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The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920

PAULA BAKER

ON ONE SUBJECT ALL OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY antisuffragists and many suffragists agreed: a woman belonged in the home. From this domain, as wife, as daughter, and especially as mother, she exercised moral influence and insured national virtue and social order. Woman was selfless and sentimental, nurturing and pious. She was the perfect counterpoint to materialistic and competitive man, whose strength and rationality suited him for the rough and violent public world. Despite concurrence on the ideal of womanhood, antisuffragists and suffragists disagreed about how women could best use their power of moral superiority. Suffragists believed that the conduct and content of electoral politics—voting and office holding—would benefit from women’s special talents. But for others, woman suffrage was not only inappropriate but dangerous. It represented a radical departure from the familiar world of separate spheres, a departure that would bring, they feared, social disorder, political disaster, and, most important, women’s loss of position as society’s moral arbiter and enforcer.¹

The debates over female suffrage occurred while the very functions of government were changing. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, federal, state, and municipal governments increased their roles in social welfare and economic life. With a commitment to activism not seen since the first decades of the nineteenth century, Progressive-era policy makers sought ways to regulate and rationalize business and industry. They labored to improve schools, hospitals, and

A number of individuals commented on earlier versions of this essay, including Dee Garrison, Kathleen W. Jones, Suzanne Lebsack, Richard L. McCormick, Wilson Carey McWilliams, John F. Reynolds, Thomas Slaughter, and Warren I. Susman. I am grateful for their criticism, advice, and encouragement.

¹ Accounts of the suffrage campaign include William H. Chafe, *Women and Equality* (New York, 1977); Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York, 1980), chap. 14; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978); Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958); Alan P. Grimes, *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York, 1967); Aileen S. Krador, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York, 1965); David Morgan, *Suffragists and Democrats in America* (East Lansing, Mich., 1970); William L. O’Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of American Feminism* (Chicago, 1969); Ross Evan Paulson, *Woman’s Suffrage and Prohibition* (Glenview, Ill., 1973); and Anne F. Scott and Andrew M. Scott, *One-Half of the People: The Fight for Woman’s Suffrage* (Philadelphia, 1975). Important treatments of the ideology of domesticity include Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman’s Sphere in New England, 1790–1835* (New Haven, 1975); Daniel Scott Smith, “Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,” in Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner, eds., *Clio’s Consciousness Raised* (New York, 1974), 119–33; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, 1973); and Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966): 151–74.

other public services. These efforts, halting and incomplete as they were, brought a tradition of women's involvement in government to public attention.² Indeed, from the time of the Revolution, women used, and sometimes pioneered, methods for influencing government from outside electoral channels. They participated in crowd actions in colonial America and filled quasi-governmental positions in the nineteenth century; they circulated and presented petitions, founded reform organizations, and lobbied legislatures. Aiming their efforts at matters connected with the well-being of women, children, the home, and the community, women fashioned significant public roles by working from the private sphere.³

The themes of the debates—the ideology of domesticity, the suffrage fight, the re-emergence of governmental activism, and the public involvement of nineteenth-century women—are familiar. But what are the connections among them? Historians have told us much about the lives of nineteenth-century women. They have explained how women gained political skills, a sense of consciousness as women, and feelings of competence and self-worth through their involvement in women's organizations. But as important as these activities were, women were also shaped by—and in turn affected—American government and politics. Attention to the interaction between women's political activities and the political system itself can tell us much about the position of women in the nineteenth century. In addition, it can provide a new understanding of the political society in which women worked—and which they helped change.⁴

² Syntheses of the vast number of works on Progressive reform include John W. Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1900–1917* (New York, 1980); Otis L. Graham, *The Great Campaign: Reform and War in America, 1900–1928* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971); Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1983); Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885–1914* (Chicago, 1957); William L. O'Neill, *The Progressive Years: America Comes of Age* (New York, 1975); and Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York, 1967). For a good recent review essay, see Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, 10 (1982): 113–32.

³ Numerous works have appeared over the past decade that deal with the public activities of middle-class women. These works most often examine particular groups and attempt to trace the development of a feminist consciousness in the nineteenth century. See, for example, Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate—Origins of American Feminism: Women and the City, 1800–1860* (New York, 1978); Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868–1914* (New York, 1980); Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia, 1981); Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana, Ill., 1981); Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1981); Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution-Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930," *Feminist Studies*, 5 (1979): 512–29; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980); William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York, 1980); Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," 15–30, "Community Work of Black Club Women," 83–93, "Political Activities of Anti-Slavery Women," 94–111, and "Black and White Women in Confrontation and Interaction," 112–28, in her *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York, 1979); J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920s* (Urbana, Ill., 1973); Keith E. Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800–1850* (New York, 1977); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (Boston, 1980); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); and Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago, 1970). A number of contemporary accounts are especially useful. See Mary R. Beard, *Women's Work in Municipalities* (New York, 1915); Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement in America* (New York, 1898); Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War* (Hartford, Conn., 1896); and "Women and the State," in William Meyers, ed., *Women's Work in America* (Hartford, Conn., 1889); and Frances E. Willard, *Woman and Temperance: Or, the Work and Workers of the Women's Christian Temperance Union* (Hartford, Conn., 1883).

⁴ A number of studies examine the treatment of women in American political thought. These include Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York, 1981); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private*

In order to bring together the histories of women and of politics, we need a more inclusive definition of politics than is usually offered. "Politics" is used here in a relatively broad sense to include any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community.⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century, gender was an important division in American politics. Men and women operated, for the most part, in distinct political subcultures, each with its own bases of power, modes of participation, and goals. In providing an intellectual and cultural interpretation of women and politics, this essay focuses on the experiences of middle-class women. There is much more we need to learn about the political involvement of women of all classes in the years prior to suffrage; this essay must, therefore, be speculative. Its purpose is to suggest a framework for analyzing women and politics and to outline the shape that a narrative history of the subject could take.

THE BASIS AND RATIONALE for women's political involvement already existed by the time of the Revolution.⁶ For both men and women in colonial America, geographically bounded communities provided the fundamental structures of social organization. The most important social ties, economic relationships, and political concerns of individuals were contained within spatially limited areas. Distinctions between the family and community were often vague; in many ways, the home and the community were one.⁷ There were, to be sure, marked variations from place to place; community ties were weaker, for example, in colonial cities and in communi-

Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought (Princeton, N.J., 1981); Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; and Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J., 1979). Historical treatments of women in politics include William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920–1970* (New York, 1972), 24–47; Jane Gruenebaum, "Women in Politics" in Richard M. Pious, ed., *The Power to Govern: Assessing Reform in the United States*, Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, no. 34 (New York, 1981), 104–20; Gerda Lerner, ed., *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* (Indianapolis, 1977), 317–22; and Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York, 1978), 102–32, 136–53.

⁵ "Government" refers to the formal institutions of the state and their functions. "Policy" includes efforts by those within these institutions as well as by those outside them to shape social or economic conditions with the support of "government."

⁶ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*; Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*; and Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*. Also see Linda Grant DePauw, *Founding Mothers: Women in the Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1975); and Joan Hoff-Wilson, "The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution," in Alfred H. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 383–444. Of these works, only Kerber's and Norton's explicitly set out to answer questions about women and politics, and their analyses differ on important points. On the basis of an examination of women's diaries and other papers, Norton argued that the Revolution and republicanism significantly changed the role of women. Family relationships, for example, grew more egalitarian, and women developed a new appreciation of their competence and skills outside the home. Kerber's analysis of American political thought in relationship to women, however, suggests that neither republicanism nor the Revolution had a positive effect on the role of women. Rather, republican thought assumed women were apolitical. But by the early nineteenth century an ideology of motherhood allowed women to combine domesticity with political action.

⁷ Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1978), 68; Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 151; Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (New York, 1970), chaps. 1, 2; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970), 182–85, chap. 4; James Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700–1815: An Interdisciplinary Analysis* (Lexington, Mass., 1973), 23–31; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, chap. 1; and Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970).

ties and regions with extensive commercial and market connections, such as parts of the South.⁸ Still, clear separations existed between men and women in their work and standards of behavior, and most women probably saw their part in the life of the community as the less important. A little-changing round of household tasks dominated women's lives and created a routine that they found stifling. Women had limited opportunities for social contact, and those they had were almost exclusively with other women. They turned work into social occasions, and they passed the milestones of their lives in the supportive company of female friends and relatives. But, however confining, separation provided a basis for a female culture—though not yet for female politics.⁹

Differences between men's and women's political behavior were muted in the colonial period, compared with what they later became. In many places, men who did not own land could not vote because governments placed property restrictions on suffrage. Both men and women petitioned legislatures to gain specific privileges or legal changes. Citizens held deferential attitudes toward authority; elections were often community rituals embodying codes of social deference. A community's "best" men stood for election and were returned to office year after year, and voters expected candidates to "treat" potential supporters by providing food and drink before and on election day. Deferential politics, however, weakened by the middle of the eighteenth century. Economic hardship caused some men to question the reality of a harmony of interests among classes, and the Great Awakening taught others to question traditional authorities. Facing a growing scarcity of land, fathers could no longer promise to provide for their sons, which weakened parental control. This new willingness to question authority of all sorts was a precondition for the Revolution and was, in turn, given expression by republican thought.¹⁰

Republicanism stressed the dangers posed to liberty by power and extolled the advantages of mixed and balanced constitutions. In a successful republic, an independent, virtuous, watchful, and dispassionate citizenry guarded against the weakness and corruption that threatened liberty. Although interpreted by Americans in different ways, republicanism provided a framework and a rationale for the Revolution. It furnished prescriptions for citizenship and for the relationship between citizens and the state. And it helped unify a collection of local communities racked by internal divisions and pressures.¹¹

⁸ Bender, *Community and Social Change*, 62–67; Michael Kammen, *Colonial New York* (New York, 1975), 290; Paul G. E. Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980); James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 149–79; Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1965); and Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), chap. 1.

⁹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, chap. 1; and Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, chaps. 1–3.

¹⁰ Among the many works on colonial political practices, see, for example, Charles S. Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1952); and Robert Zernsky, *Merchants, Farmers, and River Gods: An Essay on Eighteenth-Century Politics* (Boston, 1971). On changing attitudes toward authority, see Bushman, *Puritan to Yankee*, 138–63, 264–87; Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), chaps. 7, 8; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976); and Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

¹¹ Reviews of the literature on republicanism include Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary*

While the ideology and process of the Revolution forced a rethinking of fundamental political concepts, this re-evaluation did not extend to the role of women. As Linda K. Kerber persuasively argued, writers and thinkers in the republican tradition were concerned more with criticizing a particular political administration than with examining traditional assumptions about the political role of all inhabitants. Given their narrow intentions, they were not obliged to reconsider the position of women in the state. The language of republicanism also tended to make less likely the inclusion of women. Good republicans were, after all, self-reliant, given to simple needs and tastes, decisive, and committed first to the public interest. These were all “masculine” qualities; indeed, “feminine” attributes—attraction to luxury, self-indulgence, timidity, dependence, passion—were linked to corruption and posed a threat to republicanism. Moreover, women did not usually own land—the basis for an independent citizenry and republican government.¹²

Despite their formal prepolitical status, women participated in the Revolution. They were central to the success of boycotts of imported products and, later, to the production of household manufactures. Their work on farms and in businesses in their husbands’ absences was a vital and obvious contribution. Women’s participation also took less conventional forms. Edward Countryman recounted instances in which groups of women, angered at what they saw as wartime price-gouging, forced storekeepers to charge just prices. During and after the war, women also took part in urban crowd actions, organized petition campaigns, and formed groups to help soldiers and widows. Some even met with legislatures to press for individual demands.¹³ Whatever their purposes, all of these activities were congruent with women’s identification with the home, family, and community. In boycotts of foreign products and in domestic manufacture during the Revolution, women only expanded traditional activities. In operating farms and businesses, they stepped out of their sphere temporarily for the well-being of their families. Because separations between the home and community were ill defined in early America, women’s participation in crowd actions can also be seen as a defense of the home. As Countryman and others pointed out, a communalist philosophy motivated the crowd actions of both men and women. Crowds aimed to redress the grievances of the whole community. Women and men acted not as individuals but as members of a community—and with the community’s consent.¹⁴

Women’s political participation took place in the context of the home, but the important point is that the home was a basis for political action. As Kerber and

Quarterly, 3d ser., 29 (1972): 49–80, and “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” *ibid.*, 39 (1982): 334–56. The articles in Young’s *The American Revolution* illustrate divisions in the republican consensus.

¹² Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, chap. 2.

¹³ Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981), 43–44; Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, chaps. 2–3; Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, chap. 7; Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, chaps. 6–7; and Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1938; reprint edn., New York, 1972), 232–45.

¹⁴ Countryman, *A People in Revolution*; Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), chaps. 2, 5; Pauline Maier, “Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 27 (1970): 3–35; E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present*, 50 (1971): 76–136; and Warner, *The Private City*, pt. 1.

Mary Beth Norton have shown, the political involvement of women through the private sphere took new forms by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Women combined political activity, domesticity, and republican thought through motherhood. Although outside of formal politics, mothering was crucial: by raising civic-minded, virtuous sons, they insured the survival of the republic. On the basis of this important task, women argued for wider access to education and justified interest and involvement in public affairs. As mothers women were republicans; they possessed civic virtue and a concern for the public good. Their exclusion from traditionally defined politics and economics guaranteed their lack of interest in personal gain. Through motherhood, women attempted to compensate for their exclusion from the formal political world by translating moral authority into political influence. Their political demands, couched in these terms, did not violate the canons of domesticity to which many men and women held.¹⁵

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, women expanded their ascribed sphere into community service and care of dependents, areas not fully within men's or women's politics. These tasks combined public roles and administration with nurturance and compassion. They were not fully part of either male electoral politics and formal governmental institutions or the female world of the home and family. Women made their most visible public contributions as founders, workers, and volunteers in social service organizations.¹⁶ Together with the social separation of the sexes and women's informal methods of influencing politics, political domesticity provided the basis for a distinct nineteenth-century women's political culture.

Although the tradition, tactics, and ideology for the political involvement of women existed by the first decades of the nineteenth century, a separate political culture had not yet taken shape. Women's style of participation and their relationship to authority were not yet greatly different from those of many men. Until the 1820s—and in some states even later—property restrictions on suffrage disfranchised many men. Even for those granted the ballot, political interest and

¹⁵ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, chaps. 7, 9; and Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, chap. 9. Some works suggest that republicanism was not a cause of more egalitarian family relationships, of new education for women to enhance their roles as better wives and mothers, or of women's use of the home to gain political influence. Jay Fliegelman, for example, persuasively argued that by the middle of the eighteenth century the older notion of the patriarchal family was under attack. It was being replaced by a new ideal—one drawn from Locke and the Scottish common-sense philosophers. Examining these writings and popular novels, he showed that the new model, which called for affectionate and egalitarian relationships with children and humane child rearing designed to prepare children for rational independence and self-sufficiency, was in place well before 1776. In fact, the rhetoric of the Revolution was replete with images portraying the importance of personal autonomy and of parental respect for the individuality of children who had come of age. Thus, a cultural revolution against patriarchal authority preceded the Revolution. (Fliegelman's analysis, however, chiefly concerns sons, not daughters, and it deals with questions not directly related to relationships between men and women.) Furthermore, the "republican mother" was not an ideal limited to America. Traian Stoianovich showed that an ideology of domesticity similar in content to republican motherhood had appeared in a systemized form in France by the late seventeenth century. See Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*; and Stoianovich, "Gender and Family: Myths, Models, and Ideologies," *History Teacher*, 15 (1981): 70–84.

¹⁶ For the idea that women's political activity through organizations filled an undefined space in American government and politics, see Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784–1860* (New York, 1984), chap. 7.

electoral turnout usually remained low.¹⁷ During the early years of the republic, deferential political behavior was again commonplace. Retreating from the demands of the Revolutionary period, most citizens once again seemed content to accept the political decisions made by the community's most distinguished men. This pattern persisted until new divisions split communities and competing elites vied for voters' support.¹⁸

Changes in the form of male political participation were part of a larger transformation of social, economic, and political relationships in the early nineteenth century. The rise of parties and the re-emergence of citizen interest in politics had a variety of specific sources. In some places, ethnic and religious tensions contributed to a new interest in politics and shaped partisan loyalties. Recently formed evangelical Protestant groups hoped to use government to impose their convictions about proper moral behavior on the community, a goal opposed by older Protestant groups and Catholics. Other kinds of issues—especially questions about the direction of the American political economy—led to political divisions. Citizens were deeply divided about the direction the economy ought to take and the roles government ought to play. They thought attempts to tie localities to new networks and markets in commerce and agriculture could lead to greater prosperity, but such endeavors also meant that economic decisions were no longer made locally and that both the social order and the values of republicanism could be in danger. Local party leaders linked these debates to national parties and leaders,¹⁹

¹⁷ On electoral participation in the early nineteenth century, see Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture," *American Political Science Review* [hereafter, *APSR*], 68 (1974): 473–87; and Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870–1980* (New York, 1982), chap. 3: "The Era of Citizen Mobilization, 1840–1900." For a discussion of the increasing rates of participation, their timing, and their causes, see Richard P. McCormick, "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," *AHR*, 65 (1959–60): 288–301.

¹⁸ The rise and decline—indeed, the existence—of deference in male political behavior remains widely debated by political historians. Ronald P. Formisano has provided a good review of this literature in "Deferential-Participant Politics." A number of studies of individual communities illustrate the appearance of competing elites and new community divisions and citizens' demands. See Bender, *Community and Social Change*, 100–08; Michael Frisch, *Town into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840–1880* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 32–53, 179–201; and Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981), 82–108.

¹⁹ I have drawn my discussion of the connections between economic issues and party formation from Watson's *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict*, which imaginatively blends many of the themes and approaches historians have most recently advanced to explain nineteenth-century political life. Watson combined a refurbished economic interpretation, the assumption that citizens cared deeply about economic issues, a concern for questions about political culture, attention to republican ideology and quantitative methods, and a social analysis of politics in his account of party formation. Although such assumptions, methods, and concerns will probably continue to influence political historians, a good deal of debate remains about the development of parties and the meaning of partisanship. Richard P. McCormick argued that the legal framework governing elections (as well as the revival of the contest for the presidency) best explains the rising pitch of partisan behavior and that parties were fundamentally electoral machines, unconcerned with issues. See McCormick, *The Second American Party System*. Others, however, have found that ethnic and religious tensions among citizens can account for partisan divisions. See Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J., 1961); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827–1861* (Princeton, N.J., 1971); Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850–1900* (New York, 1970); and Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860* (New Haven, Conn., 1969). For recent historiographic analyses of Jacksonian politics, see Ronald P. Formisano, "Toward a Reorientation of Jacksonian Politics: A Review of the Literature, 1959–1975," *Journal of American History* [hereafter, *JAH*], 63 (1976–77): 42–65; and Sean Wilentz, "On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America," *Reviews in American History*, 10 (1982): 45–63. Richard L. McCormick evaluated the work of those offering an ethnic and religious interpretation. See McCormick, "Ethno-Cultural Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century American Voting Behavior," *Political Science Quarterly*, 89 (1974): 351–77.

and the rise of working men's parties in urban areas seemed to spring from a similar set of questions and sense of unease about nineteenth-century capitalism.²⁰

Whatever their origin, parties also served other less explicitly "political" purposes. The strength of antebellum parties lay in their ability to fuse communal and national loyalties. The major parties were national organizations, but they were locally based: local people organized rallies, printed ballots, worked to gain the votes of their friends and neighbors. Through political activities in towns and cities, parties gained the support of men and translated their feelings into national allegiances.²¹ Political organization provided a set pattern of responses to divisive questions, which raised problems to the national level and served to defuse potential community divisions. Indeed, by linking local concerns to national institutions and leaders, parties took national political questions out of the local context.²² The local base of the Democrats and Whigs allowed them to take contradictory positions on issues in different places. Major party leaders searched for issues that enabled them to distinguish their own party from the opposition, while keeping their fragile constituencies intact. At the same time, local politics returned in most places to a search for consensual, nonpartisan solutions to community questions.²³

The rise of a national two-party system in the 1820s and 1830s inaugurated a period of party government and strong partisan loyalties among voters that lasted until after the turn of the twentieth century. Parties, through the national and state governments, distributed resources to individuals and corporations, and patronage to loyal partisans. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, roughly three-quarters of the eligible electorate cast their ballots in presidential elections. The organization and identity of the parties changed, but the pre-eminence of partisanship and government-by-party remained. Party identifications and the idea of partisanship passed from fathers to sons.²⁴

²⁰ Discussions of working men's parties include Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia, 1980); and Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Political Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, N.Y., 1967), 11–33. The Antimasonic party, strongest in rural areas, offered a moral critique of American politics and society; see Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, 14–38. Ronald P. Formisano provided an analysis of both parties; see *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s–1840s* (New York, 1983), 197–224.

²¹ See Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), chaps. 1, 2; Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*; Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties*, chaps. 2, 7; and Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict*, 151–86, 269–77, 297–99, 312–13.

²² For a discussion of the removal of national issues from local politics, see Bender, *Community and Social Change*, 104.

²³ On the positions on issues taken by various parties, see McCormick, *Second American Party System*; and Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978). Richard P. McCormick's view that parties were primarily electoral machines conflicts with that of Holt, who argued that parties needed clear divisions between them to maintain the voters' interest. For consensual politics at the local level, especially in settled towns, see Hal S. Barron, "After the Great Transformation: The Social Processes of Settled Rural Life in the Nineteenth-Century North," in Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *Rural Societies in Nineteenth-Century America: Essays in Social History* (Chapel Hill, N.C., forthcoming); Bender, *Community and Social Change*, 104–05; and Stuart Blumin, *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century Community* (Chicago, 1976), 144, 148.

²⁴ For discussions of nineteenth-century voting patterns, see Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," *APSR*, 59 (1965): 7–28; Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted*, chap. 3; and Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *JAH*, 66 (1979–80): 279–98. Although they agree on a description of political behavior in the nineteenth century, these accounts differ on periodization, focus, and explanations for the demise of nineteenth-century patterns. I have adopted

Partisan politics characterized male political involvement, and its social elements help explain voters' enthusiastic participation. Parties and electoral politics united all white men, regardless of class or other differences, and provided entertainment, a definition of manhood, and the basis for a male ritual. Universal white manhood suffrage implied that, since all men shared the chance to participate in electoral politics, they possessed political equality. The right to vote was something important that men held in common. And, as class, geography, kinship, and community supplied less reliable sources of identification than they had at an earlier time, men could at least define themselves in reference to women. Parties were fraternal organizations that tied men together with others like themselves in their communities, and they brought men together as participants in the same partisan culture.²⁵

Election campaigns celebrated old symbols of the republic and, indeed, manhood. Beginning as early as William Henry Harrison's log cabin campaign in 1840, parties conducted entertaining extravaganzas. Employing symbols that recalled glorious old causes (first, the Jacksonian period and, later, the Civil War), men advertised their partisanship. They took part in rallies, joined local organizations, placed wagers on election results, read partisan newspapers, and wore campaign paraphernalia. In large and small cities military-style marching companies paraded in support of their party's candidates, while in rural areas picnics and pole raisings served to express and foster partisan enthusiasm.²⁶

Party leaders commonly used imagery drawn from the experience of war: parties were competing armies, elections were battles, and party workers were soldiers. They commented approvingly on candidates who waged manly campaigns, and they disparaged nonpartisan reformers as effeminate.²⁷ This language and the

McCormick's emphases on the continuities of partisan behavior throughout most of the nineteenth century and the links between distribution and partisanship. For the best account of the connections between partisanship and family, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*, chap. 1.

²⁵ Daniel Calhoun suggested that fears about gender replaced fears about tyranny in the political thought of the nineteenth century; Calhoun, *The Intelligence of a People* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), 188–205. For a discussion of partisan politics as a way of re-creating fraternal relations, see Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), chap. 3, 243–53. For an account from the Progressive era, see Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, "Friendship and Politics," *Political Science Quarterly*, 17 (1902): 189–205.

²⁶ Descriptions and analyses of campaign rituals include Robert Gray Gunderson, *The Log Cabin Campaign* (Lexington, Ky., 1957), 1–11, 108–47, 210–18; Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888–1896* (Chicago, 1971), 1–33, and "Armies, Admen, and Crusaders: Types of Presidential Election Campaigns," *History Teacher*, 2 (1969): 33–50; Michael E. McGerr, "Political Spectacle and Partisanship in New Haven, 1860–1900," paper presented at the Seventy-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, held in Philadelphia, April 1982; and McCormick, *The Second American Party System*, 15–16, 30–31, 75–76, 88, 145, 157–58, 268–76. Lewis O. Saum, drawing on a vast number of diaries, documented citizens' participation in campaigns and their laconic reactions to antebellum politics; Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America* (Westport, Conn., 1980), 149–57.

²⁷ Party politicians often spoke of reformers—those men outside of the party—in terms that questioned the reformers' masculinity. Most of all, reformers were seen as politically impotent. Men whose loyalty to a party was questionable were referred to, for example, as the "third sex" of American politics, "man-milliners," and "Miss-Nancys." This suggests that men, like women, were limited in the forms that their political participation could take. Works that note these charges of effeminacy include Lois W. Banner, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: A Radical for Woman's Rights* (Boston, 1980), 43; Geoffrey Blodgett, "Reform Thought and the Genteel Tradition," in H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *The Gilded Age* (2d edn., Syracuse, N.Y., 1970), 56–57; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), 179–91; and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982), 163–65. In addition to this language, phallic imagery and symbolism had an important place in nineteenth-century electoral politics. Psychohistorians might find a good deal of underlying meaning in the long ballot (reformers favored the short form) and pole raisings, for

campaigns themselves gathered new intensity in the decades following the Civil War. The men who marched in torchlight parades recalled memories of the war and demonstrated loyalty to the nation and to their party. Women participated, too, by illuminating their windows and cheering on the men; sometimes the women marched alongside the men, dressed as patriotic figures like Miss Liberty.²⁸ The masculine character of electoral politics was reinforced on election day. Campaigns culminated in elections held in saloons, barber shops, and other places largely associated with men. Parties and electoral politics, in short, served private, sociable purposes.

Just as the practice and meaning of electoral politics changed in the early nineteenth century, so did the function of government. State and local governments gradually relinquished to the marketplace the tasks of regulating economic activity, setting fair prices, and determining product standards. State governments limited the practice of granting corporate charters on an individual basis and, instead, wrote uniform procedures that applied to all applicants. These governments also reduced, and finally halted, public control of businesses and private ventures in which state money had been invested. A spate of state constitutional revisions undertaken from the 1820s through the 1840s codified these changes in the role of government in economic life. In state after state, new constitutions limited the power of the legislatures. Some of this power was granted to the courts, but most authority passed to the entrepreneurs. This transformation in governance is just beginning to be re-evaluated by political historians.²⁹ For our purposes, the important point is that governments largely gave up the tasks of regulating the economic and social behavior of the citizenry.

The rise of mass parties and characteristic forms of male political participation separated male and female politics. When states eliminated property qualifications for suffrage, women saw that their disfranchisement was based solely on sex. The idea of separate spheres had a venerable past, but it emerged in the early nineteenth century with a vengeance. Etiquette manuals written by both men and women prescribed more insistently the proper behavior for middle-class ladies. Woman's attributes—physical weakness, sentimentality, purity, meekness, pioussness—were said to disqualify her for traditional public life. Motherhood was now described as woman's special calling—a “vocation,” in Nancy Cott's term—that, if performed knowledgeably and faithfully, represented the culmination of a wom-

example, as well as in partisans' charges of sexual impotence. Political historians, however, have as yet failed to examine the rituals and symbols of partisan contests in regard to their sexual connotations.

²⁸ Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 266; McGerr, “Political Spectacle and Partisanship,”; and Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America*, 153.

²⁹ On economic policy and constitutional revision, see Wallace D. Farnham, “‘The Weakened Spring of Government’: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American History,” *AHR*, 68 (1962–63): 662–80; L. Ray Gunn, “Political Implications of General Incorporation Laws in New York to 1860,” *Mid-America*, 59 (1977): 171–91; Oscar Handlin and Mary Flug Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy—Massachusetts, 1774–1861* (New York, 1947); Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776–1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948); James Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Madison, Wisc., 1956), chaps. 1, 2; and Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 71–81. On changes in social policy, see Jeremy P. Felt, *Hostages of Fortune: Child Labor Reform in New York State* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1956), 17–37; and Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York, 1974), chaps. 2–4.

an's life.³⁰ While a handicap for traditional politics, her emotional and guileless nature provided strengths in pursuing the important tasks of binding community divisions and upholding moral norms.

At the same time, political activity expanded in scope and form. New organizations for women proliferated in small and large cities and became forums for political action.³¹ These organizations took on some of the tasks—the care of dependents and the enforcement of moral norms—that governments had abandoned. If not maintained by church, government, and community, the social order would be preserved by woman and the home. Women's positions outside traditionally defined politics and their elevated moral authority took on new importance and may have allowed men to pursue individual economic and social ends with less conflict. Through selfless activities in the home and community, women could provide stability.³²

As historians of women have pointed out, one of the ironies of Jacksonian democracy was the simultaneous development of the "cult of true womanhood" and rhetoric celebrating the equality of men.³³ These developments were related and carried ramifications for both male politics and woman's political role. The notion of womanhood served as a sort of negative referent that united all white men. It might, indeed, have allowed partisan politics to function as a ritual, for it made gender, rather than other social or economic distinctions, the most salient political division. Men could see past other differences and find common ground with other men.

"Womanhood" was more than just a negative referent, for it assigned the continued safety of the republic to the hands of disinterested, selfless, moral women. In the vision of the framers of the Constitution, government was a self-regulating mechanism that required good institutions to run properly—not, as in classical republicanism, virtuous citizens. Men's baser instincts were more depend-

³⁰ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, chap. 2; Berg, *The Remembered Gate*, chaps. 2–4; Degler, *At Odds*, chaps. 3–5; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977), 65–90, 107–11; Sklar, *Catherine Beecher*, 87, 151–67, 212–13; Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present* (1975; 2d edn., New York, 1979), 142–74; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," *American Quarterly*, 4 (1971): 562–84; Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 85–92; and Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood."

³¹ Mary P. Ryan argued that these new organizations prepared women for a domesticity confined to the conjugal family; *Cradle of the Middle Class*, esp. 9–18. Perhaps Berg made the strongest case for the political importance of early nineteenth-century women's organizations, for she contended that these early reform groups provided the groundwork for American feminism; *The Remembered Gate*, esp. 6–7, 174–75, 240–42.

³² Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood"; and Sklar, *Catherine Beecher*, 126–29, 151–67, 172, 212–13.

³³ The phrase is Welter's; see "The Cult of True Womanhood." Since the appearance of her work, historians of women have concentrated on questions different from those Welter asked about the concurrent rise of the woman's sphere and male egalitarianism. Welter explored the relationship between the two and found that the new insistence on woman's place compensated for the lack of restraint on male political and economic ambitions. Scholars have since focused on the impact of domesticity on feminism. Some historians, taking a "cultural" approach, have seen the roots of feminism in women's organizations and domesticity. Others, notably Ellen DuBois, have found this inadequate. They have argued that, in order to understand the origins of feminism, historians should pay closest attention to explicitly "political" concerns in the nineteenth century. For an introduction to this debate, see "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," *Feminist Studies*, 6 (1980): 26–54. Studies of the woman's sphere in the Jacksonian period include Berg, *The Remembered Gate*; Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*; Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl"; Glenda Riley, "The Subtle Subversion: Changes in the Traditionalist Image of the American Woman," *Historian*, 32 (1970): 210–27; Sklar, *Catherine Beecher*, esp. 134–36, 155–67; Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman"; and Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 85–92.

able than their better ones; hence, the framers made self-interest the basis for government. While politics and public life expressed selfish motives, private life—the home—maintained virtue. The republican vocabulary lingered into the nineteenth century, but key words gained new meanings that were related to private behavior. “Liberty,” “independence,” and “freedom” had economic as much as political connotations, while “virtue” and “selflessness” became attributes of women and the home. Because order was thought to be maintained by virtuous women, men could be partisans and could admit that community divisions existed.³⁴ At the same time, male electoral participation defined politics. As the idea of parties gained citizens’ acceptance and other modes of participation were closed off or discouraged, electoral participation stood as the condoned means of political expression.

Women’s political demands and actions that too closely approached male prerogatives met with resistance. Women fought hard—and sometimes successfully—in state legislatures to end legal discrimination. But even their victories had as much to do with male self-interest as with women’s calls for justice.³⁵ Still, they slowly gained legal rights in many states. And since male politics determined what was public and political, most of those demands by women that fell short of suffrage were seen as private and apolitical. The political activities of women in clubs and in public institutions achieved a considerable degree of male support. Women reformers not only drew little visible opposition from men but often received male financial support. Women’s moral nature gave them a reason for public action, and, since they did not have the vote, such action was considered “above” politics.

Ideas about womanhood and separate spheres, as well as forces as diverse as urbanization and the resurgence of revival religion, gave women’s political activity a new prominence. But that female sphere had now grown. Men and women would probably have agreed that the “home” in a balanced social order was the place for women and children. But this definition became an expansive doctrine: home was anywhere women and children were. Influential women writers such as Catherine Beecher described a “domestic economy” in which women combined nurturance and some of the organizational methods of the new factory system to run loving, yet efficient, homes. Others expanded the profession of motherhood to include all of society, an argument that stressed the beneficial results that an application of feminine qualities had on society as a whole.³⁶ This perspective on motherhood and

³⁴ Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969). For an economic understanding of the republican vocabulary, see Rowland Berthoff, “Independence and Attachment. Virtue and Interest: From Republican Citizen to Free Enterpriser, 1787–1837,” in Bushman *et al.*, eds., *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston, 1979), 97–124. In a related vein, Merle Curti discussed economic arguments for national loyalty; see Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York, 1946), chap. 4. On connections between domesticity and Jacksonian democracy, see Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York, 1975), chap. 4; and Sklar, *Catherine Beecher*, 80–89, 155–63.

³⁵ Degler, *At Odds*, 332–33; and Suzanne D. Lebsock, “Radical Reconstruction and the Property Rights of Southern Women,” *Journal of Southern History*, 43 (1977): 195–216. Lebsock noted that opposition to women speakers, along with new forms of ritual deference, appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century, and she suggested that men may have reacted to women’s increasing power in the private sphere by encroaching on their public roles; *Free Women of Petersburg*, chap. 7.

³⁶ Mary P. Ryan referred to women who wished to apply motherhood to the public sphere as “social housekeepers”; *Womanhood in America*, 142–47, 226–35. For other studies that consider the expansion and articulation of domesticity, see Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*; Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: A*

the home included not only individual households but all women and children and the forces that affected their lives. And it had a lasting appeal. As late as 1910, feminist and journalist Retha Childe Dorr asserted: "Woman's place is Home. . . . But Home is not contained within the four walls of an individual house. Home is the community. The city full of people is the Family. The public school is the real Nursery. And badly do the Home and Family need their mother."³⁷ Many nineteenth-century women found this vision of the home congenial: it encouraged a sense of community and responsibility toward all women, and it furnished a basis for political action.

THROUGHOUT THE NINETEENTH CENTURY women participated in politics through organizations that worked to correct what they defined as injustices toward women and children. The ideas and institutions through which women acted, however, changed significantly over time. Early organizations, including moral reform societies and local benevolent organizations, based their political action on the notions of the moral superiority of women and an expansive woman's sphere. By the mid-nineteenth century, new groups rejected that vision. Early suffrage organizations insisted on rights for women and the independence to move outside of the woman's sphere. Although they by no means fully dismissed the notion of women's moral superiority, their tactics and ideology flowed from different sources, such as the abolition movement. Still later, a new generation of clubwomen returned to the idea of a woman's sphere but rejected sentimentality in favor of the scientific and historical vision of the Gilded Age. They stressed how scientific motherhood, if translated into efficient, nonpartisan, and tough-minded public action, could bring social progress. Temperance activists and suffragists in the late nineteenth century wanted political equality so that the special qualities of womanhood could be better expressed and exercised: femininity provided a sort of expertise needed in formal politics. Drawing on the growing body of works that recount the public activities of women, we can illustrate how the nineteenth-century female political culture operated.

Some of the earliest examples of women's organizations were benevolent and moral reform societies. These groups, usually located in cities, were staffed and managed by middle-class women.³⁸ Unable to believe that women voluntarily acted in ways that were in conflict with the strictures of the woman's sphere, they blamed their charges' misfortunes on male immorality. For example, the Female Benevolent Society and the Female Moral Reform Society, both in New York City and both most active in the 1830s, concentrated their efforts on eradicating moral lapses such as prostitution. Since no woman would choose such an unwomanly vocation, they

Social History of Birth Control (New York, 1976), 95–115, 126–36; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*; and Sklar, *Catherine Beecher*, 80–89, 96, 135–37, 151–67, 193–94, 203, 221–22, 264–65.

³⁷ Dorr, *What Eighty Million Women Want* (Boston, 1919; reprint edn., New York, 1971), 327.

³⁸ Berg, *The Remembered Gale*, esp. chap. 7; Degler, *At Odds*, 279–86, 298–316; Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 149–59; Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood*, 40–43, 50–60, 64–76; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, chap. 3; and Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman."

reasoned, they blamed the moral inferiority of men and the scarcity of economic opportunities for women for this degradation of womanhood.

Such an analysis of the causes of unwomanly behavior encouraged women in benevolent groups to broaden their efforts and concerns. Organized women inaugurated employment services, trained women for work as seamstresses and housekeepers, and gathered funds to aid poor women. These reformers were also alarmed at the treatment of women in prisons; they feared these women were brutalized and immodestly mixed with male inmates. Hence they worked for prison reform and persuaded state and municipal governments to appoint female guards and police matrons, as well as to set up halfway houses and prisons for women. Other groups dedicated themselves to helping elderly women, poor women, children, and orphans. They were joined by clubwomen in working for dress reform, health and sex education, and education for women.³⁹ As their concerns widened, so did the variety of their tactics. One group published the names of prostitutes' clients that were gathered by members who held vigils outside of brothels. When moral suasion and shame seemed ineffective, they turned to law. Reformers lobbied legislators to pass measures that would protect women, children, and the home. They also launched successful petition drives. A New York State group persuaded legislators to introduce a bill that would make adultery and seduction punishable crimes. During the next three years, they put pressure on assemblymen by publishing the names of representatives who voted against the measure. It passed. Members of charitable organizations also worked to see legislation enacted that protected married women's property.⁴⁰

These demands, like all of the political actions of the antebellum groups, were fully congruent with a broad vision of the woman's sphere. We should recognize, too, that the vision of the home as embracing all women and children had an important corollary: "woman" was a universal category in the minds of organized women, as it was for others who held the doctrine of separate spheres. Because all women shared certain qualities, and many the experience of motherhood, what helped one group of women benefited all. "Motherhood" and "womanhood" were powerful integrating forces that allowed women to cross class, and perhaps even racial, lines.⁴¹ They also carried moral and political clout. Hence, women's groups celebrated the special moral nature of women, usually in contrast to men's capacity for immoral behavior. The nature of woman simply suited her to ensure the moral and social order, which sometimes necessitated the assistance of the state.

The culmination of this strain of female political culture was the Woman's

³⁹ Both Berg and Melder stressed the anti-male rhetoric of these early organizations; Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood*, chap. 4, esp. 55. Also see Riley, "Subtle Subversion"; Mary P. Ryan, "The Power of Women's Networks: A Case Study of Female Moral Reform in Antebellum America," *Feminist Studies*, 5 (1979): 66–85; Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman"; Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*; Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830–1930* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), 22–35; and Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union*, chaps. 6–7.

⁴⁰ Berg, *The Remembered Gate*, 183–85. For comparable examples, see Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood*, chap. 4; and Ryan, "The Power of Women's Networks."

⁴¹ On the possibility of racial cooperation, see Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist Abolitionists in America* (Urbana, Ill., 1978). Gerda Lerner has explicated the difficulty of such cooperation; see "Black and White Women in Interaction and Confrontation."

Parliament, convened by Sorosis, a professional women's club in New York City, in 1869. Supporters envisioned creating a parallel government with responsibilities complementing woman's nature: education, prisons, reform schools, parks, recreation, political corruption, and social policy in general—tasks that male partisan politics handled poorly, if at all. Participants intended the parliament to be elected by all women at large, and, although it met only once, the Woman's Parliament was the fullest expression of the transfer of woman's sphere to politics.⁴² Nonetheless, the members of the Woman's Parliament rejected woman suffrage, even though they were prepared to operate a separate government. Suffrage represented the antithesis of the glorification of separate spheres that lay behind the political activities of the early organizations. For these women and many men, suffrage was indeed a radical demand.⁴³ By involving women in the male political arena, women's right to vote threatened to end political separation. It implied—and suffragists argued—that men and women should be treated as individuals, equal in abilities and talents, and that neither men nor women were blessed with a special nature. Women's suffrage threatened the fraternal, ritualistic character of male politics, just as it promised to undercut female political culture.

The early suffrage movement developed from women's participation in the abolition movement, particularly the Garrisonian wing, but there was no simple connection between the two. Women, as Ellen DuBois pointed out, did not need involvement in abolitionism to recognize their oppression. Rather, from their experience women gained political skills, an ideology distinct from the doctrine of separate spheres, and a set of tactics. They learned about political organization and public speaking, found humanism an attractive alternative to evangelical Protestantism and woman's special nature, and discovered Garrisonian moral suasion to be a useful way of making political demands. Abolitionism taught women how to turn women's rights into a political movement. Moreover, the rejection of their demands by the Radical Republicans showed them the unreliability of the established political parties and the necessity for an independent movement.⁴⁴ Yet the early suffrage movement was notably unsuccessful. The organization itself split over questions of tactics and purpose. A few Western states passed woman suffrage amendments, but apparently for reasons other than women's demands. By the 1880s, many states allowed women to vote in school elections, and even to serve on school boards. But, on the whole, the movement made little headway until the turn of the century.⁴⁵

Neither the equality nor the liberal individualism promised by the early suffragists found a receptive audience in the nineteenth century. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women's political activities were

⁴² On the Woman's Parliament, see Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 39–45, 73.

⁴³ DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*. Also see Degler, *At Odds*, chap. 7; and Scott and Scott, *One-Half the People*.

⁴⁴ DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*.

⁴⁵ Fourteen states admitted women to the electorate at least for school elections. Four states—Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, and Utah—passed full woman suffrage amendments. On the conservative, nonfeminist motives behind the passage of woman suffrage in the Western states, see Grimes, *Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage*. For Sarah Churske Stevens's account of her successful race for school superintendent in Markate County, Minnesota, in 1890, see Lerner, *Female Experience*, 361–73.

characterized by voluntary, locally based moral and social reform efforts. 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. They could feel that their efforts showed some positive result and that public motherhood contributed to the common good. Moreover, men were unwilling to vote for suffrage amendments. The late nineteenth century was the golden age of partisan politics: at no time before or since did parties command the allegiance of a higher percentage of voters or have a greater hand in the operation of government. Indeed, in the extremes of political action of both men and women during the late nineteenth century—torchlight parades and the Woman's Parliament—there were hints of earnest efforts to hold together a social and political system that was slipping from control. At any rate, separate political cultures had nearly reached the end of existence.

THROUGHOUT THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, the charitable work of women aimed to remedy problems like poverty, disease, and helplessness. But after the Civil War the ideas that informed women's efforts, as well as the scope of their work, markedly changed. New perceptions about the function of the state and a transformed vision of society came out of the experience of the war. It had illustrated the importance of loyalty, duty, centralization, and organization and encouraged a new sense of American nationality. Even as the federal government drew back from its wartime initiatives, many Americans were recognizing the shortcomings of limited government. Amid rapid urbanization and industrialization, the economic system nationalized and reached tighter forms of organization. Social thinkers and political activists discovered limits in the ability of traditional Protestantism, liberalism, or republicanism to explain their world. Some even questioned the idea of moral authority itself and turned to a positivistic interpretation of Spencerian sociology, which stressed the inevitability of historical progress and touted science as the height of human achievement. While the system had its critics, it more commonly was justified by a faith in historical progress.⁴⁶

Women's political culture reflected these changes. The work of Northern women in the Sanitary Commission illustrates some of the directions that their politics took. The commission, a voluntary but quasi-governmental organization founded by male philanthropists, set out to supply Northern troops with supplies and medical care. Volunteers, they argued, were too often distracted by the suffering of individuals, and community-based relief got in the way. Unsentimental and scientific, the members of the commission felt they best understood the larger

⁴⁶ George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965); James Gilbert, *Designing the Industrial State: The Intellectual Pursuit of Collectivism in America, 1880–1940* (Chicago, 1972); Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700–1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York, 1982), 218–70; Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana, Ill., 1977); Keller, *Affairs of State*; Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union*; and Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*.

purpose and the proper way to deal with the magnitude of the casualties. Women served as nurses in the commission, as they did in army hospitals and voluntary community relief operations. They moved women's traditional roles of support, healing, and nurturance into the public sphere. At the same time, their experiences taught them the limits of sentiment and the need for discipline. Women such as Clara Barton, Dorthea Dix, Mary Livermore, and Mother Bickerdyke gained public acclaim for their services. Well-to-do Northern women raised a substantial amount of money for the commission by running "Sanitary Fairs." They collected contributions, sold items donated by men and women, and publicly celebrated the Union's cause.⁴⁷

The commission is an important example of women's participation in politics. The acceptance and expansion of the woman's sphere, professionalization, and the advancement of science over sentiment were repeated in other Gilded Age female organizations. Some middle-class groups saw socialism as the solution to heightened class tensions, and, for a time, such groups formed alliances with working-class and socialist organizations. In Chicago, the Illinois Woman's Alliance cooperated with the Trade and Labor Assembly on efforts to secure legislation of interest to both groups. Yet such alliances grew increasingly rare as socialists were discredited.⁴⁸

Organized women found a more permanent method in social science. Especially in its early reformist stage, social science tied science to traditional concerns of women.⁴⁹ The methods and language of social science—data collection, detached observation, and an emphasis on prevention—influenced the political work of women. In the South, women in church and reform groups adopted these methods to address what they perceived as the important social dislocations created by the Civil War. Gilded Age "friendly visitors" spent time with the poor, gathering information and providing a presumably uplifting example. They did little more, since alms giving was bad for the poor because it discouraged work, and, by standing in the way of progress, it was also a detriment to the race. Even more "scientific," Progressive-era settlement workers later mocked the friendly visitors' pretensions. They saw the Gilded Age ladies as lacking in compassion and blind to the broader sources of poverty and, hence, the keys to its prevention. Later still, professional social workers, further removed from sentimentality, replaced the settlement workers and their approaches.⁵⁰ Yet in the Gilded Age, social science

⁴⁷ L. P. Brockett and Mary C. Vaughn, *Women's Work in the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1967); Ann Douglas, "The War Within: Women Nurses in the Union Army," *Civil War History*, 18 (1972): 197–212; Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War*, 98–112, 212–16; Livermore, *My Story of the War*; Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*, 71–74; and Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 226–28.

⁴⁸ Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*; Ann D. Gordon and Mari Jo Buhle, "Gender Politics and Class Conflict: Chicago in the Gilded Age," paper presented at the Upstate Women's History Conference, held in Binghamton, New York, October 1981.

⁴⁹ Social science was for Franklin Sanborn, a leader of the American Social Science Association, "the feminine gender of Political Economy, . . . very receptive of particulars but little capacity of general and aggregate matters." Sanborn, as quoted in Haskell, *Emergence of Professional Social Science*, 137.

⁵⁰ On women and social science, see Gordon and Buhle, "Gender Politics and Class Conflict"; Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union*, 316–22, 324–46; and Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*, 108–12. Transitions in reform thought and tactics are traced in Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York, 1956); Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War*, 98–112, 119–216; Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 2–20, 81–82, 84; and David P. Thelen, *The New*

provided women with quasi-professional positions and an evolutionary argument for women's rights. It also contributed a logic for joining forces with formal governmental institutions, because social science taught the importance of cooperation, prevention, and expertise. This faith in the scientific method and in professionalism eventually led to a devaluation of voluntary work and to the relinquishment of social policy to experts in governmental bureaucracies.⁵¹

The temperance movement illustrates another way that women fused domesticity and politics. It engaged more women than any other nineteenth-century cause and shows how women could translate a narrow demand into a political movement with wide concerns. Temperance appealed to women because it addressed a real problem—one that victimized women—and because, as a social problem, it fell within the woman's sphere. The temperance movement developed through a number of stages and gained momentum especially during the Second Great Awakening. Its history as a women's movement, however, began with the temperance crusade during the years following the Civil War. In small cities and towns in the East and Midwest, groups of women staged marches and held vigils outside or conducted prayer meetings inside saloons, which sometimes coerced their owners to close. In some places, they successfully enlisted the aid of local governments. In most towns, however, the saloons reopened after a short period of "dry" enthusiasm.⁵²

The Women's Christian Temperance Union was a descendant of the temperance crusade. It, too, relied on Protestant teachings, women's sense of moral outrage, and the belief in women's moral superiority. Throughout its history, the WCTU was involved in working for legislation such as high license fees and local option. But under the leadership of Frances Willard, the organization, while still defining temperance as its major goal, moved far beyond its initial concerns and closer to the Knights of Labor, the Populist party, and the Christian Socialists and away from the tactics and ideology of the temperance crusade. Like these Gilded Age protest movements, the WCTU turned a seemingly narrow demand of group interest into a critique of American society.⁵³ Indeed, the ability of the WCTU to cast the

Citizenship: The Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885–1900 (Columbia, Mo., 1972). On the South, see James L. Leloudis II, "School Reform in the New South: The Women's Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses in North Carolina, 1902–1919," *JAH*, 69 (1982–83): 886–909; and Scott, *Southern Lady*, chap. 6.

⁵¹ For an examination of changing attitudes about voluntarism, see Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849–1929* (Chicago, 1982), esp. 27–50.

⁵² On women's activity in early temperance organizations, see Jed Dannenbaum, "The Origins of Temperance Activism and Militancy among American Women," *Journal of Social History*, 15 (1981–82): 235–52; Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, 93–114; and Eliza Daniel ("Mother") Stewart, *Memories of the Crusade: A Thrilling Account of the Great Uprising of the Women of Ohio in 1873 against the Liquor Crime* (Columbus, Ohio, 1889; reprint edn., 1972).

⁵³ Willard attempted to ally the WCTU with the Prohibitionists and later the Populists. For a time, she also considered supporting the Republican party but found it an unreliable partner. On Willard's relationship and that of the WCTU to the parties and reform movements of the Gilded Age, see Jack S. Blocker, Jr., "The Politics of Reform: Populists, Prohibitionists, and Woman Suffrage, 1891–1892," *Historian*, 34 (1975): 614–32; Ruth Bordin, "Frances Willard and the Practice of Political Influence," paper presented at the Seventy-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, held in Cincinnati, Ohio, April 1983; Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 60–69, 80–89; Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, 137–47; and Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana, Ill., 1963), 88–96.

traditional concerns of women in terms of a broad vision and of the public good helps explain its success. But that success was in part the result of its flexible organization. Although centrally directed, the WCTU was locally organized, which allowed the branches to determine their own concerns and projects within the general directives of the leadership. Willard's WCTU inaugurated the "Do Everything" policy, which allowed local organizations to choose projects as they saw fit. The WCTU made temperance the basis of demands for a wide range of reforms. Alcohol abuse, they argued, was a symptom, not a cause, of poverty, crime, and injustices done to women. Therefore, the WCTU organized departments in areas such as labor, health, social purity, peace, education, and, eventually, suffrage. The locals were directly involved in electoral politics: small-town women worked for "dry" candidates, while the Chicago Union supported the Socialist party.⁵⁴

The WCTU's call for the vote for women nearly split the organization. It supported suffrage not for the sake of individual rights but because the ballot could allow women to serve better the causes of temperance, the home, and the public good. American politics and economics in the late nineteenth century contained enough examples of the baneful results of unrestrained self-interest, from political corruption to avaricious corporations. The efforts of women to deal locally with social problems were no longer sufficient in a nation where the sources were extralocal, and created by male, self-interested political and economic behavior. Woman's vote, they argued, would express her higher, selfless nature. The WCTU combined the woman's sphere with suffrage under the rubric of "Home Protection," an argument that implied feminine values belonged within traditionally defined politics. While taking traditional domestic concerns seriously, the WCTU taught women how to expand them into wider social concern and political action. With greater success than any other nineteenth-century women's group, it managed to forge the woman's sphere into a broadly based political movement.

Other groups—notably the second generation of woman suffragists and clubwomen—also attempted to combine the woman's sphere and women's rights. In this effort, woman suffrage remained divisive. As DuBois and Carl Degler have shown, the threat woman suffrage posed to the doctrine of separate spheres helps explain why the struggle was so long and bitterly fought. But an examination of the political context can provide further insights. The antisuffragists' most powerful argument was that suffrage was dangerous because it threatened the existence of separate spheres. If women voted, they would abandon the home and womanly virtues. The differences between the sexes would be obscured: men would lose their manhood and women would begin to act like men. Throughout the nineteenth century, those arguments struck a chord. Participation in electoral politics did define manhood. Women also had a stake in maintaining their sphere and the power it conferred. But by the end of the century profound social, economic, and political changes made that antisuffrage argument—and the separate male and female political cultures—less persuasive to many women—and many men.

⁵⁴ Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*; Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 54–60, 70–89; Degler, *At Odds*, 338–39; Gordon and Buhle, "Gender Politics and Class Conflict"; and Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*, chap. 5.

THE NATURE OF ELECTORAL POLITICS changed significantly during the early twentieth century. Gone were not only the torchlight parades but also most of the manifestations of the male political culture that those parades symbolized. Voter turnout began to decline, and men's allegiance to political parties waned. In the broadest sense, these changes can be traced to the effects of rapid urbanization and industrialization.⁵⁵ In the nineteenth century, partisan politics was a local experience, resting on certain sorts of community relationships. In the partisan press and campaigns, politics meant economic policy. Locally, such issues were handled in an individualistic, partisan manner; on the national level, abstract discussions of distant economic questions supplied the basis for a partisan faith.

But by the early twentieth century the communities in which voters' loyalties were formed had changed. Men's most important relationships were no longer contained solely within geographically defined localities but were instead scattered over distances. Their political ties were no longer exclusively with neighbors but also with people having similar economic or other interests. Male political participation began to reflect this shift. Men increasingly replaced or supplemented electoral participation with the sorts of single-issue, interest-group tactics that women had long employed. Moreover, political parties that dealt with problems on an individualistic basis now seemed less useful because economic and political problems demanded more than individualistic solutions.⁵⁶ The sum of these changes in nineteenth-century patterns of electoral participation was to lessen the importance of partisan politics for men. In hindsight, at least, woman suffrage presented less of a threat to a male political culture and to manhood.

Even more important, the antisuffragists could no longer argue so forcefully that the vote would take women out of the home. Government had assumed some of the substantive functions of the home by the early twentieth century. Politics and government in the nineteenth century had revolved almost entirely around questions of sectional, racial, and economic policies. To be sure, governments, especially at the state level, spent the largest portion of their budgets on supporting

⁵⁵ Historians and political scientists have devoted a good deal of attention to changing patterns of electoral politics in the early twentieth century. Still, much controversy remains. For different points of view, see Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe"; Philip E. Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," in Angus Campbell and Converse, eds., *The Human Meaning of Social Change* (New York, 1972), 263–337; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven, Conn., 1974); and Jerrold G. Rusk, "The Effect of the Australian Ballot on Split-Ticket Voting," *APSR*, 64 (1970): 1220–38. Other important works tie changes in electoral politics to the transformation of governance in the twentieth century. See Hays, *Response to Industrialism*; Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853–1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979), and *Who Voted*, chap. 4; Richard L. McCormick, "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *AHR*, 86 (1981): 247–74; and Wiebe, *The Search for Order*. The interpretation offered here blends elements of these approaches along with the findings of studies of late nineteenth-century community life. It owes the most to Samuel P. Hays, "Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum," in William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development* (2d edn., New York, 1975), 152–81.

⁵⁶ On the connection between community change and partisan behavior, see Hays, "Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum"; Kleppner, *Who Voted*; and Paula Baker, "The Culture of Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Community and Political Behavior in Rural New York," *Journal of Social History* (forthcoming). The relationship between partisanship and forms of policy making is analyzed in McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy."

institutions like schools, asylums, and prisons.⁵⁷ But election campaigns and partisan political discussions largely excluded mention of these institutions. In the Progressive era, social policy—formerly the province of women’s voluntary work—became public policy. Women themselves had much to do with this important transition—a transition that in turn changed their political behavior.

Women continued to exercise their older methods of political influence, but now they directed their efforts through new institutions. Women’s clubs—united in 1890 as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs—were one important means. Beginning as self-improvement organizations, many clubs soon focused on social and cultural change. These women sought to bring the benefits of motherhood to the public sphere. They set up libraries, trade schools for girls, and university extension courses, and they worked to introduce home economics courses, to improve the physical environment of schools, and to elect women to school boards. They also sponsored legislation to eliminate sweatshops and provide tenement-house fire inspection. Clubwomen interested in sanitary reforms helped enact programs for clean water and better sewage disposal. In many cities, they raised money for parks and playgrounds. Clubs were also important in pressing for a juvenile court system and for federal public health legislation, such as the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act.⁵⁸

But by the Progressive period, these women recognized that their efforts—and even public motherhood—were not enough. The scope of these problems meant that reform had to be concerned with more than the care of women and children. Charity had real limits. Problems were not solvable, or even treatable, at the local level. Despite attempts to uplift them, the poor remained poor, and women began to identify the problem as having broader sources. The municipal housekeepers needed the help of the state: alone, they were powerless to remove the source of the problem, only to face the growing number of its victims. As Mary Beard explained in 1915,

It is the same development which has characterized all other public works—the growth from remedy to prevention, and the growth is stable for the reason that it represents economy in the former waste of money and effort and because popular education is leading to the demand for prevention and justice rather than charity. In this expansion of municipal

⁵⁷ Gerald N. Grob, “The Political System and Social Policy in the Nineteenth Century: Legacy of the Revolution,” *Mid-America*, 58 (1976): 5–19.

⁵⁸ Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*; Marlene Stein Wortman, “Domesticating the Nineteenth-Century American City,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, 3 (1977): 531–72; Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place*, 102–26, 112–27; and Margaret Gibbons Wilson, *The American Woman in Transition: The Urban Influence, 1870–1920* (Westport, Conn., 1979), 91–99. Women in the South engaged in similar work through women’s clubs and church organizations; see Leloudis, “School Reform in the New South”; John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Women’s Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886–1939* (Baton Rouge, La., 1982); and Scott, *Southern Lady*, chap. 6. Middle-class black women worked through separate organizations in the nineteenth century. See Lynda F. Dickson, “The Early Club Movement among Black Women in Denver, 1890–1925” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1982); Tullia Hamilton, “The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs” (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1978); and Gerda Lerner, “Community Work of Black Women’s Clubs,” and “Black and White Women in Interaction and Confrontation.” For clubwomen’s descriptions of their work, see Croly, *History of the Women’s Club Movement*; Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York, 1972), chap. 8; and Mary I. Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs for the First Twenty-Two Years of Its Organization* (New York, 1912).

functions there can be little dispute as to the importance of women. Their hearts touched in the beginning by human misery and their sentiments aroused, they have been led into manifold activities in attempts at amelioration, which have taught them the breeding places of disease, as well as of vice, crime, poverty, and misery. Having learned that effectively to "swat the fly" they must swat its nest, women have also learned that to swat disease they must swat poor housing, evil labor conditions, ignorance, and vicious interests.⁵⁹

What Beard described was the process by which politics became domesticated. Women's charitable work had hardly made a dent in the social dislocations of industrial society. The problems were unsolvable at the local level because they were not local problems. And, since the goal of these women was to prevent abstract, general problems—to prevent poverty rather than to aid poor people—the methods of antebellum organizations would not suffice. Hence, the state—the only institution of sufficient scope—had to intervene. Women therefore turned their efforts toward securing legislation that addressed what they perceived to be the sources of social problems—laws to compensate victims of industrial accidents, to require better education, to provide adequate nutrition, and to establish factory and tenement inspection, for example.⁶⁰ Clubwomen pointed proudly to playgrounds that they had founded and later donated to local governments.⁶¹ Thus women passed on to the state the work of social policy that they found increasingly unmanageable.

Historians have not yet explicitly addressed the questions of how and why governments took on these specific tasks. In the broadest sense, the willingness of government to accept these new responsibilities has to do with the transformation of liberalism in the early twentieth century. Liberalism came to be understood not as individualism and laissez faire but as a sense of social responsibility coupled with a more activist, bureaucratic, and "efficient" government. This understanding of government and politics meshed nicely with that of women's groups. Both emphasized social science ideas and methods, organization, and collective responsibility for social conditions. Thus there were grounds for cooperation, and the institutions that women created could easily be given over to government. Yet the character of collective action varied. The business corporation created the model for the new liberalism, while politically active women and some social thinkers took the family and small community as an ideal.⁶² But whatever the mechanism, as

⁵⁹ Beard, *Women's Work*, 221.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 6–7; Wilson, *American Woman in Transition*; Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*, 119–27; and Wortman, "Domesticating the Nineteenth-Century American City."

⁶¹ Wortman, "Domesticating the Nineteenth-Century American City"; and Leloudis, "School Reform in the New South." For contemporary accounts, see Beard, *Women's Work*, chaps. 9–11; Wood, *History of the General Federation*, 120–209; and Dorr, *What Eighty Million Women Want*.

⁶² Among the many works that trace the transition in liberal thought, see Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (2d edn., New York, 1979), chaps. 1–3; R. Jeffrey Lustig, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern American Political Theory, 1890–1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982); William E. Nelson, *The Roots of American Bureaucracy, 1830–1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); and James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918* (Boston, 1968). Discussions of the family and the small community as a model are provided in Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970); and Wortman, "Domesticating the Nineteenth-Century American City." Although historians have not yet fully described the mechanism by which government took on work that had been the responsibility of voluntary organizations, a few hypotheses seem safe. Municipal governments were undoubtedly responding to demands for better social services—ones in part

governments took up social policy—in part because of women's lobbying—they became part of the private domain.

The domestication of politics, then, was in large part women's own handiwork. In turn, it contributed to the end of separate political cultures. First, it helped women gain the vote. Suffrage was no longer either a radical demand or a challenge to separate spheres, because the concerns of politics and of the home were inextricable. At the same time, it did not threaten the existence of a male political culture because that culture's hold had already attenuated. The domestication of politics was connected, too, with the changed ideas of citizens about what government and politics were for. Each of these developments, illustrating ties between transformations in politics and the role of women, merits further attention.

Recovering from a period of apathy and discouragement, the women's suffrage campaign enjoyed renewed energy in the early twentieth century. The second generation of suffragists included home protection in their arguments in favor of votes for women. They noted that the vote would not remove women from the home and that electoral politics involved the home and would benefit from women's talents. Suffragists argued that women's work in World War I proved their claims to good citizenship. They also took pains to point out what the vote would not do. Indeed, the suffragists made every conceivable argument, from equal rights to home protection to the need for an intelligent electorate. Such a wide array of practical claims did not necessarily represent a retreat from the radicalism of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's generation. Suffragists often presented arguments in response to accusations by the opposition. If opponents claimed that woman suffrage would destroy the home, suffragists replied that it would actually enhance family life. The suffragists' arguments, moreover, reflected a transition in political thought generally. Just as Stanton's contemporaries spoke in the language of Garrisonian abolitionism, the later suffragists framed their ideas in the language of science, racism, efficiency, and cooperation. This does not make their nativist or racist rhetoric any less objectionable, but it does mean that second-generation suffragists were working within a different cultural and intellectual environment.⁶³

But organization, not argumentation, was the key to winning the vote for the second generation. They discarded a state-by-state strategy and concentrated on winning a national amendment. Under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt and others, suffragists patterned their organization after a political machine, mimicking male politics. The suffrage campaign featured a hierarchical organization, with workers on the district level who received guidance, funds, and speakers from the state organizations, which in turn were supported by the national organization.

created by women's attempts to form public opinion. Turning to existing institutions would have been a logical choice for municipal governments. Office holders may also have seen new opportunities for patronage—opportunities that gained importance as older sources (service contracts arranged with private businesses, for example) fell under attack.

⁶³ The second generation has been presented as conservative even by those historians who have regarded suffrage as a radical demand. See Degler, *At Odds*, 357–61; and Ellen DuBois, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches* (New York, 1981), 192–93. The most detailed analyses of the suffrage movement's conservative turn are Kradtitor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*; and O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave*.

They conducted petition campaigns to illustrate the support that suffrage had from women and men. They held parades and pageants to demonstrate that support and gather publicity. To be sure, suffragists pointed to the positive results votes for women could bring. But most of all, they aimed to show that woman suffrage—whatever it meant—was inevitable.⁶⁴

Suffragists considered the suffrage referenda in New York to be pivotal tests. Victory there would provide crucial publicity for the cause and lend credence to the notion of inevitability. In 1915 the referendum lost by a fairly wide margin in a fiercely fought campaign; only five scattered upstate counties supported the referendum. Two years later, woman suffrage was back on the ballot. This time, the suffragists concentrated their efforts on district work in major cities. Curiously, the election approached with much less fanfare than that of 1915. The suffragists apparently had won their battle of attrition. The amount and tone of the newspaper coverage suggests that woman suffrage was indeed considered inevitable, and the referendum passed, almost entirely because of the support it received in the cities. The election results point to important patterns. The woman suffrage referendum ran poorly in areas where the prohibition vote was high or where high voter turnout and other manifestations of the nineteenth-century culture of politics were still visible. Here, women's suffrage was still a threat. Conversely, it ran well in cities, especially in certain immigrant wards and places where the Socialist vote was high—where nineteenth-century political patterns had never taken hold or had already disappeared. Men who had no stake in maintaining the old culture of politics seemed more likely to support woman suffrage. In the South, where the right to vote was tied to both manhood and white supremacy, woman suffrage also met stiff resistance.⁶⁵

That woman suffrage had little impact on women or politics has been considered almost axiomatic by historians. It failed to help women achieve equality. It did not

⁶⁴ DuBois pointed out that the second-generation suffragists' insistence on nonpartisanship is an indication that the vote—rather than what women might do with it—was their major goal; *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 182–83. The suffragists' new campaign tactics owed a large debt to the publicity-gathering techniques of the Congressional Union. For a good account of the course of the suffrage campaign, see Carrie Chapman Catt, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (1923; 2d edn., New York, 1926), 189–91, 212, 284–99, 302–15. Also see Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 262–65, 271, 285; and Sharon Hartman Strom, "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement: A New Perspective from Massachusetts," *JAH*, 62 (1975–76): 296–315.

⁶⁵ The counties that supported suffrage in 1915 were Chautauqua, Schenectady, Chemung, Broome, and Tompkins. The lowest support for the referenda in both 1915 and 1917—as low as 30 percent—occurred in the counties of Livingston, Yates, Ulster, Lewis, Albany, and Columbia. Preliminary calculations suggest that in places where women's groups had a long history of public action, where men's organizations (such as agricultural societies) had increasing involvement in interest-group politics, and where the Socialist vote was high voters were more likely to support suffrage. The southern-tier counties, for example, illustrate the first two hypotheses. Schenectady County, like certain wards in New York City, supported Socialist candidates. Rough calculations also suggest that comparatively high levels of turnout and low incidence of split-ticket voting occurred in places where suffrage was unpopular. Nearly half of New York's sixty-two counties supported suffrage in 1917, but the greatest gains were made in New York, Bronx, Kings, Richmond, and Westchester counties. For studies of the New York City campaign, see Doris Daniels, "Building a Winning Coalition: The Suffrage Fight in New York State," *New York History*, 60 (1979): 59–88; and Elinor Lerner, "Immigrant and Working-Class Involvement in the New York City Suffrage Movement, 1905–1917: A Study in Progressive Era Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1981). Both Daniels and Lerner emphasized the support suffrage received from immigrant groups—especially Jewish voters—and Socialist voters. Lerner noted that men who voted for suffrage probably knew many women who were financially independent. Neither, however, put the race in the context of long-term political patterns.

result in the disaster antisuffragists imagined. Women did not vote as a reform bloc or, indeed, in any pattern different from men. Woman suffrage simply doubled the electorate. Historians have traced the reasons for the negligible impact of woman suffrage to the conservative turn of the second-generation suffragists, including their single-minded pursuit of the vote and home protection arguments. But to dismiss woman suffrage as having no impact is to miss an important point. It represented the endpoint of nineteenth-century womanhood and woman's political culture. In a sense, the antisuffragists were right. Women left the home, in a symbolic sense; they lost their place above politics and their position as the force of moral order. No longer treated as a political class, women ceased to act as one. At the same time, politics was unsexed. Differences between the political involvement of men and women decreased, and government increasingly took on the burden of social and moral responsibility formerly assigned to the woman's sphere.

THE VICTORY OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE reflected women's gradual movement away from a separate political culture. By the early twentieth century, the growing number of women who worked for wages provided palpable examples of the limits of notions about a woman's place. Certainly by the 1920s, the attachment of women to the home could not be taken for granted in the same way it had in the nineteenth century, in part because by the 1920s the home was something of an embarrassment. Many men and women rejected domesticity as an ideal. The "new woman" of the 1920s discarded nineteenth-century womanhood by adopting formerly male values and behavior.⁶⁶ To be sure, most women probably did not meet the standard of the "new woman," but that ideal was the cultural norm against which women now measured their behavior. Women thus abandoned the home as a basis for a separate political culture and as a set of values and way of life that all women shared.

Women rejected the form and substance of nineteenth-century womanhood. Municipal housekeepers and charity workers saw that the responsibility for social policy was not properly theirs: only government had the scope and potentially the power to deal with national problems. Society seemed too threatening and dangerous to leave important responsibilities to chance, and women to whom municipal housekeeping was unknown seemed to sense this. They also surrendered to government functions that had belonged to the woman's sphere. Given the seemingly overwhelming complexities and possibilities for grievous errors, women were willing to take the advice of experts and government aid in feeding their families and rearing and educating their children. Tradition offered little guidance; the advice of their mothers, who grew up during the mid- and late nineteenth century, could well have seemed anachronistic in an urban and industrial society.

⁶⁶ Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York, 1977). Ironically, motherhood was ritualized and glorified just as the domestic ideal declined. See Kathleen W. Jones, "Mother's Day: The Creation, Promotion, and Meaning of a New Holiday in the Progressive Era," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 22 (1980): 176–96. For a review of the work on women in the 1920s, see Estelle B. Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," *JAH*, 61 (1974–75): 373–93. Also useful is Freda Kirchwey, *Our Changing Morality: A Symposium* (New York, 1924).

Their own experiences could lead to wrong decisions in a rapidly changing society. Moreover, abandoning the functions of the old-fashioned woman's sphere allowed a new independence. Women made some gains, but they also lost the basis for a separate political culture.⁶⁷

Lacking a sense of common ground, women fragmented politically. Their rejection of the woman's sphere as an organizing principle discouraged women from acting as a separate political bloc. Without political segregation to unite them, differences among groups of women magnified. What benefited professional women might be superfluous, even damaging, to the interests of working-class women. Women did not vote as a bloc on "women's" issues because there were no such issues, just as there were no issues that reflected the common interests of all men. The commonality that women had derived from the home in the nineteenth century disappeared, leaving women to splinter into interest groups and political parties. Organizing a separate women's party held little appeal for women because they could not find issues on which to unite.⁶⁸ Women were also no longer "above" politics. Their political behavior benefited from neither the veneration of the home and the moral power it bestowed nor the aura of public concern that their older informal methods of participation communicated.

It almost goes without saying that women gained little real political power upon winning the vote. Men granted women the vote when the importance of the male culture of politics and the meaning of the vote changed. Electoral politics was no longer a male right or a ritual that dealt with questions that only men understood. Instead, it was a privilege exercised by intelligent citizens. Important positions in government and in the parties still went to men. Woman suffrage was adopted just at the time when the influence of parties and electoral politics on public policy was declining. By the early twentieth century, interest groups and the formation of public opinion were more effective ways to influence government, especially the new bureaucracies that were removed from direct voter accountability.⁶⁹

As differences between political participation of men and women lessened in the early twentieth century, the role of government changed. Government now carried moral authority and the obligations it implied. That governments often chose not to

⁶⁷ On the changed relationship between doctors and mothers, see Kathleen W. Jones, "Sentiment and Science: The Late Nineteenth-Century Pediatrician as Mother's Advisor," *Journal of Social History*, 17 (1983–84): 79–96. Jones stressed the reciprocal relationship between women and professionals, noting that women initially sought experts' advice and helped shape the profession of pediatrics. For accounts of women as more passive recipients of expert intrusion, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: One Hundred Fifty Years of the Expert's Advice to Women* (Garden City, N.J., 1979); Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York, 1977); and Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*.

⁶⁸ Felice Dosik Gordon, "After Winning: The New Jersey Suffragists, 1910–1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1982). In an important recent article, Estelle B. Freedman has argued that women's separate institutions provided a degree of influence lost when women joined organizations that included both sexes; see "Separatism as Strategy."

⁶⁹ On the rise of interest groups in politics, see Richard L. McCormick, *From Realignment to Reform: Political Change in New York State, 1893–1910* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), 151–55, 173–77, 264–71; Herbert F. Margulies, *The Decline of the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890–1920* (Madison, Wisc., 1968); and Mansel G. Blackford, *The Politics of Business in California, 1890–1920* (Columbus, Ohio, 1977). The image of the intelligent client—in this case, the voter—was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It applied even to motherhood. See Jones, "Sentiment and Science"; and Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place*, 97–99. A classic study that illustrates men's adoption of women's political tactics is Peter H. Odegard, *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (New York, 1928).

use that authority is not the point. What matters is that citizens wanted more from government, in the way of ethical political behavior and of policies that ensured economic and social stability. To exercise moral authority, government needed to behave in moral ways. Citizens expected office holders to separate their public actions from their private interests and wanted a civil service system to limit the distribution of public rewards for party work. Even in the 1920s, citizens held government responsible for encouraging a growing economy and social order. When the methods employed in the 1920s for accomplishing these goals—government orchestration of self-regulating functional groups—proved lacking, government took a larger hand in directing social and economic policy.⁷⁰

Even more fundamentally, Americans' perceptions of the distinctions between the public and private spheres were transformed by the 1920s. Although it has not received sufficient scholarly attention, some of the outlines of this change are discernable. In the nineteenth century, social and cultural separations between what was public and what was private were well-defined, at least in theory. The public world included politics, economics, and work outside of the home, while the private sphere meant the home and family. These sharp delineations provided a sense of stability. The lines were often crossed: women, for example, worked outside of the home. And, while women brought their "private" concerns to the "public" sphere, men's political involvement served private ends. This paradox suggests a rethinking of the meanings of public and private in the nineteenth century, one that has implications for understanding public life in the twentieth. Social definitions of public and private blurred in the twentieth century, re-creating an obfuscation similar to that of colonial America. In a sense, the existence of spheres was denied. The personal was political and the political was evaluated in regard to personal fulfillment. Citizens judged office holders on the basis of personality. Men and women shunned the traditional public world of voting and holding office to concentrate their attention on private life. Although not a descent into confusion (the separations between public and private had also been murky in the nineteenth century), these changes pointed to a complex and vastly different understanding of the meaning of public and private from the one held by people in the nineteenth century.⁷¹

WOMEN PLAYED IMPORTANT, BUT DIFFERENT, PARTS in two major turning points in American political history, transformations that coincided with changes in the roles of women. In the Jacksonian period, the cultural assignment of republican virtues and moral authority to womanhood helped men embrace partisanship and

⁷⁰ Ellis Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917–1933* (New York, 1979), 80–109; and Louis Galambos, *Competition and Cooperation: The Emergence of a National Trade Association* (Baltimore, 1966).

⁷¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1979); and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (1974; 2d edn., New York, 1976). On the transition from "character" to "personality" in twentieth-century culture, a transition that has important implications for the study of politics, see Warren I. Susman, "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), 212–26.

understand electoral politics as social drama. The social service work of female organizations filled some of the gaps created as governments reduced the scope of their efforts. Two political cultures operated throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. The female culture was based on the ideology of domesticity and involved continual expansion of the environs of the “home.” Women carried out social policy through voluntary action. They practiced a kind of interest-group politics, by directing their attention to specific issues and exercising influence through informal channels. Male politics consisted of formal structures: the franchise, parties, and holding office. For many men, this participation was as much social as it was political, and it contributed to a definition of manhood.

Women had a more active part in the political changes of the Progressive period. They passed on their voluntary work—social policy—to governments. Men now sought to influence government through nonelectoral means, as women had long done. Electoral politics lost its masculine connotations, although it did not cease to be male dominated. Voting, ideally, had less to do with personal loyalties than with self-interested choices. Women voted. They did so in somewhat smaller numbers than men, and they held few important party or governmental positions. But sharp separations between men’s and women’s participation abated. In this process, individual women gained opportunities. “Woman,” however, lost her ability to serve as a positive moral influence and to implement social policy.

Much work on women’s political involvement is necessary before we can fully understand the connections between women’s activities and American politics. But if either is to be understood, the two must be considered together. Gaining a broader understanding of “politics” is one way to begin doing so. This interpretation should consider the political system as a whole, and include both formal and informal means of influence. It could thus embrace voluntary activities, protest movements, lobbying, and other kinds of ways in which people attempt to direct governmental decisions, together with electoral politics and policy making. In determining what activities might be termed “political” we might adapt John Dewey’s definition of the “public.” For Dewey, the “public as a state” included “all modes of associated behavior . . . [that] have exclusive and enduring consequences which involve others beyond those directly engaged in them.”⁷² This understanding suggests that the voluntary work of nineteenth-century women was part of the political system. Although directed at domestic concerns, the activities of women’s organizations were meant to affect the behavior of others, as much as—or more than—were ballots cast for Grover Cleveland. Given such a definition of politics, political historians could come to different understandings of the changes in and connections between political participation and policy making. Historians of women could find new contexts in which to place their work. Students of both subjects need to go beyond the definition of “political” offered by nineteenth-century men.

⁷² John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York, 1927), 27. As a refinement, “consequences” might be considered political only if they represent attempts to change prescriptions for behaviors and attitudes that are enshrined in law or custom, whether done through legal or informal means.