument of women’s emotional state interfering with their ability to think clearly about political life derived from arguments centuries old. These arguments stated a woman’s ability to think and act derived from her reproductive organs, which doctors determined unstable. These Iowa anti-suffragists also argued that women should not vote, “because the agitation of this matter [had] increased the nervous strain on women, [had] divided their efforts, and produced a kind of eczema of sentimentality which [had] a wider and more pernicious effects than... generally admitted.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, Iowa anti-suffragists continually argued that voting would ruin women’s health.

The Davenport anti-suffragists wrote, printed and circulated a list of their arguments against woman suffrage during the 1910s. Throughout the pamphlet, they listed multiple arguments that coincided with national anti-suffrage rhetoric, such as “equal suffrage *has tried and has failed*.”¹⁴⁹ Antis frequently compared suffrage states, predominantly in the West, against non-suffrage states to illustrate the negative effects of woman suffrage. Iowa anti-suffragists, like those in the East, also argued that “women [would] not vote after you give them the ballot.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, antis argued women would not use enfranchisement, and so the ballot and the costs for upcoming elections would be wasted. The pamphlet argued “women in Iowa can vote on bond issues and school taxes. But only a tenth to a third of the women vote.”¹⁵¹ The pamphlet also argued that in current suffrage states, women’s political activity had already negatively affected their treatment by men. “Most observers sorrowfully admit there is less courtesy and consideration shown women by men than formerly.”¹⁵²

After his return to Iowa and conversion to support anti-suffrage, Colonel Irish told stories of the negative effects in California due to the experimentation of woman suffrage since 1911. Much of Irish's argument revolved around basic nineteenth century fears and concerns based in biological arguments which stressed gender roles. Irish strongly warned that the suffrage vote for women had put "lines on women's faces and men no longer took off their hats in elevators."¹⁵³ He also discussed increased taxation, delinquency of women and children, and corruption of women politicians. These latter two arguments revolved around the biological theme, but the taxation issue touched on a new group of arguments created by anti-suffragists, the pragmatic approach. Iowa anti-suffragists started to aim their arguments at the practical side of Iowa voters, creating a concern that woman suffrage would increase their taxes. The overall descriptions created a real world where the suffrage vote not only cost Iowans more financially, but led to the demise of cherished societal norms and traditions. This use of the pragmatic arguments derived largely from the Progressive mentality of the increased role of government. This new approach led many to believe if the suffrage vote succeeded it would lead to the demise and downfall of the whole American culture. These arguments resonated with many Iowans because of their concern for lost traditions. Iowans were taught to fear and oppose suffrage arguments and legislation in order to preserve their society.¹⁵⁴

Well into the second decade of the twentieth century, Iowa anti-suffragists continued to view the franchise for women as a threat to nineteenth century tradition. They argued men and women should remain in their separate spheres because it was unnatural for women to vote. They realized women would be pushed into the same world as men: a world of politics dominated by men. This would be a different world from

their sphere of social networks within the female community. The Iowa anti-suffragists feared and argued that woman suffrage would create an end to their female network and society. This community created a world where women found support, encouragement and friendship. Iowa antis realized men had their sphere of influence and believed there would be no room for women. In a woman's sphere, anti-suffragists argued that women had influence, status and exclusive knowledge. Iowa anti-suffragists argued they did not want to lose these benefits for a possibility—an illusion—of political equality with men. Anti-suffragists largely saw any change of this sort as unnatural and a threat to society. Iowa anti-suffragists used the beliefs that Iowa society was based on gender roles and family, and created fears that woman suffrage would eliminate these situations.¹⁵⁵

A senator present during the 1911 hearings, Mr. Shirley Gilliland, proclaimed women, particularly the numerous suffragists, needed to stay home and not bring their “dishpans and coal scuttle” into the legislature.¹⁵⁶ Gilliland argued women “could be better employed at home,” saying the suffragists only wanted to be in the organizations to “get their picture taken and for notoriety.”¹⁵⁷ He also added, suffragists “ought to stay at home and bring up the coming generation not to be sissies.”¹⁵⁸ After the debates, this Iowa General Assembly denied the proposal by an overall vote of 27-21.¹⁵⁹

Iowa anti-suffrage arguments into the second decade of the twentieth century did utilize some national rhetoric, however, the arguments from the two groups were not completely parallel. Iowa anti-suffragists argued women should have a wide range of activities, some of which included women working outside the private sphere. “We believe in women working together in public as well as in private; we believe it ventilates their minds.”¹⁶⁰ They argued public activities would allow women to become “better

neighbors, friends, and citizens,” without the vote.¹⁶¹ They did not argue, however, that women should be working in the public sphere for permanent social means, as national anti-suffragists argued, but rather, that it would be acceptable for women to occasionally be involved with community efforts outside the domestic sphere.

While Thurner’s ideas for the new, progressive anti-suffrage arguments work on the East coast, they do not include all early twentieth century anti-suffrage arguments. This included the organizations and individuals debating Iowa anti-suffrage arguments. As a result, during the early twentieth century, Iowa anti-suffragists faced a major dilemma with their arguments and their actions. Iowa antis continually argued women should be in the female sphere—the domestic sphere and at home—not in the public sphere working politics. As such, this created problems for Iowa anti-suffragists as they were forced to face the contradiction of their arguments versus their actions: many Iowa anti-suffragists worked in the public sphere when they argued women should only be in the private. Thus, to hopefully rectify the problem Iowa antis called for a ‘quiet campaign.’¹⁶² This campaign initially proceeded to follow simple educational actions conducted by women. Regardless of their intentions, the actions by Iowa anti-suffragists only proceeded further into the public arena during the twentieth century as they gave speeches, organized opposition clubs, held meetings, hosted dances and planned public events.¹⁶³ While anti-suffragists maintained they did not want to be involved in the public arena with men, their actions resembled closely those of the suffragists they criticized. Nonetheless, Iowa anti-suffragists continued to vocally maintain their argument of women’s rightful place in the home.

National anti-suffragists started to argue that women were citizens the same as men, though with different uses. According to Manuela Thurner, Progressive Era antis from the East stopped arguing Victorian Era themes that women and men should be separate in the private and public spheres based on biology, but rather argued women had a particular role in the public arena that was different from the public arena of males, and that was appropriate for females.¹⁶⁴ While this became a standard argument in national organizations, the Iowa women did not voice this opinion explicitly through their spoken or printed materials. Few, if any, mentioned this idea up to 1916.

Throughout the early twentieth century debates, suffragists continually argued that liquor, big business and political interests supported and controlled anti-suffrage organizations. Many prominent suffragists assumed the anti-suffragists were under the control of more powerful male forces, including liquor interests. Suffragists belittled the antis, claiming anti-suffrage groups were solely dependent on male groups that worked to protect their economic interests. Suffragists recognized the frequent anti-suffrage arguments from the turn of the century: the majority of women did not want to vote; women should be in the home; and women were not mentally or emotionally capable of voting. On the whole, suffragists assumed all anti-suffragists were brainwashed by influential male interests into old fashioned, backward women.¹⁶⁵ What the suffragists missed, however, was the reality that the majority of anti-suffrage leaders who controlled and led the movement were influential women themselves. While these male groups might have also worked to defeat suffrage amendments, they did so for entirely different reasons than traditional anti-suffragists.

Iowa anti-suffragists—men and women—fought against suffrage because they believed female enfranchisement would bring women into the public sphere, leading to disaster for families, society and the country. The idea of anti-suffragists being involved in political debates against suffragists in the legislature and outside of their homes, did not sit well with most turn of the century anti-suffragists as they argued the act unladylike.¹⁶⁶ While national anti-suffragists worked to improve social conditions, they objected to female suffrage based on the idea of *how* women would fulfill these goals of serving their country socially while being outside the public sphere. Years into the twentieth century, some of these same anti-suffragists, nonetheless, did exactly what they were trying to prevent. They were in the public sphere through their own campaign, lecturing, debating and even lobbying, all things which they advocated for women to avoid. While the national anti-suffrage groups' arguments had shifted to correct this contradiction, suffragists continued to critique Iowa anti-suffragists because of the inconsistency between their arguments and their public actions.

For Iowa anti-suffragists, their arguments swirling around the state during the early twentieth century drifted apart from other states' arguments. These states, particularly in the East, increasingly shifted their arguments towards women's involvement into the public sphere as non-partisan members. With this transition, Iowa anti-suffrage organizations lost the cohesiveness of their arguments as well as their ultimate effect. This shift noted a change between the Midwest state and others as Iowans continued the use of the older arguments while the national anti-suffrage organizations changed their rhetoric into new arguments. This divided set of arguments caused problems for Iowa anti-suffragists and for national anti-suffrage organizations in

later years. The upcoming 1916 Iowa referendum would illustrate a further divide of these arguments and their consequences.

⁸¹ Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 217- 212.

⁸² Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780—1920," *The American Historical Review* 89, No. 3 (June 1984), 620; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Sept. 1973), 335-336.

⁸³ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xi-xiii.

⁸⁴ Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movement in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 183-184; Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 2.

⁸⁵ Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 4-6.

⁸⁶ Marshall, 4-6.

⁸⁷ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*.

⁸⁸ Marshall, 4-7.

⁸⁹ Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920*. Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), xxvi, 54-56; Camhi, 2.

⁹⁰ Buechler, 183.

⁹¹ Camhi, 3; Jablonsky, xxvi.

⁹² Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*.

⁹³ Buechler, 179; Marshall, 6-10.

⁹⁴ Joseph Gilpin Pyle, "Christian Civilization in the Balance," Pennsylvania Association Oppose to Woman Suffrage, "Anna B. Lawther Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1.

⁹⁵ Pyle, 1.

⁹⁶ Pyle, 1-3.

⁹⁷ Buechler, 179; Marshall, 6-10.

⁹⁸ Everett P. Wheeler, "For the Preservation of the Home," The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, "Iowa Woman's Suffrage Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, 1-2.

⁹⁹ Robert P. J. Cooney, Jr., *Winning The Vote: The triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement* (Santa Cruz: American Graphic Press, 2005), 174.

¹⁰⁰ Marshall, 6-10.

¹⁰¹ Marshall, 6-10.

¹⁰² “Mothering the Community,” *Remonstrance*, October 1914, reprinted by the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, “Anna B. Lawther Collection,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

¹⁰³ “Mothering the Community,” *Remonstrance*, October 1914.

¹⁰⁴ Manuela Thurner, “‘Better Citizens Without the Ballot:’ American AntiSuffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (Spring 1993), 43.

¹⁰⁵ Thurner, 43; Marshall, 102.

¹⁰⁶ Thurner, 41.

¹⁰⁷ Thurner, 41.

¹⁰⁸ Thurner, 41.

¹⁰⁹ Thurner 41-42.

¹¹⁰ *The Anti-Suffragist*, April 1912.

¹¹¹ Thurner, 35-41.

¹¹² Thurner, 40.

¹¹³ Thurner, 40.

¹¹⁴ Thurner, 40.

¹¹⁵ Buechler, 183-184; Camhi, 2.

¹¹⁶ *Census of Iowa*, 1915, Compiled and Published under Direction of The Executive Council of the State of Iowa, Des Moines. State Historical Library of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

¹¹⁷ Marshall, 284.

¹¹⁸ Camhi, 3; Jablonsky, 16.

¹¹⁹ “Physician’s Wife Jars Suffragets: At their Hearing Before Senate Committee She opposes Votes for Women” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 7 March 1911.

¹²⁰ “Physician’s Wife Jars Suffragets...” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 7 March 1911.

¹²¹ “Physician’s Wife Jars Suffragets...” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 7 March 1911.

¹²² *The Register and Leader*, 21 March 1912.

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- ¹²³ Buechler, 182.
- ¹²⁴ Thurner, 34-36.
- ¹²⁵ Jablonsky, xxv.
- ¹²⁶ Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1969), 142, 256.
- ¹²⁷ “Women in a Tangle,” *The Davenport Daily Republican*, 15 November 1901.
- ¹²⁸ Camhi, 110.
- ¹²⁹ “Alice French Collection,” Special Collections Department, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.
- ¹³⁰ Josiah H. Shinn, “Miss Alice French of Clover Bend,” *Arkansas Historical Association*, publication II, 1906, 344-351.
- ¹³¹ *Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association Pamphlets*, Women’s Anti-suffrage Association of the Third Judicial District of the State of New York, 1905.
- ¹³² *Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association Pamphlets*, 1905.
- ¹³³ *Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association Pamphlets*, 1905.
- ¹³⁴ *The Des Moines Daily Leader*, 19 November 1901.
- ¹³⁵ *The Des Moines Daily Leader*, 19 November 1901.
- ¹³⁶ Marshall, 6-10.
- ¹³⁷ “Anti-Suffragists Will be in Readiness to Prosecute Campaign at Early Date,” *The Des Moines Daily Leader*, 21 November 1901.
- ¹³⁸ “Anti-Suffragists Will be in Readiness...” *The Des Moines Daily Leader*, 21 November 1901.
- ¹³⁹ “Anti-Suffragists Will be in Readiness...” *The Des Moines Daily Leader*, 21 November 1901.
- ¹⁴⁰ “Women in a Tangle,” *The Davenport Daily Republican*, 15 November 1901.
- ¹⁴¹ “Women in a Tangle,” *The Davenport Daily Republican*, 15 November 1901.
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- ¹⁴⁴ Marshall, 196.
- ¹⁴⁵ Gallaher, 213-219.
- ¹⁴⁶ Schwieder, 227.
- ¹⁴⁷ “Why We Are Anti-s,” Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, 1916, “Iowa Women’s Suffrage Collection,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, 2.

¹⁴⁸ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 2.

¹⁴⁹ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 1.

¹⁵⁰ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 2.

¹⁵¹ “Why We Are Anti-s.” 2.

¹⁵² “Why We Are Anti-s,” 2.

¹⁵³ Noun, 256.

¹⁵⁴ Benjamin, 247-250; Noun, 256; *The Woman’s Protest*, November 1915.

¹⁵⁵ Jablonsky, xxv.

¹⁵⁶ “Suffrage Beaten In Iowa: Senate Refuses, 27 to 21, to Submit Issue to the People,” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 22 March 1911.

¹⁵⁷ “Suffrage Beaten In Iowa,” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 22 March 1911.

¹⁵⁸ “Suffrage Beaten In Iowa,” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 22 March 1911.

¹⁵⁹ “Suffrage Beaten In Iowa,” *Des Moines Daily Leader*, 22 March 1911.

¹⁶⁰ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 2.

¹⁶¹ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 3.

¹⁶² Buechler, 184.

¹⁶³ Buechler, 184; Cooney, 175.

¹⁶⁴ Turner, 48.

¹⁶⁵ Turner, 33-34.

¹⁶⁶ Camhi, 2; Jablonsky 1-2.

CHAPTER THREE 1916 Referendum Vote: The Iowa Anti-Suffrage Action

On January 18, 1916, the Iowa Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, the Iowa AOWS, formed under the leadership of Mrs. Sarah Casady, a wealthy, college educated housewife from Des Moines.¹⁶⁷ With the suffrage referendum approaching, Iowa anti-suffragists increased their campaign to defeat the June 5th vote by creating and acquiring literature, teaching and sending out speakers, forming organizations and building membership. Iowa anti-suffragists acquired literature, speakers and financial assistance from national anti-suffrage organizations to aid with the campaign. This referendum campaign would establish not only the differences in rhetoric between the anti-suffragists and suffragists, but also among the national and Iowa anti-suffragists. The contrast among the anti-suffrage groups would establish the reality that the anti-suffrage movement did not form or continue cohesive rhetoric during the 1916 Iowa referendum vote.

To defeat the referendum, the newly organized AOWS formed and acquired new members quickly. The organization consisted of women from towns across Iowa including twelve officer positions with members from Des Moines, Clinton, Davenport, Sioux City, Cedar Falls, Dubuque, Council Bluffs and Webster City. On average, these anti-suffrage members were fifty years old, with the leaders ranging from sixty-four years old to twenty-eight years old. The majority of these women were married, with the exception of one divorcee and one widow. While the majority of Iowa anti-suffrage leaders had at least a few years of college, and all having some level of either high school or grammar education, only two registered in the census with outside employment.

These Iowa anti-suffragists varied their specific religious views, but all were based in Christianity. Only one member did not mention any denominational views. Overall, these women would have been considered middle to upper class. The average income and property values of these families rested around ten thousand dollars. While these Iowa anti-suffrage leaders were located around the state, they had common backgrounds and the common goal of defeating woman suffrage.¹⁶⁸

The formation of the Iowa AOWS inspired others across the state to form affiliated groups to fight the referendum by receiving members, producing literature and holding lectures on these issues. City chapters appeared in Davenport, Dubuque and Sioux City.¹⁶⁹ High-profile Iowans like Sioux City resident Miss Margaret Gay Dolliver, the sister of the late U.S. Senator from Iowa, also assisted the cause.¹⁷⁰ While both men and women worked against suffrage, well-to-do Iowa women were the leading organizers of the first official Iowa anti-suffrage groups.

In fact, only after the female anti-suffragists of Iowa organized did any male organizations arise. In March 1916, the Iowa Association of Men Opposed to Women Suffrage, IAMOWS, organized and sent a letter to the “men of Iowa.”¹⁷¹ The letter argued that Iowa men should support the “conservation of womanhood” by speaking for the anti-suffrage cause, thus saving, “the women of Iowa from politics and public office for which Nature did not design them...”¹⁷² The letter included an application for membership which also included a fee that went toward the “campaign to defeat the proposed Woman Suffrage Amendment at the polls on June 5, 1916.”¹⁷³

Although male and female anti-suffrage organizations held separate meetings, they both advanced similar arguments against woman suffrage. Familial relations, at

times, also aided this; in particular, Simon Casady, the vice-president of the IAMOWS, was also the husband of the Iowa AOWS president. While Iowa female anti-suffragists organized first officially, all anti-suffrage organization members knew they needed internal cohesiveness to gain the majority of public support.¹⁷⁴

The *Waterloo Courier* reported activities of anti-suffrage organizations, concluding that the antis had worked quietly behind the scenes, with the goal of defeating the suffrage referendum in a “short and decisive campaign.”¹⁷⁵ The article discussed a prominent male anti-suffrage campaigner who had come to Waterloo to organize “male anti-leagues.”¹⁷⁶ This anonymous man said, ‘a large number of Waterloo men...are against women’s suffrage, although most of them put the soft pedal on their talk in public.’¹⁷⁷ During his visit to Iowa, this man found that ‘most of these men will keep out of arguments with the ardent suffragists in order to keep peace in his family. But when they go to the polls they will vote ‘no’ on suffrage.’¹⁷⁸ Thus, he reiterated the argument of past anti-suffragists that the majority of Americans did not want woman suffrage, regardless if their voices were not the loudest; however, he stressed that Iowa males needed to speak out against suffrage to avoid this misconception at the polls.

Colonel John P. Irish, a “professional antiwoman-suffrage campaigner” by 1916, continued to lecture across Iowa during the campaign.¹⁷⁹ While women generally controlled the anti-suffrage movement organizations, they appreciated Irish’s support because his status kept anti-suffrage debates on the front pages of newspapers and not on the inside women’s pages. Thus, the anti-suffragists used Irish’s celebrity as a way to gain more influence and then to establish themselves credibly on their own.¹⁸⁰

Suffragists regarded these public male lecturers and groups that opposed female enfranchisement as the primary threat to the referendum, because they appeared well-organized and established. The suffragists did not see the anti-suffrage women as their direct opposition, but instead believed female anti-suffragists were the pawns of political and liquor interests. These two male groups had largely started the opposition for female enfranchisement in the late nineteenth century. Suffragists, however, did not realize the impact and intensity of their female anti-suffrage opponents by the twentieth century. This neglect of female anti-suffragists was one of the suffragists' major errors. The suffragists underestimated the power of the anti-suffrage women to use these large interest groups to their advantage. The female anti-suffrage groups formed alliances, and thus provided a central organization for all opponents of woman suffrage. While these different groups did not share the same reasons for opposing suffrage, they coordinated their efforts because they sought the same ends.¹⁸¹

As a result of these suffragists' assumptions, arguments about funding were heated during the campaign, particularly in the counties where the suffrage debate loomed large. Generally, suffragists argued that the "wet" counties in Iowa supported anti-suffrage ideas and organizations. According to the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association records, residents of the biggest anti-suffrage counties also gave a fair amount of money to suffrage campaigns. Dubuque County, a "wet" county, pledged the most during the 1916 campaign: \$300. The people of Des Moines County, another "wet" county, also supported the suffragists with a \$130 contribution.¹⁸² Generally, contributions during the referendum came from a variety of counties that supported both suffragists and anti-suffragists, showing that Iowa counties were not solid voting blocks.

During this fervid time of debates and campaigns, the anti-suffragists continued to strengthen in membership and donations. In Davenport, Alice French—pseudonym, Olive Thanet—attached herself to the local anti-suffrage organization as one of its vice-presidents.¹⁸³ She was a famous fiction writer, which gave the anti-suffragists more publicity and popularity with French’s supporters. French started working personally on the Davenport anti-suffrage movement in 1916. In April, she noted in her diary that they “ought to do something about organizing the Antis [of Davenport].” Five days later, French reported the Davenport anti-suffragists had found “a very advantageous location” for their local headquarters.¹⁸⁴

These Iowa anti-suffrage organizations largely started because of national financial support. The Iowa organizations formed five years after the national society of anti-suffrage supporters, the National Association Opposed to Woman’s Suffrage, NAOWS, was founded in New York with Mrs. Dodge as president.¹⁸⁵ This national organization, with an exclusive female membership, provided enormous aid—both financially with campaign funds and physically with trained lecturers—to the Iowa anti-suffrage organizations and supporters during the 1916 campaign.

These Iowans and their organizations received much support from the NAOWS as well as other out-of-state organizations. This reflected typical anti-suffrage strategy: the NAOWS frequently aided local groups in states that held referendum votes. In 1916, the NAOWS worked three important referendum campaigns: Iowa, South Dakota and West Virginia. National anti-suffragists realized the Iowa referendum could either create great momentum or serious problems for the upcoming state campaigns. “After all...a defeat in Iowa would discourage suffragists everywhere, the campaign in Iowa was of national

concern,” noted one national anti-suffragist.¹⁸⁶ In particular, as the *Shenandoah Sentinel Post* observed, “the Iowa antis and their supporters worked hard for a defeat in Iowa as this would ‘be of great assistance in the campaigns in South Dakota and West Virginia.’”¹⁸⁷ Other organizations like the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, MAOFESW, submitted a letter to the NAOWS, in New York City stressing, “Iowa needs money before June.”¹⁸⁸

Outside influences of this kind increasingly penetrated Iowa organizations before the referendum. In addition to money, the national anti-suffragists also sent pamphlets and delegates to Iowa. In Massachusetts, for example, the Anti-Suffrage League met in the home of an anti-suffrage supporter “to hear the report of the delegate sent to Iowa.”¹⁸⁹ The newspaper article noted the antis had strong “hope” for a victory in Iowa. In fact, “all of the visitors were optimistic in their statements regarding the Iowa election.”¹⁹⁰ The NAOWS had recently defeated a number of state suffrage referendums and believed the trend would continue to Iowa. More importantly, Iowa started the state referendum campaigns for 1916. While they were optimistic, the national antis, both the NAOWS and Eastern state chapters, recognized the importance of gaining momentum with Iowa for the other two state referendum debates, and so attempted to wield their influence.

These national female anti-suffragists became more forward and aggressive with the Iowa newspapers as the editors gradually lent their support to the suffrage movement after the turn of the century. The *Grundy Center Republican*, for example, reported an encounter with the national anti-suffragists: “*The Republican* has received a wild appeal from the anti-suffragists of the East not to print anything favorable to suffrage unless we print as much news against suffrage right along side of it.”¹⁹¹ National anti-suffragists

traveled into Iowa with the goal of using all possible means to defeat the referendum. They had executed this plan in Eastern states successfully, so they decided to continue the action. This particular editor, however, argued that this anti-suffrage request was pointless, since his newspaper would not help either side.¹⁹²

By 1916, the *Des Moines Register* had come to support the suffrage movement, and in fact, during the campaign, the Iowa press generally sided with the suffragists. During previous decades, Iowa newspapers had either opposed suffrage or printed relatively equally the suffrage debates. According to the Iowa anti-suffrage organizations, by 1916, ‘600 of our 848 newspapers’ supported women suffrage.¹⁹³ In March 1916, however, the suffragists became anxious about the upcoming public vote. A local suffrage newspaper complained that “the suffragists are treading too softly and that casual observers seem to have some doubts as to the very existence of a campaign.”¹⁹⁴

Throughout the campaign different voices spoke about the suffrage issue. For many Iowa towns and surrounding areas, national anti-suffragists persisted as the main voice for anti-suffrage information and arguments. The *Des Moines Tribune* reported almost all the Iowa counties had local suffrage and anti-suffrage groups, but in a few counties there were no local women speaking out. An anonymous author noted in the newspaper that the national suffragists and anti-suffragists had invaded all counties in Iowa, but in some areas, no local women had joined the discussion to express their opinions. The author argued that if Iowa women really wanted to take action in the debate, they needed to express their opinions so male voters would know if their women actually wanted the vote. The *Des Moines Tribune* reported that most newspapers provided open spaces for local women to voice their opinions, but none had taken

advantage. The author worried men would vote for woman suffrage unless Iowa anti-suffrage supporters argued against it.¹⁹⁵

Nonetheless, national women connected to the NAOWS including Miss Bronson, Miss Clara Markeson and Miss Marjorie Dorman were sent to Iowa to conduct lectures during the campaign. These national antis gave numerous anti-suffrage talks, particularly as the end of the campaign approached. In the period from March to June, newspapers listed multiple anti-suffrage speeches all over Iowa, from Ottumwa to Webster City, Cedar Falls, Dubuque and Clarion.¹⁹⁶ Mrs. Margaret C. Robinson and Miss Marjorie Dorman frequently lectured at Drake and Des Moines College. Mrs. Robinson also presented the case against suffrage to Grinnell College students.¹⁹⁷ Other frequent speakers included Mrs. Robert Johnson and Mrs. Elbert Carpenter—both out of state anti-suffragists.¹⁹⁸

During the Iowa debates, New York, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania organizations primarily distributed the national literature. The Women's Anti-Suffrage Association of Massachusetts in Boston frequently published and sent pamphlets by Margaret C. Robinson to the Iowa anti-suffrage organizations. Robinson largely argued the new twentieth century national rhetoric for women's public, non-partisan role. She rarely based her pamphlets on older biological arguments. In one pamphlet she argued, "Intelligent women who are interested in public affairs have now a large influence in bringing about advanced social legislation."¹⁹⁹ She argued women had more influence without the ballot. In fact, "woman suffrage [destroyed] this non-partisan power of women and [gave] them nothing worth having in its place."²⁰⁰ When women were outside politics they could use their influence as non-partisans with men in all political

parties, and thus, have greater influence. Robinson believed the loss of non-partisan influence would create huge ramifications for women's moral and social work. She argued that many of the social reform laws were in place because of this nonpartisan lobbying to all the political parties. "Many excellent laws now on our statute books are there largely owing to the non-partisan influence of club women and social workers who have worked unitedly (sic) to put them there."²⁰¹

In a small number of pamphlets, Robinson argued for women's moral influence and power, a trend from the late nineteenth century. She argued suffrage would destroy this traditional Victorian influence and power because women would have to resort to the same immoral political tactics used by men. "The question for intelligent women to decide is whether or not they want this influence destroyed."²⁰² Thus, she argued, intelligent, well-to-do women needed to assist in opposing the vote in order to maintain a greater influence and power.

Anti-suffrage supporters, like Mrs. Robinson, primarily came to Iowa from the East coast; however, occasionally anti-suffragists arrived from nearby states. Mrs. Elbridge Carpenter, born in Iowa, traveled from Minnesota to Iowa to give lectures against suffrage. Mrs. Carpenter argued Americans should not try woman suffrage as an "experiment" just because suffragists said many women wanted it.²⁰³ This frequent anti-suffrage argument worked to reassure male voters that while suffragists were louder, the majority of women did not want enfranchisement.

Mrs. Carpenter addressed another frequent argument derived from fears as she argued that the "masses of foreign born women, even more illiterate than their men; masses of ignorant black women in the south; masses of indifferent and corrupt women in

our cities; will all vote” and ruin white, well-to-do women’s way of life.²⁰⁴ She argued that male enfranchisement “was too hastily conferred on the freedmen after the war and...the south has suffered for it ever since.”²⁰⁵ Therefore, she urged husbands, brothers and fathers to represent women rather than forcing another irreversible disaster. She argued the ballot would never be an experiment as the franchise could only be enlarged, but not minimized. Many Americans viewed new male immigrants and African Americans as unworthy of the American vote, so white, male voters were wary of giving a new group of Americans the franchise.

Other national fears like Mormonism, socialism and feminism were also the basis for many of the anti-suffrage arguments, and featured prominently in the pamphlets sent to Iowa anti-suffrage organizations from the East. The Pennsylvania Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, PAOWS, published a pamphlet before the referendum that the Iowa anti-suffragists redistributed. One section of the pamphlet, “Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage,” attacked the female suffrage states of the West, including Utah, where its female Mormon residents were among the first American women with the vote. The writer argued that Mormonism, socialism and feminism had been the force behind the adoption of woman suffrage in eleven states with a total population around eight million. To emphasize the anti-suffragists’ main argument that the majority of Americans did not want female suffrage, the pamphlet also noted that woman suffrage had been defeated in eighteen states with a population of thirty million.²⁰⁶

Ex-senator Frank G. Cannon of Utah said that the Mormon Church thrived in eleven states by 1916, “the exact eleven states where women vote.”²⁰⁷ The Pennsylvania anti-suffragists claimed “the Mormons want woman suffrage for the simple reason, the

more wives they have the more votes they control.”²⁰⁸ While the Mormon Church ended polygamy in 1890, anti-suffragists were still able to use this fear against the American voter and continued the argument well into the twentieth century. Mormonism, along with feminism, Socialism and suffrage drove the national arguments that were based on voters’ fears that anything different or new would negatively change their world.

During the campaign, suffragists also voiced their opinions of anti-suffrage arguments. Iowan Carrie Chapman Catt advocated for the Iowa referendum, by criticizing an anti-suffrage argument.

The worn-out argument against suffrage that woman’s place is in the home cannot be used by intelligent people, for in every rank and sphere of work women are found—in factories, banks, commercial life, and professional life. The wheels of business would stop if women remained in the home as it is argued that they should.²⁰⁹

Catt’s argument resounded deep into anti-suffrage literature. By this point in the twentieth century, however, the national anti-suffragists had turned away from this argument. National antis argued women should work in the public sphere, but maintained they would do a better job without the ballot.²¹⁰ Catt, however, did not accept this argument and continued, “even anti suffragists do not stay home. They come clear out here to Iowa from the east to tell the men not to give women the vote because women’s place is in the home.”²¹¹

While the national anti-suffragists argued during the 1916 Iowa referendum they no longer agreed with the separate spheres argument, Iowa anti-suffragists answered differently. Iowa antis did not blend the new national anti-suffrage argument about women’s non-partisan influence in the public sphere into their referendum repertoire.

Instead, Iowa anti-suffragists retained older arguments about the female sphere based on their own conceptions of cooperative family and community living. They argued that “there are some things which man can do better than woman, and some things which woman can do better than man, and that if *she* will faithfully and efficiently ‘mother’ her own home she can trust *him* to ‘father’ the community.”²¹² This argument did not coincide well with Iowa farm men and women as many farm families could not realistically enact these strict roles. Nonetheless, Iowa anti-suffragists relied upon the idea of separate spheres, arguing that the relationships between men and women should be separate as each had his or her own strengths for their particular environments.

While national anti-suffragists argued that women needed to be brought out of their roles for the moral good of the state, Iowa anti-suffragists largely argued that these separate roles needed to be maintained. This diversity created a strange set of arguments as many national groups aided the Iowa anti-suffragists with pamphlets, lecturers and funds to support their cause. The older anti-suffrage arguments used by Iowa antis created problems for their campaign because they were paradoxical, as they argued women should be in the home and not in the public sphere with men. Iowa anti-suffragists rectified this problem by calling for a ‘quiet campaign’ that would remain educational. The initial remark on the front of multiple pamphlets stressed that they went “into this discussion unwillingly and with regret.”²¹³

These older arguments used by Iowa anti-suffragists fit into their mentality of work, tradition and family. The Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, Davenport branch published, “Why we are Anti-s in Iowa” and listed arguments against female enfranchisement, including the belief that “equal suffrage is a menace and not a

hope for community.”²¹⁴ This main argument stemmed from the experiment with equal suffrage in the West where it “*has been tried and has failed.*”²¹⁵ Suffragists argued multiple reasons why female enfranchisement would aid America, but anti-suffragists repeatedly used the suffrage states as examples against the suffrage arguments. Suffrage in “Colorado has neither helped industrial problems nor purified politics nor created better laws to protect women and children than any of the male suffrage states.”²¹⁶

Mary C. Chapman, an Iowa City resident, wrote to the editor in chief of *The Iowa City Citizen*. She said “Now, let’s be honest; the majority of women do not want to vote. That is true here and has been elsewhere.”²¹⁷ Iowa anti-suffragists also feared a loud minority would overrule the indifferent majority. Iowa antis portrayed women, particularly farm women, as “indifferent” to the ballot, and suggested that giving them the vote would create an uneven and wasted voting pattern.²¹⁸ Iowa women might vote in their first election, but after the novelty of voting wore off, Iowa antis argued, women would lose their sense of duty. “Women in Iowa [could already] vote on bond issues and school taxes, the pamphlet writers observed, “but only a tenth to a third of women” did so.”²¹⁹ On May 11, 1916, the *Cedar Falls Record* published an anti-suffrage advertisement noting eighty percent of Iowa women did not want the ballot. “That the minority insists upon forcing the unwilling majority functions they have no desire to assume.”²²⁰

Iowa anti-suffragists created and used their own arguments based on societal fears and concerns about change. This included moral and pragmatic arguments. One of the more frequent strategies for Iowa anti-suffragists to gain support among male voters was to appeal directly to farmers. Iowa antis used this method regardless that their

membership was largely urban based. Focusing on their concerns of the farming majority, one pamphlet asserted that woman suffrage would lead to even higher taxes. The pamphlet claimed that since the passage of woman suffrage, California had a one hundred percent tax increase and Denver had “the highest tax rate of any city of its size in the world with twenty-six dollars for every man, woman and child in the city.”²²¹ The author also argued that equal suffrage states wasted taxpayer money. “Money thrown away in hysterical legislation, useless commissions, uncalled for bond issues, increased election costs—Taxes are squandered because of catering legislative interest to the irresponsible elements among voters.”²²² This pamphlet argued that women would ruin the political process with their lack of knowledge of government and the public sphere, in particular, a lack of knowledge of the farmer’s needs.²²³

Other posters showed a sense that town and country voters had different priorities.

One flyer noted that each group did not want to be ruled by the other.

The Farmers of Iowa should remember that the granting of Woman Suffrage means the doubling of the city vote in Iowa which has no thought of their interests and does not materially increase the farm vote. It is not your wife and daughter who will vote, but the women of towns and cities who have easy access to the polls...

Thus, “You, Mr. Farmer, must pay the bill. Can you afford this experiment at this time?”²²⁴ Iowa farmers feared that suffrage would not be equal among the geographic areas and that farm women would not be able to vote as farming restricted families to the demands of the land.²²⁵

These farmers feared town and urban men and women did not understand their needs living in rural areas, and thus, would overrule the governmental process with

legislation for overwhelming urban area needs. During this time farmers struggled to gain useful legislation for their livelihood. They feared increased legislation for townspeople would dictate over the rural areas of Iowa. This pamphlet, which showed the antagonisms between town and rural people, worked to the anti-suffragists' advantage.

Iowa anti-suffragists also used the nineteenth century biological argument during the 1916 debates, noting women were more emotional than men. They argued suffrage would cause an "increased...nervous strain on woman."²²⁶ While these biological arguments stemmed from older anti-suffrage arguments, they remained in use by Iowa antis because they continued to work. Education revolving around the emotional side of the human body, and in particular the female body, was not widely known and understood. Thus, Iowa anti-suffragists continued the older argument that female enfranchisement would decrease the health of women.²²⁷

The Dubuque Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, DAOWS, voiced its rhetoric, including pragmatic arguments, frequently during the 1916 campaign. One of the organization's main contentions was that female enfranchisement would endanger the democratic process by allowing candidates to purchase their offices. In the *Dubuque Daily Times Journal* on May 22, 1916, the DAOWS placed an advertisement alleging that,

the election expenses of successful candidates for the U.S. Senate...were three times as great in woman suffrage states as in male suffrage states of similar population. It is not desirable to establish a condition under which the candidate, if not a rich man, must allow others to place him under obligation by sharing his campaign expenses.²²⁸

Almost all Iowa anti-suffrage literature stressed the expenses woman suffrage threatened to increase from taxes to campaign costs. During the last month before the campaign, Iowa anti-suffragists continually used the possibility of increased taxes as an argument against the referendum. “Why Pay More Taxes,” published by the Dubuque Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, claimed that female voters would double the polling costs and double the number of votes. Using California as their suffrage state scapegoat, the authors of the pamphlet argued that “California election expenses have increased 133 ½ percent since 1910,” when California women received suffrage rights.²²⁹

The arguments about doubling election costs aligned with Iowa anti-suffragists’ argument of doubling votes, both pragmatic arguments were viewed as a waste of finances. Iowa anti-suffragists argued that only nineteen to twenty percent of voting age women were single. Thus, as the majority of women were married, antis argued these women would simply vote the same as their husbands, which would result with a double vote.²³⁰ By 1916, Iowa anti-suffragists included a new realm of pragmatic arguments; though, they had not excluded the biological arguments like the national anti-suffragists.

Iowa anti-suffragists continued to use rhetoric which worked, including the argument that female suffrage would only “increase the Socialist vote and influence.”²³¹ Iowans connected the idea of woman suffrage to increased independence in women. They believed this would, in turn, inevitably cause all women to become feminists, wanting total “economic independence” from their families and achieving an “easy divorce.”²³² This feminist transition would ultimately turn the nation from one of cohesive families into dissatisfied individuals which would then lead to socialism.²³³ Suffrage, feminism and socialism “all mean the other and no matter which cause wins

first, disaster to matrimony and the home will follow.”²³⁴ This possible set of circumstances, regardless of the varied arguments, caused real fear for many Iowans. Anti-suffragists used the increasing national socialist support along with the already rising numbers of women working outside the home to generate fears for female suffrage. Iowa anti-suffragists aligned socialism with suffrage as both groups argued for equal rights and standards, economically and politically. Anti-suffragists also used a 1913 suffrage slogan that stated “one million socialists work and vote for woman suffrage.”²³⁵

A Dubuque paper discussed other Iowa fears as they published reports of suffragists who urged Iowans to “get in step” with Illinois, where a piece of partial legislation had recently passed, and with other states that had passed legislation for women’s full enfranchisement. The paper also published the anti-suffrage reply by the Dubuque Branch of the Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage:

We do not believe Iowa will be in haste to ‘get in step’ with Utah, which means in step with Mormonism, by which that state is governed; not in step with little Nevada, with her loose marriage and divorce laws, and many other loose laws besides; or with Colorado whose political condition for the past three years has been unspeakable; or with the mining states of Arizona, or even with the great state of California.²³⁶

These Iowa anti-suffragists feared that woman suffrage would change their way of life, which they saw as already under threat. While the Iowa anti-suffragists welcomed the national influence through pamphlets, speakers and money, they also formulated their own objections to woman suffrage based on their state’s mentality. Speaking against the suffrage states in the West, one writer asked, “have any of them a purer, higher form of government than Iowa? Have any of them cleaner cities in the interest of young men and

women? Have they diminished the number of saloons, or lessened the sale of liquor?”²³⁷ Thus, Iowa anti-suffragists argued that male-only suffrage states had better laws for women and children, as well as widows and orphans, and provided working people with better wages.

These Iowa anti-suffragists also argued that “the ballot is a privilege and a heavy responsibility; it is not a right.”²³⁸ Instead of gaining more voters, they argued for better voters. Perhaps Iowa anti-suffragists saw female enfranchisement as inevitable. They argued for better voter education for men and small voting opportunities for women with school matters and taxation. “We do not believe in jumping into water over our head until we learn how to swim.”²³⁹ Iowa anti-suffragists argued against female enfranchisement in the early twentieth century, however, they realized that woman suffrage could be acceptable in the future. Iowans, more than the national anti-suffragists, appeared to be understanding and open to the inevitability of female enfranchisement. In this way, Iowa anti-suffragists did not appear as serious about anti-suffrage as their national counterparts.

Nonetheless, Iowa anti-suffragists campaigned hard against the 1916 referendum vote, combining old arguments blended with new. Included in this combined list of arguments were nineteenth century values and gender roles which were threatened by the suffrage vote. Thus, during the campaign, Iowa anti-suffragists mixed old biological and moral arguments with new pragmatic arguments. These combined arguments stemmed from fears that their lives and communities would change. Anti-suffragists told Iowa men and women to fear female suffrage as it would negatively bring women into the public sphere, drawing them away from household duties, creating family disaster. Iowa

anti-suffragists feared this action would then create chaos in the community, which would spread across the state, and then eventually, the nation.

They believed the ballot would push women into an unwelcome world: the political sphere dominated by men. Therefore, these anti-suffrage writers worried that the ballot would ultimately alter and possibly end their sphere of social networks and influence within their female community. This female community was a world where women found support, encouragement and friendship, important aspects of their lives. Iowa anti-suffragists argued if women were placed in the public sphere with men, there would be no room for women's influence or action. In the private sphere, Iowa anti-suffragists argued that women had influence and status based on their exclusive knowledge and "suffrage would mean a loss of [the] rights" women already possessed.²⁴⁰ They did not want to lose these benefits for a possibility—an illusion, they believed—of political equality with men. Iowa anti-suffragists largely saw these transitions as unnatural and a threat to society.²⁴¹

Iowa anti-suffragists did believe, however, that women had a moral role in society. This moral role became their form of power and their form of influence, which the suffrage vote threatened. While Iowa anti-suffragists believed women should remain in the private sphere, they also argued women could pursue their natural role and work morally for women and children outside the home. In this way, they would still be considered part of the female sphere. Overall, these anti-suffrage arguments for Iowa women's role in society were largely aimed at urban women.

Early in February 1916, Miss Minnie Bronson, the chief speaker for the national anti-suffragists, addressed suffrage arguments and tactics. 'I am an Iowa woman, and I

think I know the Iowa men, and I am convinced they will not be misled by any such methods. Inuendos (sic) and personal vituperations... never carry any cause in Iowa.²⁴²

Miss Clara Markeson, the anti-suffrage field organizer, traveled with Miss Bronson during her campaign through the eastern part of the state, including Charles City, Dubuque, Clinton and Waterloo.²⁴³

As the date of the referendum grew closer, Iowans paid more attention to the increasingly frequent anti-suffrage debates. Colonel Irish spoke to Iowans at the Iowa City courthouse in May 1916. According to *The Iowa City Citizen*, he spoke in front of a “big crowd.”²⁴⁴ Not all lectures would have gained such a large crowd, but the well-known speaker, the location of the lecture in a large Iowa town, and date close to the referendum vote, probably attributed to the large crowd. Both Iowa City and surrounding rural area men and women probably filled the courthouse, though newspaper reports did not record the specific social makeup of the group.

To make sure their arguments and opinions were heard, the Iowa Association Opposed to Women Suffrage published their largest pamphlet a few weeks before the 1916 referendum vote and particularly aimed their arguments to male voters. These Iowa anti-suffragists filled page after page with arguments to make the case that “woman suffrage is wrong in theory and bad in practice.”²⁴⁵ Iowa anti-suffragists continued to argue that the majority of women did not want the vote, because suffrage was unnatural for women and would result in immorality both at home and in society as a whole. These anti-suffragists, aiming their arguments at the minds, hearts and egos of the male voters, worked to illustrate the catastrophic changes in their world if female suffrage became law.

Public lectures, large pamphlets and posters spread the arguments of the anti-suffragists across the state. Members of the Dubuque Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, DAOWS, distributed multiple pamphlets across the state of Iowa. They produced the poster, “Do Dubuque Women Want to Vote? ‘NO!’”²⁴⁶ It argued Dubuque women did not want to vote and had demonstrated this opinion when less than 100 women voted for a Dubuque bond issue, which was considered “a question of taxation!” This poster worked to refute the main suffrage argument that women were taxed, but not represented through the vote. The poster argued, “Men, by your vote June 5th, please do not force the ballot upon women who do not want it and who have just shown you so.”²⁴⁷

The DAOWS sent out their last advertisement to the *Dubuque Telegraph Herald* on Sunday, June 4. In this advertisement, the Dubuque anti-suffragists went as far as to explicitly tell male voters that the proposed amendment would be on a separate ballot at the primary election, as anti-suffragists were concerned voters would overlook the suffrage ballot. To ensure all avenues were covered antis added, “P. S.—You may vote NO on the amendment without declaring your party affiliation.”²⁴⁸ The Dubuque anti-suffragists wanted to reassure voters that anti-suffrage was not aligned with any particular party to receive all possible votes. The anti-suffragists worked hard during the last few days because a referendum defeat had no guarantee.²⁴⁹

On June 5, 1916, Iowa men voted for the fate of female enfranchisement in Iowa and afterwards, the people of Iowa and the nation waited for the results. After the polls closed, the public informally learned the referendum had been defeated. The official announcement finally arrived with the same verdict: 173,024 votes against and 162,683

votes supporting the woman suffrage referendum.²⁵⁰ Thus, on June 5, 1916, Iowa voters defeated the amendment for woman suffrage by 10,341 votes.²⁵¹

Surprising to some, the voting patterns in Iowa were not strictly aligned by a rural and urban divide. Some believed suffrage opposition arose strictly from rural areas while suffrage support occurred in urban areas. While there were many living in rural areas who did not support suffrage, rural residents did not exclusively oppose female enfranchisement. In fact, out of the twelve urban counties in Iowa during 1916, ten opposed suffrage.²⁵² Overall, Iowa rural and urban counties blurred the lines for any strict voting patterns of the referendum vote.

After the official announcement by political authorities, the anti-suffragists celebrated, the suffragists sulk, and newspapers were unusually silent. As noted, by the twentieth century, most Iowa newspapers supported the suffrage movement. As a result, many did not address the suffrage defeat in Iowa as boldly as they had supported the proposal during the preceding debates. A day after the referendum vote, in the Brooklyn, Iowa *Daily Eagle*, an anonymous woman wrote into the newspaper critiquing Iowa papers for this purposeful oversight. She asked why the newspaper did not proclaim loudly the defeat of woman suffrage. “Had Iowa gone for suffrage by a majority of only 500 or less there would have been jubilee meetings in Carnegie Hall and at the Academy of Music.”²⁵³ The inclusion of these New York landmarks illustrates her understanding of the importance of this Iowa referendum in the East. She also critiqued newspapers for the lack of news coverage on the amendment’s defeat in Iowa and her distaste for the newspaper’s political affiliation.

The *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, a Massachusetts paper, noted local anti-suffragists also celebrated the Iowa victory over woman suffrage. The celebratory luncheon occurred in Boston with local anti-suffrage ladies. They read a telegram from Iowa announcing the defeat of the June 5th vote. The members gave recognition to those Boston women who had, “assisted in the Iowa campaign, and who helped the Iowa anti-suffrage organizations apply the methods which proved so successful in defeating the suffrage movement in this state [of Massachusetts] last fall.”²⁵⁴ The article alluded to the influence of national organizational efforts through pamphlets, speakers and financial support during the referendum vote.

This defeat also provoked an important shift in suffrage strategy. After this referendum, the suffragists realized they could and were being defeated by anti-suffragists at the state level. While the anti-suffragists did not have a large active following, they had enough logistical support to defend the status quo through a state by state defense approach. Anti-suffragists had used this strategy to their advantage, because it let them form a defense to defeat the proposed amendment. Antis succeeded against suffrage forces with less money, literature and total support.²⁵⁵ Realizing this fact, Carrie Chapman Catt and the other suffragists made plans to directly address the federal government to change the United States Constitution. While Iowa anti-suffragists claimed success in a defeated referendum, this defeat became the catalyst which led to a monumental change in America.²⁵⁶

The arguments used by Iowa anti-suffragists ultimately exhibited the values and traditions supported by Iowans. During the Iowa referendum vote of 1916, the anti-suffragists won their battle in Iowa, but three years later, they lost the war. Iowa anti-

suffragists conducted an almost non-existent movement without the financial support from outside organizations. While Iowa anti-suffragists accepted money, lecturers and pamphlets from out-of-state anti-suffrage organizations throughout the debates, they did not share identical arguments with their national supporters. Iowa anti-suffragists had their own arguments based on elements important to their way of life and belief system, including fears that essential aspects of their lives would disappear with woman suffrage. This small state debate over female enfranchisement left lasting effects over the entire nation, ending one debate locally, but creating one nationally.

¹⁶⁷ Anne M. Benjamin, *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895—1920: Women Against Equality* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 247-250.

¹⁶⁸ *Census of Iowa*, 1915, Compiled and Published under Direction of The Executive Council of the State of Iowa, Des Moines. State Historical Library of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin, 247-250.

¹⁷⁰ *Oskaloosa Herald*, 15 April 1916.

¹⁷¹ Iowa Association of Men Opposed to Women Suffrage, 1 March 1916, "Iowa Women's Suffrage Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

¹⁷² IAMOWS, 1 March 1916.

¹⁷³ IAMOWS, 1 March 1916.

¹⁷⁴ *The Des Moines Register*, 11 March 1916; IAMOWS, 1 March 1916.

¹⁷⁵ "Antis Quietly Making Plans," *The Waterloo Courier*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁷⁶ "Antis Quietly Making Plans," *The Waterloo Courier*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁷⁷ "Antis Quietly Making Plans," *The Waterloo Courier*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁷⁸ "Antis Quietly Making Plans," *The Waterloo Courier*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁷⁹ Noun, 142.

¹⁸⁰ "Big Audience Hears Irish," *The Iowa City Citizen*, 22 May 1916; Benjamin, 250.

¹⁸¹ Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 101-102, 119; Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the*

United States, 1868-1920. Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New, ed. Gerda Lerner (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), xxv, xxvi, 54-56.

¹⁸² Papers. "Anna B. Lawther Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

¹⁸³ Benjamin, 251.

¹⁸⁴ "Alice French Collection," The Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois; "Alice French Collection," Special Collections Department, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa; Benjamin, 251.

¹⁸⁵ "History of Struggle for Recognition of Suffrage," *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, Indiana, 20 August 1920.

¹⁸⁶ Robert P. J. Cooney, Jr., *Winning The Vote: The triumph of the American Woman Suffrage Movement* (Santa Cruz: American Graphic Press, 2005), 316-318.

¹⁸⁷ "Fighting the Suffrage Amendment" *Shenandoah Sentinel Post*, 1916.

¹⁸⁸ Benjamin, 247-248.

¹⁸⁹ "Entertained at Chairman's Home: Executive Committee of Anti-Suffrage League Meets at Residence of Mrs. G.R. Wallace," *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, Massachusetts, 3 June 1916.

¹⁹⁰ "Entertained at Chairman's Home," *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, Massachusetts, 3 June 1916.

¹⁹¹ *Grundy Center Republican*, 6 April 1916.

¹⁹² *Grundy Center Republican*, 6 April 1916.

¹⁹³ Noun, 256; *The Woman's Protest*, July 1916, 3.

¹⁹⁴ *The New Republic*, VI, no. 73, 25 March 1916, 198; Benjamin, 249-251.

¹⁹⁵ "A Seeming Lack of Interest," *The Des Moines Tribune*, 11 April 1916.

¹⁹⁶ *The Cedar Falls Recorder*, 19 April 1916; *Clarion Clipper*, 9 March 1916; *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, March—April, 1916; *Ottumwa Courier*, 9 March 1916; *Webster City Journal*, 20 April 1916; Benjamin, 251.

¹⁹⁷ "Anti-Suffrage Speakers Talk to Students," *The Des Moines Capital*, 14 April 1916; *The Des Moines News*, 25 April 1916.

¹⁹⁸ *The Cedar Falls Recorder*, 19 April 1916; *Clarion Clipper*, 9 March 1916; *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, March—April, 1916; *Ottumwa Courier*, 9 March 1916; *Webster City Journal*, 20 April 1916; Benjamin, 251.

¹⁹⁹ Margaret C. Robinson, "Woman Suffrage a Menace to Social Reform," "Iowa Women's Suffrage Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, 2.

²⁰⁰ Robinson, "Woman Suffrage a Menace to Social Reform," 2.

²⁰¹ Robinson, "Woman Suffrage a Menace to Social Reform," 2.

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- ²⁰² Robinson, "Woman Suffrage a Menace to Social Reform," 4-5.
- ²⁰³ "Suffrage—Why some Oppose it," *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, 27 March 1916.
- ²⁰⁴ "Suffrage—Why some Oppose it," *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, 27 March 1916.
- ²⁰⁵ "Suffrage—Why some Oppose it," *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, 27 March 1916.
- ²⁰⁶ "Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage," "Anna B. Lawther Collection," 1.
- ²⁰⁷ "Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage," 2.
- ²⁰⁸ "Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage," 2.
- ²⁰⁹ *The Iowa City Citizen*, 2 May 1916.
- ²¹⁰ Manuela Thurner, "'Better Citizens Without the Ballot': American AntiSuffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era." *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (Spring 1993), 33-60.
- ²¹¹ *The Iowa City Citizen*, 2 May 1916.
- ²¹² "Why We Are Anti-s," Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, 1916, "Iowa Women's Suffrage Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, 2.
- ²¹³ Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movement in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 184; "Why We Are Anti-s."
- ²¹⁴ "Why We Are Anti-s," 1.
- ²¹⁵ "Why We Are Anti-s," 1. (Italics in Original).
- ²¹⁶ "Why We Are Anti-s," 1.
- ²¹⁷ "Women in Politics," *The Iowa City Citizen*, 22 May 1916.
- ²¹⁸ "Why We Are Anti-s," 2-3.
- ²¹⁹ "Why We Are Anti-s," 3.
- ²²⁰ *The Cedar Falls Recorder*, 11 May 1916.
- ²²¹ "To the Iowa Farmer!—Remember! Women Suffrage Means High Taxes," Iowa Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, "Iowa Women's Suffrage Collection," State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.
- ²²² "To the Iowa Farmer!—Remember! Women Suffrage Means High Taxes."
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- ²²⁶ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 1.
- ²²⁷ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 3.
- ²²⁸ *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, 22 May 1916.
- ²²⁹ “Why Pay More Taxes?,” Iowa Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, “Iowa Women’s Suffrage Collection,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.
- ²³⁰ “Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage,” 2; “Why We Are Anti-s,” 3.
- ²³¹ “Defeats and Failures of Woman Suffrage,” 2.
- ²³² “The Case Against Woman Suffrage,” Iowa Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, “Iowa Women’s Suffrage Collection,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.
- ²³³ Howard Tarrant, *AntiFeminism in America: Opposition to the Women’s Movement in the United States 1848-1929*, A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U. S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present, eds., Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).
- ²³⁴ “The Case Against Woman Suffrage.”
- ²³⁵ “The Case Against Woman Suffrage.”
- ²³⁶ “Against Suffrage For Iowa,” *Dubuque Daily Times Journal*, 1 May 1916.
- ²³⁷ “Why Pay More Taxes?”
- ²³⁸ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 2.
- ²³⁹ “Why We Are Anti-s,” 2.
- ²⁴⁰ “Antisuffragists Hold Rally at Shops,” *The Des Moines Register*, 13 February 1916.
- ²⁴¹ Jablonsky, xxiv.
- ²⁴² *The Evening Tribune*, 8 February 1916.
- ²⁴³ *The Evening Tribune*, 8 February 1916.
- ²⁴⁴ “Big Audience Hears Irish,” *The Iowa City Citizen*, 22 May 1916.
- ²⁴⁵ “The Case Against Woman Suffrage,” Iowa Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, “Iowa Women’s Suffrage Collection,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.
- ²⁴⁶ “Opinions of Patriots Against Woman Suffrage,” Dubuque Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, “Iowa Women’s Suffrage Collection,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.
- ²⁴⁷ “Opinions of Patriots Against Woman Suffrage.”
- ²⁴⁸ *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, 4 June 1916.

²⁴⁹ “Casey Makes Last Appeal to Recognize Woman’s Rights,” *The Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 2 June 1916.

²⁵⁰ Gallaher, 200-201; Noun 257-261; Osburn and Schmidt, 14; Also, Schwieder, 227, noted a different referendum count with 162,849 for and 172,990 against the referendum. Because of the multiple sources consistently noting the count used in this text, the Schwieder information was not used.

²⁵¹ Gallaher, 200-201; Noun, 257-61; Osburn and Schmidt, 14.

²⁵² *Census of Iowa*, 1915, Compiled and Published under Direction of The Executive Council of the State of Iowa, Des Moines. State Historical Library of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa; Secretary of State Election Records, “Election Returns (B) Special Election June,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

²⁵³ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 June 1916.

²⁵⁴ “Celebrate Anti-Suffrage Victory,” *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, Massachusetts, 23 June 1916.

²⁵⁵ Jablonsky, 111.

²⁵⁶ Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780—1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89, No. 3 (June 1984), 642.

CONCLUSION

In 1916, Iowa males voted against woman suffrage. While this victory would only last a few more years, anti-suffragists took pride in their success. They argued their movement saved the family, community and nation. Anti-suffrage activities since the mid-nineteenth century had worked to maintain the roles of men and women. National and Iowa anti-suffragists used a variety of arguments throughout the decades. While the different anti-suffrage groups initially shared the same arguments, over time, the national rhetoric shifted to include new arguments, while Iowa rhetoric maintained older arguments.

In the mid-nineteenth century, national and Iowa anti-suffragists argued woman suffrage threatened their ideal of womanhood. Overall the anti-suffrage arguments revolved around two categories: the unique nature of women and the special role played by women in sustaining the family, and ultimately, civilization. Each anti-suffrage organization believed its members were the defenders of family, home, community and nation. The anti-suffragists used this understanding of the Victorian woman in their rhetoric, arguing women were completely different from men—physically, morally, emotionally and intellectually. The biological and moral arguments provided by anti-suffragists illustrated their deep fears of the changing roles of women. In addition to new scientific theories mixed with past beliefs, the nineteenth century anti-suffrage arguments were based on Victorian values, democratic ideals and the Bible.

As the decades progressed into the twentieth century, national anti-suffragists noted a change in American society and realize a need to adapt. They noted the advent of

the Progressive movement along with women becoming more publicly involved during the early twentieth century. The progressive mentality of efficient action to change society's ills highly influenced national anti-suffrage activity and rhetoric. National anti-suffragists realized these changes and became more involved in the public arena, arguing women could provide better service to their nation without the ballot, which contradicted past rhetoric. Thus, national anti-suffragists shifted their nineteenth century biological and moral arguments to moral and pragmatic themes in the twentieth century.

This national change, however, did not parallel anti-suffrage rhetoric in Iowa. Rather, during the early decades of the twentieth century, Iowa anti-suffragists still argued the moral and biological nature of women to oppose suffrage. Thus, Iowa anti-suffragists still argued women needed to remain in the private sphere. This became a problem by the twentieth century as more anti-suffragists presented themselves in public to oppose suffrage. By the 1916 Iowa referendum debate, Iowa anti-suffragists had included the new pragmatic arguments similar to the national anti-suffrage organizations, though the Iowa anti-suffragists had still not excluded the biological arguments as well. The differentiation in arguments among the Iowa and national anti-suffragists caused confusion among Iowa voters during the suffrage debate as the different anti-suffrage organizations distributed their pamphlets and speakers through Iowa.

Despite the differences in rhetoric and action, the Iowa and national anti-suffrage organizations drew similar members. The opposition to woman suffrage started on the East coast and spread westward largely through a group of well-to-do women. Throughout the decades, Iowa anti-suffrage members were educated, married and middle to upper class women. Iowa males also organized anti-suffrage groups and fit the same

description. All anti-suffrage groups were largely a reactionary measure to suffrage activity, as anti-suffragists only needed to maintain the status quo.

The anti-suffrage activity and strategy was successful at the Iowa polls in 1916. The arguments by national and Iowa anti-suffragists caused enough doubt in the minds of Iowa voters that the 1916 suffrage referendum saw defeat. While this defeat stopped advancing state suffrage, it only prompted suffragists to change tactics and work for a national amendment. After the Iowa referendum, suffragists realized anti-suffragists had, and would continue to defeat suffrage proposals at the state level. Anti-suffrage success did not result from a large following, but rather their logistical support for a state by state defense approach. This advantageous strategy worked for anti-suffragists because it allowed them to form enough of a defense to defeat the proposed amendment. Anti-suffragists only needed to cause enough doubt in the minds of voters about woman suffrage to maintain the status quo, rather than change it. Thus, anti-suffragists succeeded against suffrage forces with less money, literature and member support.

Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffragists realized their defeats resulted from their legislative tactics. They realized attempting to pass woman suffrage proposals in all forty-eight states did not use their full power and strength against the opposition. Thus, suffragists made plans to conduct a federal campaign to change the voting standards in the United States Constitution. This change in tactics allowed suffragists to focus most of their energies to lobby the federal government while still working on the few state governments where suffrage had a chance. This shift by suffragists to a combined strategy proved successful by 1920.

Iowa anti-suffragists joined forces to oppose the federal woman suffrage amendment, but did not find the success they had during the 1916 referendum vote. Woman suffrage proved to be a struggle passed through the generations in Iowa, by both the proponents and opponents of the measure. After the 1916 vote, suffragists continued to work for woman suffrage through the Iowa Legislature. Anti-suffragists continued their work to oppose the suffrage proposals in Iowa, but by 1919 had declined in membership and lost momentum. To the anguish of anti-suffragists, the Iowa Legislature passed presidential suffrage for women by May 1919.

This struggle over woman suffrage was one of many that occurred in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The debate between anti-suffragists and suffragists outlined ideas of shifting tradition and the effects of change. Each side fully believed their arguments would become reality. Suffragists argued woman suffrage would completely overhaul American politics and society with positive results while anti-suffragists argued woman suffrage would lead to the demise of civilization. After the passage of the nineteenth amendment, Americans realized neither drastic claim occurred. In fact, society continued without any extreme changes. The majority of women continued their roles within the realm of the family. Female voting patterns were largely as anti-suffragists predicted, with most married women voting similarly to their husbands. Many anti-suffragists as well as suffragists withdrew altogether from public activity after the close of the suffrage debate. While female enfranchisement ended in rather docile results, it ultimately illustrates the extent to which Americans, particularly Iowans, debated and struggled to defend and maintain their goals, values and mentalities.

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