



Members of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League, n.d. Letitia Lawton (left), Cora Mitchel (center), and Emeline Eldredge (right). Photograph, COURTESY OF THE PORTSMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

## Uncovering the Lives of Ordinary Rhode Island Suffragists

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In 1925 Sara M. Algeo published *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, a memoir about her work as a leader in the Rhode Island woman suffrage movement. The book also detailed the contributions of many other Rhode Islanders to the cause. Algeo explained that Carrie Chapman Catt, the former president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), had discouraged her from writing the book because she believed that it would be too similar to accounts written by other suffrage leaders. Algeo disagreed with Catt, though, and wrote that "there are few volumes written by the common garden variety of suffragists. They are all written by the extraordinary, the distinguished, the great."<sup>1</sup> The editors and contributors of the *Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States* share Algeo's commitment to documenting the often-overlooked but significant activism of ordinary Americans in the suffrage movement.

The year 2020 marks the centennial of the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, granting American women the constitutional right to vote.<sup>2</sup> In honor of this anniversary, in 2015 Thomas Dublin and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eminent historians of American women's history, created the *Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States*, an internet database of biographical essays about American woman suffragists. The collection is available at <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/VOTESforWOMEN>.<sup>3</sup> The biography database currently contains over 2600 short biographies of woman suffragists from across the country. By the time the project concludes, approximately another 1000 entries will be added.

Dublin and Sklar designed the project as a work of social history, meaning that the entries would focus on the ordinary, and usually unknown, members of the movement, instead of celebrated leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or Alice Paul. Most Americans' knowledge of the woman suffrage movement has been limited and focused on these high-profile leaders. There has been less awareness of and attention to the hundreds of thousands of women who constituted the ground troops of the movement and made the Nineteenth Amendment possible. Who were these ordinary suffragists? What were their backgrounds? What motivated them to devote their time, energy, and money to the movement? What suffrage activities did they engage in? What was the impact of their activism, in their local communities, states, and in the nation as a whole? The editors and authors of the *Online Biographical Dictionary* believe that the biographical perspective of ordinary suffragists reveals new understanding and nuances about the suffrage movement that have been lost by a traditional historical focus on national leaders and organizations.

The biographical project focuses on woman suffrage during the period of 1890-1920, when it developed into a mass movement with millions of members, instead of its nineteenth century roots, dating back to the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, with far more limited membership and influence. The biographical collection examines three different categories of suffragists: "Mainstream Suffragists of the National American Women Suffrage Association" (NAWSA), "Militant Suffragists of the National Woman's Party" (NWP), and "Black



Women Suffragists.” Lastly, the project is crowdsourced, with ordinary Americans researching and writing biographical entries about ordinary suffragists. The authors of the biographies are community members, professors, local historians, and graduate, undergraduate, and high school students.

I serve as the Rhode Island state coordinator of the *Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States*. In total, there are about seventy biographies representing Rhode Island suffragists, primarily from the NAWSA groups that were central to the state movement, but also entries on Black suffragists and militant ones.<sup>4</sup> The largest group of contributors to the Rhode Island biographies were faculty and undergraduate students from Rhode Island College. A class of high school students from Massachusetts also researched and wrote Rhode Island biographies. Numerous members of the community who were interested in local history and the suffrage movement, also contributed biographies.

The biographies include Rhode Island women such as Bertha G. Higgins, Enid M. Pierce, Cora Mitchel, Mildred Glines, Anna G. Smith, and Helen Dougherty.<sup>5</sup> More famous or earlier Rhode Island suffragists such as Paulina Wright Davis, Anna Garlin Spencer, Elizabeth Buffum Chace, and Julia Ward Howe, were not included. This article examines the Rhode Island suffrage movement of the early twentieth century and how the biographies of these women reveal a new, more diverse, larger, and more influential movement in the state. With their ideas, backgrounds, and actions, the women helped the Rhode Island movement achieve new highs with the 1917 presidential suffrage legislation and the 1920 ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, but also embodied the flaws and contradictions of the suffrage movement with racism and other prejudices.

The Rhode Island organizations affiliated with the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) dominated in history, size, and influence. The Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association (RIWSA) was founded in 1868 and was the only suffrage organization in the state for many years. Smaller regional branches of RIWSA included groups such as the Pawtucket League, the Compton League, and the Newport County Woman Suffrage League. In the early twentieth century, new NAWSA suffrage organizations were created by Rhode Island women. At the 1906 NAWSA convention in Baltimore, Dr. M. Carey Thomas, president

of Bryn Mawr College, led a meeting about establishing a national suffrage organization for college women. RIWSA officers followed up on this sentiment and formed a committee, helmed by Ardelia Dewing Gladding, to explore how to attract more women college students into the movement. By the end of 1907, they had created a new Rhode Island organization, named the College Equal Suffrage League, with Florence Garvin as its first president. Sara M. Algeo, a founding member of the College League, noted that it worked in partnership with RIWSA and “brought it new blood and new members.”<sup>6</sup>

By 1913, Algeo was the president of the College Equal Suffrage League and came to admire the suffrage tactics and organization of Carrie Chapman Catt’s Woman Suffrage Party in New York. The Rhode Island College League hosted a speech by Catt where she explained the Woman Suffrage Party’s principles and strategies of working as a political machine. The week after Catt’s talk in 1913, Rhode Island suffragists led by Algeo, Sara L.G. Fittz, Helen R. Parks, and Esther H. Abelson formed the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party (RIWSP) with Algeo as chairman.<sup>7</sup> The RIWSP engaged in new suffrage outreach efforts, political lobbying, and created new high-profile events in Rhode Island such as an annual suffrage bazaar that raised money and awareness for the cause. The RIWSP often shared membership and events with RIWSA and both organizations were state branches of NAWSA.

In 1915, the three Rhode Island NAWSA groups—the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association, the College Equal Suffrage League, and the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party—agreed to merge into one organization with the new name of the Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association (RIESA) with Agnes M. Jenks as president.<sup>8</sup> The merger of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party into the RIESA ended up being a rocky one. Algeo had disagreed with amalgamation and several months later reestablished RIWSP as an independent organization which she served as chairman again. In subsequent years, RIWSP maintained its independence from RIESA and its affiliation with NAWSA; however, collaborations among the two organizations and their members were common. One notable difference between the organizations was that RIWSP welcomed Black members and Bertha G. Higgins and Mary E. Jackson were active participants. Higgins joined with Algeo as one of the charter members of the reestablished RIWSP.

In the 1910s, new suffrage organizations that identified as more militant emerged in Rhode Island. These groups, though, had a more limited membership and impact in the state than the NAWSA ones. In 1913, Ingeborg Kindstedt, a Swedish immigrant, and resident of Providence, led a small group of women in creating the Women’s Political Union (WPU). The organization was also referred to at times as the Women’s Political Equality League. The Rhode Island group was modeled after Harriot Stanton Blatch’s Women’s Political Union, a suffrage organization in New York City that introduced more public protest tactics and sought to bring more working-class women into the movement. The *Providence Journal* reported that the members of the Rhode Island group were “admirers of Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst,” the famous militant British suffragist.<sup>9</sup> Alice Paul and Doris Stevens, national leaders of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, a more militant group devoted to activism for a suffrage constitutional amendment, came to Rhode Island to speak to the WPU members about the Congressional Union. The Rhode Island WPU developed formal affiliations with the Congressional Union and the Women’s Political Union in New York.

The Rhode Island WPU embraced the idea of militant tactics in support of suffrage. At a meeting, a member suggested that they pursue tactics similar to the famous Dorr Rebellion

in Rhode Island in the 1840s, a radical democratic movement that attempted to rewrite the state constitution, implement its own government, and seize an arsenal in order to provide the right to vote to all adult white men in the state instead of only property owners.<sup>10</sup> The suffragists of the Rhode Island WPU also embraced more explicitly feminist rhetoric and ideas than the more mainstream RIWSA. In 1914, for example, the members passed a resolution declaring that women had the right to “disobey man, man-made laws and man-preached commandments.”<sup>11</sup> These provocative discussions aside, the WPU did not undertake any major activities, militant or otherwise, in support of suffrage in Rhode Island beyond their regular meetings.

Rhode Island WPU leaders, Ingeborg Kindstedt and Maria Kindberg, also a Swedish immigrant and Kindstedt’s partner, gained national attention, though, for a high-profile event in 1915. Alice Paul, Congressional Union leader, asked Kindberg and Kindstedt to deliver a woman suffrage petition with 500,000 signatures to President Woodrow Wilson. Kindstedt and Kindberg, accompanied by Sally Bard Field, drove by car 3,000 miles from the Congressional Union convention in San Francisco to Washington D.C. The trip lasted for ten weeks and the women met with fifteen governors and twenty-five mayors to promote the suffrage cause along the way.<sup>12</sup>



Suffrage envoy Sara Bard Field (left) and her driver, Maria Kindberg (center), and machinist Ingeborg Kindstedt (right), during their cross-country journey to present suffrage petitions to Congress, September-December. United States Washington D.C., 1915. [Sept.-Dec.] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mnwp000424/>.



By 1915, national and local suffragists expressed interest in having a branch of the Congressional Union (CU) in Rhode Island. Many Rhode Island suffragists, including those in RIWSA, were already members and supporters of the national CU. Marian Perry and Alva Belmont, prominent Rhode Island socialites, were members of the national advisory committee of the CU and helped fund and establish a national CU headquarters in Newport. Agnes M. Jenks, chairman of RIWSA, also served on the CU advisory committee. In 1915, Jenks met with Alice Paul, and told her that she was “desirous of having a branch of the Union in Rhode Island, and would [do] everything possible to aid in the arrangements for [a Congressional Union] convention” in the state.<sup>13</sup> Jenks worried, though, about the potential negative influence of the WPU leaders in a new CU organization. She told Paul that the WPU was a “moribund association” with essentially only two members—Kindstedt and Kindberg—and warned her that the two women would undermine the Rhode Island Congressional Union branch if given too much freedom and power.<sup>14</sup> In March 1916, a small group of women, led by Kindstedt and Kindberg, received a charter for a new organization, the Congressional Union of Providence, R.I., and Kindstedt served as first president. The new organization held regular meetings, hosted open-air rallies, and brought in local and national speakers on suffrage and related topics. The new Rhode Island CU branch occasionally collaborated with RIESA to conduct political lobbying about woman suffrage with members of the Rhode Island state government.

Both nationally and in Rhode Island, the Congressional Union eventually transitioned into the National Woman's Party (NWP). In May 1917, Rhode Island women including Marian Perry and Mildred Glines hosted a National Woman's Party conference to create an NWP branch in the state. Mildred Gilbert, a national organizer of the party, spoke at the event about the NWP and also met with RIESA leaders and requested their cooperation in the campaign for the federal suffrage amendment. After the meeting, Agnes M. Jenks, the RIESA chairman, announced that the RIESA board supported “working in perfect harmony with both national associations [NAWSA and NWP]” and the importance of a federal suffrage amendment. This note of collaboration between the RIESA and Rhode Island NWP was a departure from the contentious relationship that existed between NAWSA and NWP nationally as the leaders clashed on suffrage tactics.<sup>15</sup>

Jenks echoed some of these concerns, explaining that RIESA decided to not affiliate formally with the NWP because RIESA members and leaders had reservations about the wisdom of the NWP's militant tactics, most notably the “present picketing of the White House, which, in this serious national crisis seems extreme action that serves no end, and which conservative Rhode Island women are not prepare to indorse.”<sup>16</sup>

The NWP did not have many state branches and concentrated its efforts on lobbying for suffrage nationally rather than by state. As a result, the Rhode Island NWP membership and organization remained fairly small and focused their attentions on the federal government and the suffrage amendment. Mildred Glines was a twenty-three-year-old Rhode Islander and one of the hostesses of the NWP Rhode Island conference. She had been a member of the legislative committee of RIESA that engaged in the campaign for a presidential suffrage bill in Rhode Island that had passed in April 1917. Glines was elected vice chairman of the new Rhode Island NWP and later became its chairman. In 1918, she was spending time working at the NWP headquarters in Washington but under Alice Paul's directives, returned to Rhode Island with a resolution that Glines drafted asking the state legislature to support the suffrage constitutional amendment. That resolution was passed and Glines returned to Washington, D.C. to lobby Rhode Island Senators LeBaron B. Colt and Peter G. Gerry for their support for the amendment.<sup>17</sup>



Mildred Glines, chairman Rhode Island, National Woman's Party. “Through Miss Glines's efforts the Rhode Island Legislature has just passed a resolution calling upon Senators to work and vote for the [suffrage] amendment.” Providence Rhode Island, ca. 1917 [to 1918 Apr. 20] Harris & Ewing W. (ca. 1917). PHOTOGRAPH RETRIEVED FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

The members of the Rhode Island NWP became more active in the state in 1919 as they collaborated with RIESA and RIWSP in a campaign to convince the Rhode Island legislature to hold a special session to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. Much of the NWP's lobbying of the Rhode Island Governor and General Assembly, though, was led by Abby Scott Baker, political chairman of the national NWP, instead of local Rhode Island women.<sup>18</sup> After the Rhode Island legislature voted to ratify the amendment in January 1920, Alice Paul attended the signing of the ratification by Governor Beeckman and later met with him, along with Agnes M. Jenks, to urge him to encourage other Republican governors and leaders to support the amendment.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the militant (NWP) and mainstream (NAWSA) members of the suffrage movement, the *Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States* has a category on Black suffragists in order to examine and highlight this significant and often neglected group. White suffrage leaders and organizations regularly discriminated against Black women in the movement, ignored the devastating effects of racism in America, and, at times, made direct pleas for suffrage for white women using the arguments of white supremacy. White suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton helped shape the historical narrative about woman suffrage with their influential, six-volume history of the movement, *The History of Woman Suffrage*. This history documented and praised the white, mainstream suffrage movement led by NAWSA and its predecessors, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association, and erased the suffrage support and activism of Black women. We still have much to learn about Black suffragists in the United States and Rhode Island, although historians have demonstrated their significance to suffrage and broader equality movements.<sup>20</sup>

For most of American history, scholars, politicians, activists, and the public dismissed or overlooked Black suffragists because of explicit and implicit biases that privileged the history of white leaders and organizations. The efforts of Black suffragists, though, have also been neglected and misunderstood because they often took different forms than those of white activists. As mentioned previously, in Rhode Island, Black women belonged to the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party, a rare interracial suffrage organization. This participation, though, was unusual. At the turn of

the century, many Black women, men, and organizations supported woman suffrage as a tool for racial equality, protection, and uplift during a period when racism was especially intense throughout the United States and white supremacy efforts in the South had mostly disenfranchised Black men. In both Rhode Island and the United States, most Black suffrage efforts took place in organizations that were not exclusively devoted to suffrage. Suffrage was only one component, albeit a significant one, of a broader African-American movement for civil rights and social reform at the turn of the century. Much of this suffrage activism was done in the local, state, and national organizations of the Black clubwomen's movement, led by the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). In addition to suffrage, Black clubwomen worked for better conditions of public health, education, careers, homes, and respectability for African Americans.

In Rhode Island, Black women primarily worked for suffrage in their own organizations such as the Rhode Island Union of Colored Women's Clubs, the Sojourner Truth Club, Colored Women's Civic and Political League, and the Woman's Newport League. Roberta J. Dunbar was one of the leading Black activists in Rhode Island at the turn of the century and *The Providence Journal* referred to her as “one of the best-known Afro-American club women in New England.”<sup>21</sup> For many years Dunbar served as president or an officer in



Roberta Dunbar. “Miss R. J. Dunbar,” *The Crisis* 13 (February 1917): 174.

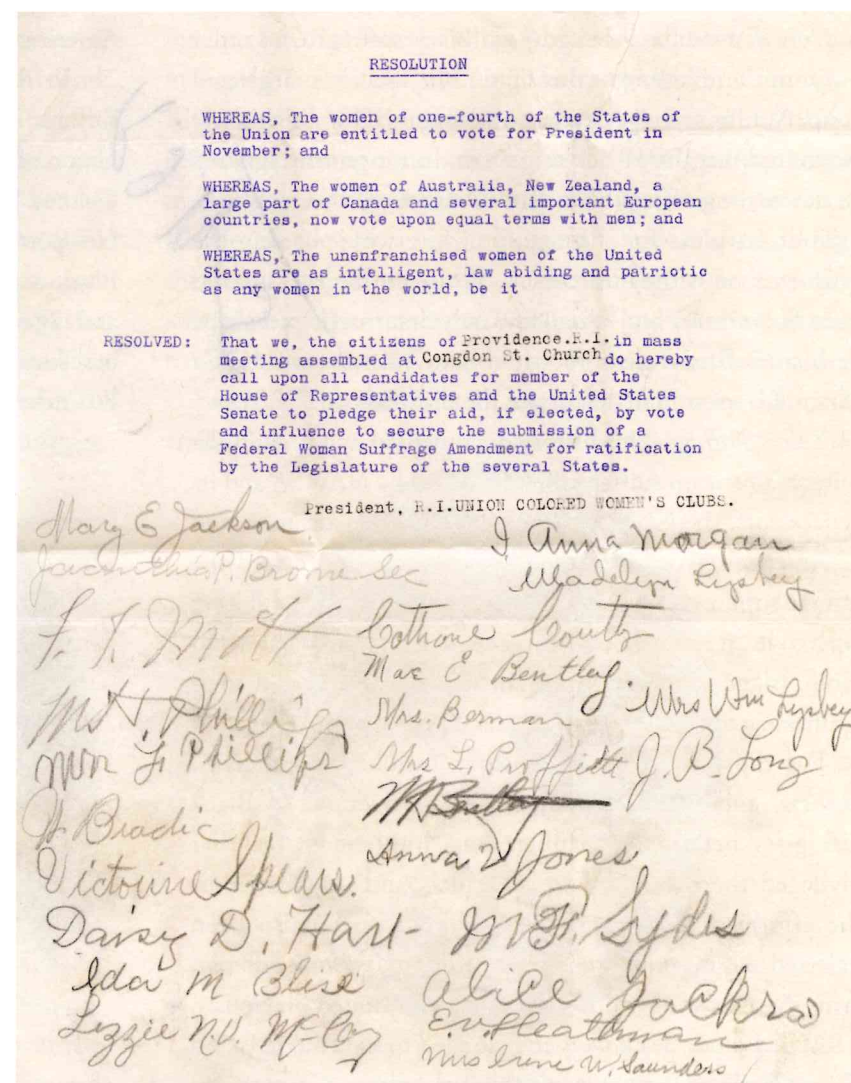


organizations including the Woman's New Century Club, and the New England Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. She served as recording secretary for the national NACW from 1912-1917, alongside Mary Church Terrell and Mrs. Booker T. Washington. In addition to her work in Black women's clubs, she was also a leader in other Black civil rights and community organizations such as the Providence National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Marathon Club.

Most suffrage histories would not include someone like Dunbar. There is no explicit record of her belonging to a suffrage organization or espousing support for the cause. Her ideas and activism, though, provide strong circumstantial evidence that she supported woman suffrage. Dunbar spoke passionately that Black women held special traits and responsibilities to protect the interests of African-American families and communities. She was a leader in local, regional, and national Black women's clubs at a time when they actively supported woman suffrage. She was a colleague and friend with leading suffragists in Rhode Island such as Mary E. Jackson, a Black suffrage leader, and Sara M. Algeo, a white one, and participated in local events with many prominent white suffragists. Dunbar was an original and active member of the Providence League of Women's Voters, an organization that emerged out of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party as ratification of the suffrage amendment neared. Like many other white and African-American suffragists, Dunbar also became active in political parties after woman suffrage. For over forty years after the ratification of suffrage, Dunbar was an active member of the Julia Ward Howe Republican Club, a Black women's political organization.

Other Black women in Rhode Island have suffrage legacies that are easier to trace than Dunbar's. Bertha G. Higgins was a suffrage leader in both the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party and Black women's clubs. Within RIWSP, Higgins led a committee for "colored women" in the suffrage movement. She regularly gave speeches to

Black audiences, in locations such as Black churches, about the importance of woman suffrage to African-American women and the African-American community as a whole. She raised money and awareness for the suffrage cause by partnering with a Black women's club, the Twentieth Century Art and Literary Club, to put on a suffrage minstrel show of Black singers and music. In 1913, at the annual conference of the Rhode Island Union of Colored Women's Clubs, Higgins led a debate titled, "Why the Rhode Island Union should endorse the Suffrage movement." Following this discussion, the members voted to pass a formal resolution of support for the woman suffrage movement. Sara M. Algeo noted that this 1913 suffrage resolution by the Union of Colored Women was "the only endorsement received from any large body of women in the State before ratification took place."<sup>22</sup>



U.S. Senate, Resolution of the [R.I.] Union of Colored Women's Clubs supporting the Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment, 1916. <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/image/RIUnionColoredWomenPetition1916.htm>.

Like Dunbar, Higgins became a founding member of the League of Women Voters in Rhode Island and a powerful advocate for the Republican Party. In 1920, she founded the Julia Ward Howe Republican Women's Club and worked to encourage Black women to vote, to support Republican candidates in local and national elections, and to lobby Republican politicians on issues important to African Americans, such as civil rights legislation, employment, and social services. Higgins's political activism in Rhode Island garnered her national attention by Republican leaders and Warren Harding invited her to his presidential inauguration in 1920 in recognition of her support during the campaign and her political influence among African-American voters in Rhode Island.<sup>23</sup>

Mary E. Jackson was another prominent Black suffragist in Rhode Island and nationally. As with Higgins and Dunbar, she was active in the Black clubwomen's movement and for many years served as president of the Rhode Island Union of Colored Women's Clubs. She also was a member of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party. She served as vice president in the Alpha Suffrage Club, the influential Black suffrage organization led by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in Chicago, and headed the suffrage department of the NACW. In 1915, Jackson participated in a forum dedicated to woman suffrage in *The Crisis*, the NAACP's journal, with Black leaders such as Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell. In her essay, "The Self-Supporting Woman and the Ballot," Jackson argued that working women needed the vote to protect themselves and that anti-suffrage objections were "protests against progress, civilization and good sense."<sup>24</sup>

During World War I, Jackson served as national secretary for African-American women in industrial work for the Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA). In this high-profile position, Jackson advocated for woman suffrage for Black women in the context of the American war effort. She claimed that American women were being called to "hold the second line of defense" on the home front during the war and that the country "must by virtue of that call enlist all of its women

## COLORED PLAYERS IN SUFFRAGE MINSTRELS



Back Row, Left to Right—William Wiley, Kittie Nelson, Constance Branch, William Allison, Hope Gray, Adeline Brauner, Cronwell Went. Second Row—Viola Smith, Daisy Allison, Mildred Thomson, Lulu Scott, Pearl Smith. Tambourine Girls—Vashti Maxwell, Marion Gray.

African-American women in Rhode Island organized fundraisers to aid the woman suffrage cause. "Colored Players in Suffrage Minstrels," photograph, *The Providence Journal*, May 14, 1916.



Mary E. Jackson, photograph, from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 163.



citizens, including colored women.” She continued that the Black woman “must be made to know she is no longer in any sense a ward of America, but a citizen with the rights, duties, and responsibilities of citizenship.”<sup>25</sup> In January 1920, Rhode Island suffragists held a banquet to celebrate the state’s ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. At this party, Jackson gave a speech in which she reminded the audience of mostly white suffragists and politicians of the critical work that remained to achieve racial equality. Sara M. Algeo described Jackson’s words as “a flaming sword” about “the wrongs that must be righted among our colored brothers and sisters.”<sup>26</sup>

Traditionally most Americans have believed that “women got the right to vote with the Nineteenth Amendment,” overlooking that Black women in the South, like their male counterparts, were disenfranchised by legislation, violence, and discrimination. Black men and women in the South really only gained the right to vote in 1965, with the legal protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In 2020, with new political and social pressures to attend to issues of intersectionality and racial discrimination, historians and journalists have emphasized the limitations of the Nineteenth Amendment and the white-dominated suffrage movement. This correction is much needed and overdue; however, some of the coverage has promoted the idea that only white women achieved the right to vote with the Nineteenth Amendment. For example, a recent article in *Vox* claims, “the 19th Amendment was essentially for one group of women and one group only: white women.”<sup>27</sup> This new historical narrative erases Northern Black women such as Higgins, Dunbar, and Jackson who worked hard for woman suffrage and wielded significant political power locally and nationally in the years following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.<sup>28</sup>

As the evidence of the Black suffragists demonstrates, an important advantage of taking a biographical approach to the history of woman suffrage is that it helps reveal the complexity and diversity of the movement. In recent years, there has been an increasing perception of the suffrage movement as an elite and exclusive group of white, middle and upper-class Protestant women. The nineteenth-century Rhode Island suffrage movement was made up of a small group of native-born whites. These suffragists, though, included women, and men, from a wide variety of economic and social backgrounds, with strong connections to the abolition movement, the labor movement, and activist Protestant denominations such as

the Quakers. The Rhode Island suffrage movement in the early twentieth century did have some suffragists from privileged backgrounds. However, as the Rhode Island movement increased in size in this period, it grew more diverse in the race, class, ethnicity, and religion of its members. It also drew more women who worked, remained single, and were younger than the nineteenth-century pioneers.

Some of the twentieth-century Rhode Island suffragists reflected assumptions about the elite nature of the movement. They could trace their family roots to the settlers of Rhode Island or other New England colonies in the 1600s and belonged to organizations such as the Mayflower Society and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Various Rhode Island suffragists held family connections to prominent local family names such as Angell, Sprague, Colt, Ballou, Fenner, Hopkins, Carrington, Dorr, Bowen, and Olney. Examples of these elite suffragists include Margarethe Lyman Dwight who grew up in the Dorr Mansion and whose mother founded the Lincoln School, a private girls’ school, for her to attend. Dwight descended from several prominent Rhode Island families. A great-great-grandfather represented Rhode Island in the Continental Congress during the American Revolution.



Margarethe L. Dwight, photograph, c. 1900, from Dorothy W. Gifford, *Lincoln School: The First Century* (Providence, R.I.: Lincoln School, 1984), 44.

COURTESY OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL.

Her great-grandfather, General Edward Carrington, served as the American Consul in Canton, China. Another great-grandfather was Sullivan Dorr, who earned his fortune as a shipping merchant. Thomas Wilson Dorr, Sullivan Dorr’s son, and Dwight’s great uncle, was a politician and reformer best known for leading the Dorr Rebellion—a political uprising in the 1840s to expand the franchise in Rhode Island to white men who did not own property. Anne Hitchcock Sims, a Newport suffragist, was the great-great-granddaughter of Ethan Allen, who gained fame in the American Revolution, and her father, Ethan Hitchcock, served as Ambassador to Russia and Secretary of the Interior. In 1905, she married William Sims, who became an admiral in the U.S. Navy and the president of the Naval War College. President Theodore Roosevelt, the Vice President, and the entire Cabinet of the government attended the wedding.

Other Rhode Island suffragists include Florence Garvin, the daughter of Governor Lucius Garvin and Joujou Edith Converse Colt, a prominent socialite in Washington D.C. and Newport, and the daughter of a U.S. Naval Admiral. She married LeBaron C. Colt, the member of a family with historical, political, and financial prominence in Rhode Island. Her father-in-law, LeBaron B. Colt, served as a representative in the Rhode Island General Assembly, a justice to the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and a U.S. Senator.

These privileged suffragists, however, are only part of the Rhode Island movement and by the early twentieth century, it included more suffragists with different racial, class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Bertha G. Higgins grew up in the rural South right after the Civil War. Her parents were most likely formerly enslaved people and her father worked as either a farmhand or sharecropper. Many of the suffragists grew up in families in which their fathers held working-class jobs. Helen Dougherty’s father worked in factory jobs in Berkshire County in Massachusetts and Pawtucket. Mary E. Jackson’s father was a teamster and Roberta J. Dunbar’s father worked as a plumber and bartender. Esther Abelson’s father was a Jewish Russian immigrant who worked as a junk dealer and construction worker. Elizabeth M. Barr’s Scottish father was a machinist. Sara M. Algeo’s father died when she was four years old and her mother worked to support the family as a washerwoman.

A few of the modern Rhode Island suffragists were immigrants to the United States, such as Henrietta von Klenze

from Germany, Caroline Dowell from England, Deborah Knox Livingston from Scotland, and Ingeborg Kindstedt from Sweden. Much more common, though, were suffragists who were second-generation immigrants with parents who had emigrated from Europe. For example, Agnes M. Bacon grew up in Central Falls, the child of parents from Ireland. Sara Algeo’s parents emigrated from Ireland and England. Esther Abelson grew up in Revere, Massachusetts, the child of Russian immigrants. The second-generation immigrants added new ethnic and class diversity to the movement. In addition, many of them were Catholic, when the suffragists had traditionally been almost exclusively Protestant. Esther Abelson was a rare Jewish suffragist in Rhode Island.

These new kinds of suffragists allowed and pushed the movement to reach more diverse groups of Americans. Abelson emphasized the importance of reaching out to Jewish Americans about woman suffrage and claimed they needed “to rouse the Jewish contingent from its extreme indifference.”<sup>29</sup> Sara M. Algeo, the daughter of an Irish immigrant, applauded Sara L. G. Fittz, also the daughter of an Irish immigrant, for “gaining a constituency among the Irish-American group” for suffrage.<sup>30</sup> Fittz used woman suffrage in Ireland as a way of appealing to Irish Americans in Rhode Island. In a letter to the editor of *The Providence Journal*, she explained that “Irish women have a vote in Ireland, but not in Rhode Island” and that “100,000 Irish woman householders do vote.” She called on men of Irish origin to “give to their women in America the same political privileges they would have enjoyed had they remained at home.”<sup>31</sup> Black women such as Bertha G. Higgins and Mary E. Jackson developed new strategies to reach out to African Americans in Rhode Island, recruit them into the suffrage movement, and fight for woman suffrage for all races. Swedish and Norwegian immigrants in Rhode Island, according to Algeo, were “well informed on the question [of woman suffrage] and almost universally in sympathy,” probably in large part due to the suffrage activism of Ingeborg Kindstedt and Maria Kindberg, Swedish immigrants who ran the Swedish Young Women’s Home in Providence.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to increasing diversity, the Rhode Island suffragists embodied the “New Woman” trend as women pursued and created new public opportunities in American society at the turn of the century. They were more likely to hold outside employment, to remain single, and to attend college. Middle- and upper-class women who did marry



and have children engaged in increasing social and political activism, in addition to their family duties. Nationally and in Rhode Island, as women participated in higher rates of employment, education, and reform, they became more interested in and supportive of suffrage and the movement grew in size and influence.<sup>33</sup> Several of the Rhode Island suffragists were legally single but pursued less traditional relationships. Helen Dougherty lived unmarried for many years with Robert F. Hunt who had been her boss while she worked at *The Labor Advocate: Newsletter of the Socialist Party of Rhode Island*, a socialist newspaper in Rhode Island. Elizabeth Upham Yates, Louise Hall, Maria Kindberg, and Ingeborg Kindstedt had long-term relationships with other women with whom they shared suffrage activism, homes, and property.<sup>34</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, more American women pursued higher education at colleges and universities. Many of the Rhode Island suffragists attended elite women's colleges, which were hotbeds of suffrage debate and activism. Annie H. Barus and Louise Hall graduated from Vassar College, Jessie V. Budlong from Smith College, Helen Emerson from Bryn Mawr, Elizabeth Upham Yates attended Radcliffe College and the Woman's College at Brown University, and Gertrude E. Knox, Mount Holyoke College. Sara M. Algeo went to Boston University and Veva E. Storrs, St. Lawrence College. Henrietta von Klenze earned a B.A. and Ph.D. in Germanic Studies at the University of Chicago. Both Jessie V. Budlong and Sara M. Algeo received master's degrees from the Woman's College at Brown University.



Helen Dougherty, in "Miss Helen Dougherty," photograph, *The Providence Sunday Journal*, November 3, 1912. COURTESY OF THE JOHN HAY LIBRARY, BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, R.I.



Jessie V. Budlong, photograph from the Smith College '98 Class Book (Florence, Mass.: The Bryant Press, 1898), 27. <https://archive.org/details/class1898smit>.

Other suffragists attended less elite schools. Louise Peck, Helen Bowen, and Enid M. Pierce graduated from the Rhode Island Normal School (later renamed Rhode Island College), Alice Worden Cooper graduated from Teachers College at Columbia University, and Sara L.G. Fittz from the Normal College of New York City, in preparation for teaching careers.

At the turn of the century, the Rhode Island suffrage movement had increasing numbers of working women. Most of these women were employed in middle-class jobs; although many had fathers who labored in working-class jobs, few of the suffragists held working-class positions. Suffrage organizations had only started to make more inroads with working-class women in the period and most working-class women had limited time available to volunteer with the organizations. Rare exceptions were Roberta J. Dunbar and Ellen M. Bolles who both worked as dressmakers; at other times Dunbar worked as a manicurist and hairdresser.<sup>35</sup> Some of these women spent their lives as single women with careers; others worked until they married. The most common profession of the suffragists was schoolteacher and women including Agnes M. Bacon, Avis A. Hawkins, and Enid M. Pierce had long careers teaching in Rhode Island public schools. Frances Lucas began her career as a teacher before assuming the position as principal of the Lincoln School, the private school founded by Margarethe Dwight's mother. Emeline Eldredge served as superintendent of the Portsmouth school district. In addition to her other working-class jobs, Roberta J. Dunbar became principal of the Watchman Industrial School, an industrial school for Black young people.

Suffragists worked in other professional jobs as well. Elizabeth M. Barr and Mary A. Angell were librarians — Barr at the Rhode State Library and Angell as the first woman librarian at the historic Providence Athenaeum. Mabel E. Orgelman worked as a stenographer before becoming owner and manager of the Green Lantern Tea Room in Providence. Leila P. Andrews worked as a real estate broker and owned rental properties. Mary E. Jackson was a civil servant, working as a statistician in the Rhode Island Labor Department. Louise Hall was employed as a field secretary, a professional suffrage organizer, for RIWSA and the College Equal Suffrage League. Althea L. Hall worked as a bookkeeper at a manufacturing plant. Sarah J. Eddy became a famous artist, especially known for a portrait she painted of Susan B. Anthony. Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill worked as an actress on stage and in the new medium of film and Agnes M. Jenks also was a stage actress prior to her marriage.

American women participated in increasing activism, careers, and voluntarism for social reform at the turn of the century. This was a common trajectory for women throughout the country but especially prominent in industrial and urban regions such as Rhode Island. The women reformers in this period feared that modern trends including industrialization and urbanization posed great threats to the health, morality, and character of American society and were especially damaging to women, children, family, and the home. These reformers believed that women had special traits and responsibilities to fix these social ills.

Social reform became one of the most important ways that American women became involved in the suffrage movement. As with education and employment, reform broadened women's horizons, brought white middle- and upper-class women into the public and political spheres, and provided an important motivation for supporting suffrage. For many suffragists, the appeal of woman suffrage was that they could use the vote to pressure politicians and political parties to support reform legislation, on topics such as temperance, child labor, and public health. Agnes M. Jenks explained that she joined the suffrage movement after she realized in her reform activism that women needed the ballot "to assure reforms for women and children," and that they were handicapped in their efforts to gain legislative changes without political power.<sup>36</sup> The vast majority of Rhode Island suffragists at the turn of the century were also active in local and national social

reform organizations and viewed social reform and woman suffrage as complementary and interrelated.

One of the largest reform movements at the turn of the century was the anti-alcohol temperance movement. Nationally and in Rhode Island, there was much overlap in membership, ideas, and concerns between the suffrage and temperance movements. Elizabeth Upham Yates, a future president of RIWSA, explained at a local Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) meeting in 1896, that the WCTU was the "greatest result of woman's progress" and that "every woman should be deeply interested in the cause of temperance." She continued that temperance activism and legislation could help solve "all the other important problems now before the world. Immigration, the contest between capital and labor, all involved temperance in some form."<sup>37</sup> RISWA and RIESA members regularly belonged to the WCTU and gave suffrage speeches there. In turn, WCTU members spoke about temperance and suffrage at RIWSA and RIESA meetings. Local and state branches of the WCTU lobbied the Rhode Island legislature and governor in favor of various presidential suffrage bills and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Sara M. Algeo was active in both the suffrage and temperance efforts in Rhode Island. She explained that there was a long,

close relationship which always existed between the two national organizations representing suffrage and temperance. From the time of Susan B. Anthony and her disciples Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt, they have been spiritually interlocked. Frances Willard [longtime president of the WCTU]...was heart and soul for suffrage.<sup>38</sup>

Algeo offered her own unique testament to interrelated suffrage and temperance movements when Jennie L.W. Rooke, the state president of the WCTU, gifted her with two puppies. Algeo named the dogs "Suffrage" and "Prohibition" and said they were "worthy of the great reforms they signified," and a "splendid advertisement for both causes."<sup>39</sup>

Rhode Island suffragists argued that with the right to vote women would vote for temperance politicians and the resulting temperance legislation would improve American society dramatically. Deborah Knox Livingston was a suffragist and state president of the WCTU in Rhode Island before becoming a prominent leader in temperance and suffrage in





Sara M. Algeo with her dogs, "Suffrage" and "Prohibition," photograph from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 250.



Deborah Knox Livingston, photograph from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 109.

other New England states and nationally, including serving as the chair of suffrage for the national WCTU. Speaking at a WCTU meeting in West Warwick in 1912, Livingston called for "the enfranchisement of women," which she believed offered "the only hope for the enforcement of the liquor traffic" as well as "other great social reforms now before the people of this country," including child labor, crime, disease, education, and prostitution.<sup>40</sup> Livingston wrote a song about suffrage and temperance called "The Advancing Host" that included the chorus:

Women want the vote, women want the vote,  
To bring in prohibition, women want the vote.  
Women want the vote, women want the vote,  
To make a sober nation, women want the vote.<sup>41</sup>

Helen Dougherty, suffragist and Socialist candidate for Secretary of State, echoed Livingston's ideas about temperance and suffrage. She claimed that whenever,

the question of woman suffrage came up the liquor interest fought it relentlessly. There was a reason. If woman should ever get the right of franchise in Rhode Island you could count upon one thing for a surety, and that is that there would not be a liquor store on every corner; that there would not be so many of them in the congested, wage-workers' residential districts of Providence as are now permitted to do business.<sup>42</sup>

As with temperance, child labor was a common social issue that motivated women reformers and suffragists at the turn of the century. Annie H. Barus was a state leader in the fight against child labor and a suffragist. She was chairman of the Rhode Island Child Labor Committee, a director of the Rhode Island Consumers' League, and chairman of the Rhode Island Women's Clubs committee on social and industrial conditions. Barus also served on the National Child Labor Committee as the Rhode Island representative. In public lectures, Barus charged that children as young as five and six years old worked out of their homes for the jewelry industry and that more than 6000 children were employed in Rhode Island factories. She also accused Rhode Island of being a pioneer in child labor, which she claimed first emerged as a problem at Slater Mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, the first cotton mill in the United States.<sup>43</sup>

As with temperance, Barus and other suffragists believed that women would use the vote to fight against child labor. She wrote an essay in support of voting rights for women as part of a debate series on suffrage published by *The Providence Journal* in 1912. Barus argued that women needed the vote in order to protect children, which she considered the special skill and responsibility of women. She explained that, "Potential motherhood in one half of humanity instinctively puts that half on the defensive to cherish and protect the race as against the masculine incentive to utilize and exhaust." Their innate maternal nature, Barus claimed, was

compelling women to ask for the power of the ballot in behalf of children, that they may help control the conditions that surround their labor, their education and their play; that they may efficiently help in solving the questions of the State's dependents—the aged and the sick—the responsibility for whose care and comfort was deemed their special vocation.

She cited evidence from a study that demonstrated "the 11 countries where children are best cared for are the 11 where women have equal power with men in controlling governmental and social practices." Barus claimed that this proved the "power of the ballot to aid women in the fulfillment of the special function of their sex—motherhood" and that nature had put "her stamp of approval on equal suffrage."<sup>44</sup>

Barus's ideas about motherhood and suffrage were common ones in the Rhode Island and national suffrage movement. Although some suffragists fought for the right to vote based on the idea of equality with men, a more common philosophy and strategy of suffragists was to argue that women were fundamentally different than men. These suffragists believed that women were naturally more moral, religious, and nurturing, and that these traits would make them voters who would oppose political corruption and support politicians and legislation to protect society, particularly women and children.<sup>45</sup> Sara L.G. Fittz declared that American society was "calling for mothering" and that "the enfranchising of women will be the salvation of the world."<sup>46</sup> Helen Dougherty, suffragist and Socialist claimed, "the natural gentleness and unselfishness of woman's nature will make her a more valuable voter in matters which affect the home, the child and the public health."<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Upham Yates testified before a Rhode Island House committee in support of a presidential suffrage bill. She said that at a previous assembly debate on

woman suffrage, a man "said that he hoped the measure would not pass because he was afraid that if given the ballot women would introduce corruption into Rhode Island politics." Yates countered that assumption, stating, "Open the doors of your prisons and see 100 men come out for every woman. Open the doors of our churches and see how many more women you will find there than men."<sup>48</sup>

Suffragists claimed that the vote would allow women to protect the family and home in American society. At a 1915 "Woman Suffrage Forum" held by RIWSA, Helen R. Parks argued that woman suffrage was needed "in the interest of pure food laws, including the great question of the milk supply under sanitary conditions, and as to quality." She also claimed that suffrage could help with issues including the "proper housing, removal of garbage, and many other instances of municipal house-keeping which affect the home." Parks ended her speech by declaring, "the only thing that will help to make the whole world better—the Ballot."<sup>49</sup> Mabel E. Orgelman argued that granting women suffrage would help them improve their homes in other ways. Women's public activity, she claimed had given them a "broader vision" and a "increased civic interest and civic intelligence." As a result, according to Orgelman, these women were "raising children who will constitute a more patriotic and more intelligent citizenship than that of today. The interests of the home, of the school and of the child are better safeguarded than ever before and the moral and spiritual forces of the community strengthened."<sup>50</sup>

Some of the Rhode Island suffragists who espoused maternalist ideas for suffrage, such as Dougherty and Orgelman, did so despite their own status as single woman without children. As in Annie H. Barus's quote that all women had their "potential motherhood" that made them instinctively want to "cherish and protect" children, many women believed that motherhood was not necessary for women to represent and exert maternal and nurturing values as reformers and voters—that women naturally had these traits even if they did not actually bear or raise children.<sup>51</sup>

Most suffragists who used this maternalist rhetoric in support of woman suffrage believed these concepts. The maternalist ideas, though, were also a useful strategy to counter the claims of anti-suffragists and fears of many American men and women that woman suffrage would hurt women's roles in the family. Ettie Dunbar was a Rhode





Anna H. Sims with her children, photograph from Captain W.G. Cassard, "Concerning a Naval Family [Family of President of the Naval War College William S. Sims]," *The Newport Recruit* (January 1919), 15.

Photo by Backrock Admiral Sims Has Every Inducement to Come Home. The Family on Kay Street

Island suffragist who had previously worked as a suffragist in Massachusetts under the name Ettie Lowell. She defended suffrage and women's domesticity, arguing that, "All suffragists claim that woman's sphere is in her home by nature, and therefore she knows best concerning the needs of the home," and that, "women will not be influenced away from the home by becoming interested in political life." Instead she claimed, "Government is housekeeping on a larger scale—and woman are the traditional housekeepers."<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Alice Stone Blackwell, a national suffrage leader, used Ettie Lowell as an example to discredit the anti-suffrage idea that women voting would hurt the family or turn women away from the home by noting that Lowell was an active suffragist and the mother of ten children.<sup>53</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the social reform and maternalist aspects of suffrage helped advance the movement in Rhode Island. In this period, the Rhode Island suffragists also employed new public tactics and improved and intensified older strategies of lobbying politicians. The 1910s was a period in which the Rhode Island suffragists dramatically increased the movement's public profile and influence, culminating in the passage of a 1917 law granting Rhode Island women the right to vote in presidential elections. The presidential suffrage bill was a major accomplishment for the Rhode Island suffragists. It was also a national milestone, as Rhode Island was the first East Coast state to grant women presidential or full suffrage. That the Rhode Island movement accomplished

this feat was not an accident; they were one of the pioneers of a presidential suffrage campaign. RIWSA members first introduced the legislation in 1892 and suffragists fought for it persistently for the next twenty-five years.

In 1912, RIWSA and the College Equal Suffrage League hired Louise Hall, a suffragist from Massachusetts, to serve as a professional field secretary in charge of organizing. Hall helped revitalize and modernize the Rhode Island suffrage movement, although she only worked there for several months. She organized and led the first open-air suffrage rally in Rhode Island in downtown Providence on April 11, 1912. *The Providence Journal* ran a photograph of Hall standing on a peanut box and giving a suffrage speech to a large crowd. The article described her as "dressed in a smart walking suit of brown, and holding a large yellow flag on which appeared the lettering, 'Votes for Women,'" and reported that she explained "the [suffrage] cause from diverse angles of arguments." Besides the speech, Hall and two other suffragists carried bags that read "Votes for Women," sold suffrage buttons and copies of *The Woman's Journal* suffrage newspaper, and passed around a large yellow sign advertising an upcoming local speech by NAWSA president, Anna Howard Shaw.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the open-air rallies, Hall also initiated daily luncheon meetings about woman suffrage for factory workers to try to attract more support for the movement from working-class men and women. She arranged for the organization to have a suffrage booth at the 1912 Pure Food Exposition in

Providence and the suffragists continued to operate a booth at the food fair annually for the rest of the decade. *The History of Woman Suffrage* praised the Rhode Island women's suffrage activism at the food fairs describing that, "thousands of new members were enrolled, tens of thousands of leaflets were distributed, and publicity work was done. The 'suffrage map' was in evidence, showing the many States that had been won, an irrefutable argument against the emanations of the anti-suffrage booth."<sup>55</sup>

The Woman Suffrage Party in Rhode Island initiated new public events and rallies in the state, canvassed voters, constructed a strong political lobbying infrastructure, established an annual suffrage bazaar at Christmas time to raise funds and awareness for the cause, and sold *The Woman's Journal* on the streets. Esther Abelson was in charge of selling subscriptions to *The Woman's Journal* for RIWSP and also represented RIWSP at the 1913 NAWSA national convention in Washington D.C. At the convention, Abelson's role as a "newsie" garnered her national attention, as a photograph of her selling copies of *The Woman's Journal* was published in newspapers across the country, including *The New York Times*.<sup>56</sup>

RIWSP led a high-profile public campaign for woman suffrage in 1914. NAWSA announced a national week of suffrage events in April and May in all fifty states, culminating with a proposed "Woman's Independence Day" on May 2. RIWSP leaders and members organized the Rhode



Esther Abelson, from "Women at the Suffrage Convention in Washington," photograph, *The New York Times*, December 14, 1913.



Louise Hall speaking at the first open-air rally in Rhode Island in 1912. Photograph from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 128.

The Rounding Up for the Woman Suffrage Party Banquet



"The Rounding Up for the Woman Suffrage Party Banquet," (1913), cartoon. Politicians featured are Providence Mayor Joseph Gainer, Governor Aram J. Pothier, George W. Parks, and Senator Addison P. Munroe. cartoon, from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 178.





"Woman's Journal Day" (most likely 1914). Ingeborg Kindstedt in the center with two unidentified women. Photograph, from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 151.

Island events in collaboration with RIWSA and WPU. The suffragists organized a varied series of events for the "Votes for Women" week, with each day having its own theme. They arranged with local stores to have window displays with suffrage merchandise and suffrage colors and for theatres to show suffrage films and plays, allow suffrage speakers, and to sell suffrage merchandise. Suffragists held open meetings throughout the state, sold copies of *The Woman's Journal* in the streets, threw a suffrage ball with four hundred attendees, and raised money with a rummage sale.

During the "Votes for Women" week, on "Church Day" the suffragists requested that clergymen speak in support of woman suffrage. In Woonsocket, for example, Reverend George F. Beecher of the First Baptist Church, gave a sermon in favor of woman suffrage. He stated that, "Woman has become a wage-earner. She toils in the factory and in the office and in the store. She has entered the professions and is rapidly proving herself to be the peer of man in the realm of public affairs." Echoing many of the suffragist claims, Beecher drew on maternalist themes claiming, "Our legislation of to-day deals largely with social questions such as pure food, sanitary housing, sweat shops, regulated hours of employment and the white slave trade [prostitution]. It is generally conceded that woman is more sensitive to the distinctions between right and wrong than man."<sup>57</sup>

The week wrapped up with a day-long series of events at Roger Williams Park in honor of "Woman's Independence Day," including children's activities, a tree planting in honor

of noted social reformer Jane Addams, entertainment, and speeches from national leaders including Stephen S. Wise, a prominent rabbi and social activist, and local suffragists including Mary E. Jackson, Sara L.G. Fittz, and Henrietta von Klenze. *The Woman's Journal* heralded Woman's Independence Day as "a red letter day in Rhode Island suffrage history."<sup>58</sup>

In the early twentieth century, in addition to these new public events, the Rhode Island suffragists developed sophisticated political lobbying. Ever since Jeannette S. French, a Pawtucket suffragist, had introduced the presidential suffrage bill for RIWSA in 1892, suffragists commonly testified before House and Senate hearings at the State House and communicated with politicians. At a 1911 Assembly hearing, Elizabeth Upham Yates pleaded with the Rhode Island legislators to pass presidential suffrage for women. She appealed to state pride, stating, "Many States have already extended the franchise to women. Shall cultured New England be behind the wild and woolly West?"<sup>59</sup>

In the early twentieth century, though, the suffragists intensified their political efforts in support of woman suffrage in general but particularly aimed at passing the presidential suffrage bill. In 1905, RIWSA created its own newspaper, *The Woman Citizen*, edited by Jeannette S. French. The newspaper carried articles about local, state, and national suffrage events and issues and ran from 1905-1913. When they produced their first issue, the RIWSA members placed a copy on the desk of every Rhode Island legislator. In 1914, members of the RIWSP and RISWA participated

in a lobbying effort at the Rhode Island State House that *The Providence Bulletin* described as "Woman suffragists stormed the State House...and made a verbal assault upon the members of the General Assembly."<sup>60</sup> The suffragists "buttonholed" members of the assembly, confronting them in the State House's corridors, staircases, and elsewhere to try to persuade them about woman suffrage.

Sara L.G. Fittz gave much of the credit for the political campaigns in the 1910s to the organizing skills of Agnes M. Jenks, who joined the Rhode Island movement in 1914 and served as the legislative committee chair and chair of RIWSA and RIESA. Prior to moving to Rhode Island, Jenks had been legislative chair for the New Hampshire Woman Suffrage Association. Fittz explained that Jenks "prepared women speakers, lobbyists, organizers, canvassers, chairmen of committees to command and understand the situation and harnessed every available opportunity that might have a remote bearing on our ultimate triumph."<sup>61</sup> For a three-year period from 1914 to 1917, according to Fittz, with "the exception of one stormy day, women with sound political sense, instructed in arguments for suffrage, have been present at [all] legislative sessions."<sup>62</sup>

Besides interacting with politicians, the suffragists exerted political pressure behind the scenes. They let Rhode Island legislators know that if they killed the presidential suffrage bill in committee and denied the Assembly as a whole from voting on it, that the legislators "should not be surprised if they find [RIWSP] which has been treated in this unstatesmanlike manner stumping the State against their re-election."<sup>63</sup> The suffragists conducted extensive research into several years of voting records to determine which legislators were their biggest opponents and obstacles. They ultimately narrowed a list to three legislators whom they decided to target for political defeat in 1914 and distributed circulars publicizing opponents of the presidential suffrage bill. One of these politicians was Republican Representative Albert P. Sumner. Jenks referred to him as "an arch enemy to progressive legislation of any sort and is commonly called 'slippery and incompetent.'"<sup>64</sup> Sumner was enraged at the suffragists' campaign against him and called them "pestilential." He declared that he had been subjected to "personal attack in 1914 by the women, which I believe was intended to blackmail me into voting for woman suffrage."<sup>65</sup>

Despite the suffragists' political lobbying, the presidential suffrage bill did not succeed in 1914 and in subsequent years, the suffragists ramped up their political tactics. During the

## THE WOMAN CITIZEN

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States. \* \* \*

"Civil Incapacitations tend to beget habits of hypocrisies and meanness."  
—Constitution of Rhode Island.

VOL. IX. RHODE ISLAND, FEBRUARY, 1913. NO. 2.



STATE NORMAL SCHOOL. "Hope" is the Motto of Rhode Island. In education an good laws is the hope of Rhode Island Women.

THE WOMAN CITIZEN. Published monthly. Eight numbers a year. Editor, Mrs. Jeannette S. French. Contributing Editor, Mrs. Lena Morris Reynolds. Office, 365 North Main Street, Pawtucket. Tel. Pawt. 515.

Notice. The office of The Woman Citizen, 365 North Main street, Pawtucket, will be open every Monday evening until further notice, to Suffragists or inquirers who may choose to call. A meeting of The Woman Citizens' Equal Suffrage League will be held in the parlor adjoining. After the business of the meeting, a discussion on Suffrage will be given, led by some member of the League, or some visitor from other Suffrage societies.

The Great Woman Suffrage Pageant. Washington, Feb. 16.—True to woman's artistic sense, the suffragists who are arranging the great Pageant-Procession here March 3rd are planning to make it a symphony of color. The anti-suffragists say

*The Woman Citizen* (Pawtucket, R.I.) IX, No. 2 (February 1913), front cover. RHI X17 4213. RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS.



Agnes Jenks, Bain News Service Publisher.  
Agnes Jenks [No Date Recorded on Caption Card]  
Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014687861>.



1916 election season, suffragists including Agnes M. Jenks, Elizabeth Upham Yates, Nettie E. Bauer, Sara L.G. Fittz, and Mabel E. Orgelman spoke and campaigned for suffrage at Republican and Democratic rallies. They succeeded in getting the state Democratic Party to add support for woman suffrage to its political platform.

Anna G. Smith succeeded Jenks as the RIESA legislative chair in 1916 and led political lobbying efforts for woman suffrage within the state and with the Rhode Island delegation in the United States Senate and House of Representatives. *The Providence Journal* described the efforts of Smith's RIESA legislative committee, noting that they met with every member of the assembly and provided legislators with weekly letters about national and international suffrage news. In addition, the article reports, the suffragists went "into the districts of recalcitrant members with petitions. They were careful to visit first important officials and citizens of their district." *The Journal* explained that "it afforded the women exceeding joy to see a legislator who had declared to high heaven that no man or woman in his district wanted woman suffrage compelled to present a petition signed by hundreds of his constituents."<sup>66</sup> After the Rhode Island state government passed the presidential suffrage bill in 1917, NAWSA leaders brought Anna G. Smith to Washington D.C. to give speeches on "How We Won Presidential Suffrage in Rhode Island"

and to assist in NAWSA's lobbying in the Senate and House of Representatives for the federal suffrage amendment. Mildred Glines, future chair of the Rhode Island NWP, was a member of Smith's legislative committee.

On April 17, 1917, twenty-five years after Rhode Island suffragists first introduced the cause of presidential suffrage, several hundred suffragists packed the State House for the vote on the bill by members of the House. The representatives engaged in a four-hour debate before voting to pass the law by a margin of 71-20, at which point the suffragists "burst into hand-clapping and words of joy, and Speaker Hammill was obliged to call for order."<sup>67</sup> The presidential suffrage legislation was groundbreaking in Rhode Island and the East Coast states. Newspapers across the country covered the event, with *The New York Evening Post* declaring that, "Thanks to 'Little Rhode,' woman suffrage crosses the Alleghanies and touches the Atlantic ocean" and that Rhode Island's action "has wide significance."<sup>68</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, NAWSA president, praised the victory and noted that "With Rhode Island we break the solid East and capture one of the strongholds of the antis." Alice Paul, NWP president, attended the Rhode Island governor's signing of the bill and said that the victory in Rhode Island "gives us the hope that the National Government will follow this lead and give full suffrage to all the women of the country."<sup>69</sup>



Suffragists and Rhode Island senators at the State House in 1914, photograph from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 181.



Rhode Island Governor Beeckman signing the presidential woman suffrage bill, April 18, 1917. Left to right: Unidentified woman (most likely Ethel W. Parks), Helen R. Parks, Mabel E. Orgelman, Senator Henry B. Kane, Agnes M. Jenks, Governor R. Livingston Beeckman, Elizabeth Upham Yates, Anna G. Smith, Nettie E. Bauer, Representative Richard W. Jennings, Mildred Glines. Photograph. RHI X36143a. RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS.

Rhode Island suffragists were jubilant about achieving presidential suffrage. In an interview with *The Providence Journal*, Sara M. Algeo asked, "Do you realize that this has come after 25 years of effort and we are rejoiced?" Mary R. Ballou was an elderly suffragist who had worked in the Rhode Island movement for almost fifty years. She stated that, "It marks the beginning of the end of what has been for me a long and often hopeless appearing fight...I hardly expected to live long enough to see old hide-bound Rhode Island take its place at the head of the procession of progress in the East." She expressed hope that the presidential suffrage victory would pave the way for complete suffrage rights for women in the near future.<sup>70</sup> In explaining the presidential suffrage achievement, Sara L.G. Fittz wanted to ensure that suffragists got proper credit for their activism. She explained, "Our victory was no accident, no intervention of Divine Providence, no miracle, no taking advantage of unsettled war conditions." Instead, she argued, presidential suffrage was achieved through "the women leaders' consecration, unselfishness, intelligence, wit, and great sacrifice of time, money and creature comforts."<sup>71</sup> The effective and persistent political lobbying that suffragists engaged in in the 1910s was critical in getting the bill out of committee and getting a wide margin of legislators to vote "yes."

As we commemorate historic suffrage accomplishments such as Rhode Island's 1917 presidential suffrage bill and the Nineteenth Amendment, it is also important to recognize and examine the less flattering and more offensive aspects of the movement. In recent years, historians have revealed the complicated history of the woman suffrage movement. The ideas and actions of suffrage leaders, members, and organizations were often offensive and seemingly contradictory to the stated goal of expanding democracy and rights in America.<sup>72</sup> The white-dominated suffrage organizations reflected and reinforced objectionable ideas about race, class, and ethnicity in American society. Examples of the "dark side" of the suffrage movement are evident in the Rhode Island history.

The strongest indictment of the national suffrage movement and organizations such as NAWSA and the National Woman's Party has centered on the role of racism and African-American women. Some white suffragist leaders made explicit appeals in the South that giving the vote only to white women would shore up white supremacy by providing additional white voters to counter Black voters. Others strategically were willing to sacrifice or downplay the needs of Black women to appeal to white politicians



and citizens. Still others believed that suffrage was a single-issue movement and racial discrimination was an unrelated and separate issue. Nationally and in the states, suffrage organizations such as NAWSA and the National Woman's Party routinely discriminated against Black women.

In the dominant suffrage organization in Rhode Island, RIWSA (later RIESA), race was a complicated issue. The organization did not have any Black members. The RIWSA suffragists regularly argued that giving women the right to vote would allow them to work to improve various social problems, such as poverty, child labor, alcoholism; however, they rarely expressed concern about or organized against the problems of racial discrimination and inequity in Rhode Island. An notable exception took place at the annual RIWSA meeting in October 1900, when its committee on resolutions proposed several resolutions on racial and ethnic equality. One resolution condemned the practice of lynching—racially-motivated extralegal killings. Other resolutions condemned war as evil and criticized the United States for imperialist

policies in the Philippine Islands. The committee connected the issue of woman suffrage to racial equality in a resolution that stated, "We hope that the agitation of Anti-Imperialism will lead many to see that it is as wrong black or white as it is to disfranchise a man be he Fillippino [*sic*], Cuban, or Mexican and that the ignoring of the humanity of women by disfranchising them has had a tendency to lower our idea of justice in relation to men of other races." This was a powerful statement arguing that discrimination against women contributed to discrimination against men from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The RIWSA members accepted the resolutions but this attention to issues of racial and ethnic equality was anomalous for the organization at the turn of the century.<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned previously, the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Party was a rare interracial organization that allowed Black women to participate and its white founder, Sara M. Algeo, maintained friendships with Black suffragists and spoke about woman suffrage at the Rhode Island Union of Colored Women's Clubs. On occasion, individual white suffragists, such as Althea L. Hall from Pawtucket, spoke out in favor of racial equality. In a letter to the editor of *The Evening Times*, Hall wrote in favor of a proposed civil rights bill in the Rhode Island Assembly. She explained that more than fifty years after the end of slavery, "what we call civil rights are still, in a measure, denied the colored race." The proposed bill would provide fair and equal treatment in public to all races in Rhode Island. Hall asked, "Does that not seem fair and reasonable to any right-minded person?"<sup>74</sup> This kind of attention and support about civil rights by white suffragists in Rhode Island, though, was unusual in this period.

Other white suffragists in Rhode Island expressed frustration at the kinds of American men who had voting rights when white women did not. Their words echoed those of earlier suffrage leaders, most notably Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who believed that white women were treated more poorly than "inferior" groups of men. In the "Declaration of Sentiments," the statement of purpose from the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, Stanton declared that white women were denied rights "given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners."<sup>75</sup> Stanton and other suffragists' resentment grew stronger following the creation of the Fifteenth Amendment that granted African-American men the right to vote but

not white or Black women. In 1869, Stanton railed against the proposed amendment, stating indignantly, "Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who cannot read the Declaration of Independence or Webster's spelling book, making laws for [educated white women]."<sup>76</sup> Voting rights for all men, including African-American and immigrant men, according to Stanton, created "an antagonism everywhere between educated refined women and the lower orders of men, especially at the South where the slaves of yesterday are the lawmakers of to-day."<sup>77</sup>

Elizabeth Upham Yates, president of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association, attempted to appeal to anti-immigrant sentiment in Rhode Island when she testified at a 1910 committee hearing at the State House in favor of the presidential suffrage bill. She told the committee, "one of the great problems of to-day is the foreign vote. But we would call your attention to the fact that there are 32,000,000 American women here and only 10,000,000 foreign-born men and women. The way to keep the beam balanced is to give the vote to the American women."<sup>78</sup> Yates' nativist fearmongering about immigrant votes is similar to the argument that some white suffragists made about woman suffrage and white supremacy in the South—that white women's votes could help counter and dilute any political power by Black men. Yates also made the argument about native-born women checking the power of foreign-born male voters at another presidential suffrage hearing at the Rhode Island State House in 1915.<sup>79</sup>

In speeches and essays, Sara L.G. Fittz used offensive language to disparage male voters from racial and ethnic minorities. At an open-air suffrage rally in 1914, Fittz declared,

The American woman for over 60 years has asked for a voice in their own government. During that time they have seen the ballot thrust, unasked, in the hand of the male negro, given to the Indian without even consulting him, and now Congress has declared the brown men of the Philippines are capable of self-government. And all the time our American women taxpayers, social workers and others, remain in the class of lunatics, idiots and minors.<sup>80</sup>

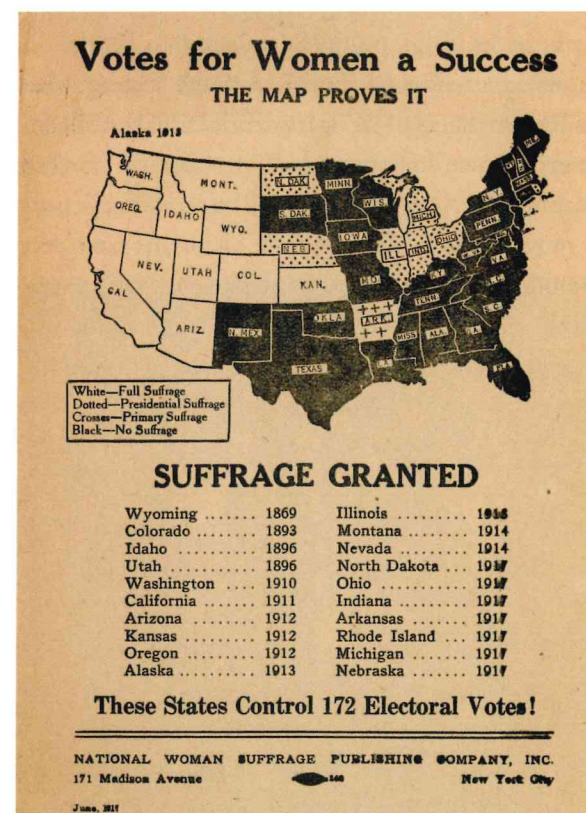
Fittz continued this theme in a 1916 letter to the editor in *The Providence Journal*. In the lead-up to the United States entering World War I, politicians were asking American women to support the proposed war effort. Fittz called this



Elizabeth Upham Yates. Photograph from Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 101.



Sara L. G. Fittz from "How Rhode Island Women Are Sharing in the Campaign," photograph, *The Providence Sunday Journal*, October 3, 1920. COURTESY OF THE JOHN HAY LIBRARY, BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, R.I.



A 1917 NAWSA suffrage flyer after Rhode Island passed presidential suffrage. From NAWSA flyers and handbills from the Adele Goodman Clark Papers, M 9, Special Collections and Archives, Virginia Commonwealth University, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vculibraries/24941542555>.



“a mockery, for how can women prepare to defend what they have not—the political liberty accorded to all naturalized citizens, drunkards, and pardoned criminals?” She echoed Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s complaints about the Fifteenth Amendment and the decision to grant Black men the right to vote, claiming,

In order to work for the freedom of the slave, women laid aside their own fond hopes of freedom. Their reward was to see the black men, who could not spell or read boosted over the heads of the noblest American women. They saw themselves degraded and humiliated under the feet of their former slaves—now, their political masters.<sup>81</sup>

Cora Mitchel, a suffragist from Portsmouth, Rhode Island and founder of the Newport County Woman Suffrage League, spoke much more positively about African Americans than Sara Fittz did. However, her positive comments reflected Southern proslavery and “Lost Cause” ideology. In our research, Mitchel is the only Rhode Island suffragist whose family owned enslaved people. Her ancestors had roots in Portsmouth dating back to 1638; in her childhood, her family moved to Apalachicola, Florida where her father worked as a cotton merchant and owned enslaved people. In 1916, Cora Mitchel published an account of her life in the South during the Civil War, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*. In it she downplayed the family’s involvement with slavery, claiming that her father did not believe in slavery and “owned only three [slaves], and they had come to him imploring him to buy them, as otherwise they would be sold in the open market.” Mitchel claimed that they were “faithful, valuable servants” and treated like “members of our family.”<sup>82</sup> Ideas about benevolent slaveowners and loyal slaves were common among whites in the North and South and helped support racial inequality in the United States at the turn of the century.

Suffragists were also deeply involved in Americanization activities in Rhode Island during and after World War I. During the war, xenophobic concerns about immigrants in the United States intensified. Americanization involved various efforts to integrate foreign-born residents into American society by teaching them ideas and practices of language, religion, work, and family to replace their native ones, at times against their will. The decision to participate in the Americanization movement was an obvious one for many Rhode Island suffragists. Many of them already had deep roots

in temperance activism, working girls’ clubs, and settlement houses, all of which worked to assimilate immigrants into American society at the turn of the century.

Agnes M. Bacon, a suffragist and teacher from Central Falls, Rhode Island was a leader of Americanization activities in Rhode Island. In 1919, Bacon and a group of suffragists served on the Rhode Island Woman’s Americanization Committee, a state branch of the NAWSA national committee on Americanization. Some suffragists held nativist ideas about immigrants being a threat to American society. However, they also feared that concerns about foreigners could undermine the suffrage effort and sought to reassure native-born Americans that foreign-born women could be trusted as voters if woman suffrage passed. The Rhode Island Americanization committee lobbied for a bill that would make English education mandatory for foreign-born residents and appoint a state director of Americanization.

The General Assembly passed the bill in 1919 and Governor R. Livingston Beeckman appointed Bacon to be the first State Director of Americanization. The law instituted new Americanization efforts in school and in the public and mandated that all foreign-born residents up to age twenty-one take English language courses. Although the supporters



Agnes M. Bacon, from “Mrs. Agnes M. Bacon New State Director of Americanization,” photograph, *The Providence Journal*, August 1, 1919. COURTESY OF THE JOHN HAY LIBRARY, BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, R.I.

of the legislation were suspicious of immigrants, Bacon was the child of Irish immigrants and had taught foreign-born children for many years as a teacher in Central Falls. She was more sympathetic to immigrants than many Americanization proponents, and expressed the hope that Americanization teachers would not demonstrate “race prejudices and religious antagonism” towards their foreign students. Bacon argued that Americanization courses were especially necessary for foreign-born women in order for them to understand American ideals of citizenship and government and to be prepared to vote when woman suffrage passed. Foreign-born women, she claimed, assimilated at slower rates than their children and husbands because they were sheltered in the home and less active in American society. As a result, Bacon claimed that foreign women were “far from being aids in Americanizing their families, [and instead] they often became reactionary forces.” She also expressed a desire that future legislation would force immigrant women to pass a citizenship test before gaining full citizenship rights, such as voting.<sup>83</sup>

Sara M. Algeo served as chair of the Rhode Island Woman’s Americanization Committee and made the argument that Americanization was especially important to the nation because of World War I. She argued that Americanization would advance national identity and patriotism during wartime and that “a homogeneous, coherent, unified citizenship is a greater security than a heterogeneous mass of unrelated non-English-speaking groups.” The Rhode Island population, at the time, she noted, was roughly one-third foreign born. She continued that woman suffrage and Americanization could work in tandem as an added incentive for “loyalty and patriotism on the part of our foreign-born population.”<sup>84</sup> Algeo and RIWSP created a pamphlet, *Suggestions to the Women Voters of Rhode Island*, to advance the cause of Americanization and explain to foreign-born women how to qualify for the right to vote, that they distributed widely across the state.

Much like Americanization, eugenics also gained new prominence and popularity in American society in the late 1910s. Eugenics is a now discredited racial science whose proponents claimed that society could be improved by studying and intervening with genetics of individuals and groups. One strain of eugenics proposed the limiting of “bad” reproduction by “lesser” groups, such as immigrants, African Americans, and the mentally, physically or morally impaired, in order to improve the American gene pool and

society. Rhode Island suffragist, Enid M. Pierce, who was also a supporter of temperance and Americanization, advocated for eugenics. In 1918, Pierce gave an hour-long speech on “cripples” at a People’s Forum meeting in which she drew on eugenic principles to explain the role of heredity in causing physical, moral, and mental disabilities. She claimed that “mental cripples, the feeble-minded, and the insane are on an increase,” and called for legislation to prevent the reproduction of individuals with these “flaws.”<sup>85</sup> On a related eugenic note, Pierce also supported protective legislation to restrict the hours and conditions under which women could work. She claimed that this legislation was needed to protect women’s reproductive capacity, stating “women must have shorter factory hours in order not to be made unfit for motherhood.”<sup>86</sup> Ingeborg Kindstedt, as chairman of the Rhode Island CU was also an advocate of eugenics and proposed that the subject, and its theories about marriage and parenting, should be taught in the schools.<sup>87</sup>

The flaws and shortcomings of the Rhode Island suffragists existed alongside their many accomplishments and admirable traits. Both sides of the movement existed in the state and nationally, and recognizing and examining this complicated history helps provide us a fuller understanding of the suffrage movement and American society.

On January 7, 1920, over fifty years of activism by Rhode Island women culminated in an event where Governor R. Livingston Beeckman signed the state ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment surrounded by suffragists. Four months later, on May 17, the members of the Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association met to conclude the organization’s business. Most of them continued their political and social activism in Rhode Island as part of the new League of Women Voters organization. Sara M. Algeo documented the final RIESA event. The group’s organizational records, dating from its beginning as the Rhode Island Woman’s Suffrage Association in 1868, were contained in a metal filing box. On this last day, she wrote, “A procession of women marched through the streets of Providence carrying the records of the organization for fifty years, which were deposited in the archives of the State House with impressive ceremony.”<sup>88</sup> Those records and their original filing box are currently housed in the Rhode Island State Archives. The suffragists kept careful documentation of their activism, believed they were doing important work, and were determined to preserve it



in the historical record. The *Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States* honors this commitment to documenting the history of woman suffrage. By detailing and examining the lives of individual women in the movement, the project helps reveal the broad scope of their backgrounds, ideas, actions, prejudices, and impact. These ordinary women transformed the suffrage effort in Rhode Island into an effective mass movement at the turn of the century that achieved presidential suffrage in 1917 and full suffrage in 1920. For further information on the women mentioned in this article, and additional Rhode Island suffragists, please explore the entries in the *Online Biographical Dictionary* at <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/VOTESforWOMEN>.



"Suffrage Workers Visit Governor Beeckman at State House to Urge Early Ratification of National Enfranchisement," photograph, *The Providence Journal*, July 15, 1919. COURTESY OF THE JOHN HAY LIBRARY, BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, R.I.

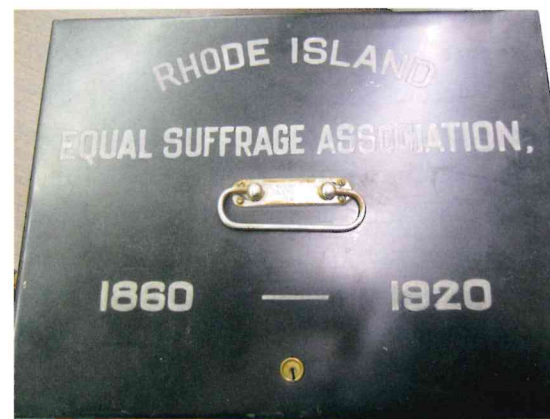
R. I. Equal Suffrage Association members deliver the box of their records to the state archives. Despite poor image quality in this reproduction, the historic nature of the occasion is clear. *The Providence Journal*, May 18, 1920.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, AT FIRST CONVENTION, ATTEND "HONORABLE DEMISE" OF SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION

Picture Shows Organization, Headed by Miss Mary B. Anthony, Mrs. Barton P. Jencks, Mrs. Carl Barus and Mrs. George Gladding, Assembled on State House Steps with Steel Box Containing All Records of Old Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association.—Box Was Deposited in Care of State Librarian Brigham and Contents Will Form Part of Rhode Island's Political History

The original filing box of the RIESA records, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, R.I. PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR.



## Endnotes

- 1 Sara M. Algeo, *The Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 13.
- 2 Black women in the South quickly lost this newfound right as Southern governments and white citizens used legislation, trickery, and violence to prop up white supremacy and deny Black women the vote in a similar manner as Black men had been since the late nineteenth century.
- 3 The database is part of Dublin and Sklar's website, "Women and Social Movements in the U.S., 1600-2000," a resource of primary and secondary sources on the history of women's activism in the United States (<https://search.alexanderstreet.com/wass>).
- 4 Approximately 80% of the Rhode Island biographies are currently available on the database link listed above and the remaining ones should be available by the beginning of 2021. To search for local suffragists, type "Rhode Island" in the search box on the project's home page or search by name if you know the suffragist's name.
- 5 Note: throughout the essay I have chosen to use the first name of married suffragists instead of the names of their husbands. Some were more commonly referred by their husbands' names, though, in the historical documents.
- 6 Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 100.
- 7 Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 161-162.
- 8 "Woman Suffrage Clubs Affiliate," *The Providence Daily Journal*, June 11, 1915.
- 9 "Form Women's Political Union," *The Providence Journal*, November 20, 1913.
- 10 "Criticizes House Attitude on Woman Suffrage Bill," *The Providence Journal*, March 26, 1915.
- 11 "Suffragist Plan Outing at Idlewild Cottage," *The Providence Journal*, June 24, 1914.
- 12 Russell DeSimone, "Rhode Island's Two Unheralded Suffragists," *Small State Big History: The Online Review of Rhode Island History*, <http://smallstatebighistory.com/rhode-islands-two-unheralded-suffragists/>.
- 13 "Woman Suffrage Convention Here," *The Providence Daily Journal*, May 28, 1915.
- 14 Russell DeSimone, "Rhode Island's Two Unheralded Suffragists."
- 15 See Sara Hunter Graham, *Women Suffrage and the New Democracy* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1996); Katherine H. Adams and Michael L. Keene, *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
- 16 "Federal Suffrage Work is Planned," *The Providence Journal*, April 21, 1917; "Suffragists Vote Not to Affiliate with Nationals," *The Providence Journal*, May 3, 1917.
- 17 Inez Haynes Irwin, *The Story of the Woman's Party* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), 342-43.
- 18 "W.C.T.U. Wants Special Session," *The Providence Journal*, July 19, 1919.
- 19 "State House Brevities," *The Providence Daily Journal*, January 8, 1920.
- 20 Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2020); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
- 21 "With the Club Women," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, August 26, 1906.
- 22 Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 164.
- 23 By the 1930s, Higgins became disillusioned with the Republican Party and transferred her allegiance to the Democratic Party. Higgins strongly supported the 1932 Democratic candidate for President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and changed the name of her political organization to the Julia Ward Howe Democratic Women's Club. For her support, Higgins had the opportunity to welcome President Roosevelt to Rhode Island when he visited the state in 1936. See Norma Lasalle Daoust, "Building the Democratic Party: Black Voting in Providence in the 1930s," *Rhode Island History* 44 (August 1985): 81-88.
- 24 M. E. Jackson, "The Self-Supporting Woman and the Ballot," *The Crisis* 10 (August 1915): 187-188.
- 25 Mary E. Jackson, "Colored Girls in the Second Line of Defense," *The Association Monthly* 7 (October 1918): 364.
- 26 Sara M. Algeo, "Rhode Island Ratification Day," *The Woman Citizen* 4 (January 24, 1920): 27: 763.
- 27 Anna North, "The 19th Amendment Didn't Give Women the Right to Vote," *Vox*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/8/18/21358913/19th-amendment-ratified-anniversary-women-suffrage-vote>.



- <sup>28</sup> Biographies for Roberta J. Dunbar, written by Michelle Valletta and Elisa Miller, Bertha G. Higgins by Elisa Miller, and Mary E. Jackson by Kaylah VanWasshnova are available in the *Online Biographical Dictionary* in the Black suffragist section at <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/VOTESforWOMEN/bwsintro>.
- <sup>29</sup> "Suffragists Plan Big Meeting," *The Providence Daily Journal*, April 19, 1913.
- <sup>30</sup> Sara M. Algeo, "Rhode Island Women Alert," *The Woman's Journal* 44 (November 1, 1913):1.
- <sup>31</sup> Sara L.G. Fittz, "Woman Suffrage in Ireland As a Lesson to This Country," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, July 25, 1915.
- <sup>32</sup> Sara M. Algeo, "Rhode Island Women Alert," 1.
- <sup>33</sup> See Jean Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman: The Woman's Movement in America, 1875-1930* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003).
- <sup>34</sup> Kindberg and Kindstedt lived together for many years.
- <sup>35</sup> Bolles also worked as a clairvoyant before moving to New Mexico where she was heralded as one of the oldest female postmasters in the United States in her mid-seventies.
- <sup>36</sup> Record of Meetings—September 10, 1908 - February 11, 1915, Folder 21, Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association Records, 1868-1930, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, R.I.
- <sup>37</sup> "Young Women's C.T.U.," *The Providence Journal*, November 7, 1896.
- <sup>38</sup> Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 111.
- <sup>39</sup> Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 251.
- <sup>40</sup> "Pawtuxet Valley: Liquor Traffic and Social Reforms," *The Providence Journal*, April 15, 1912.
- <sup>41</sup> Quoted in Paul D. Sanders, ed., *Lyrics and Borrowed Tunes of the American Temperance Movement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 91-92.
- <sup>42</sup> "Miss Dougherty, Candidate for Secretary of State, Asks 'Why Not?'" *The Providence Journal*, November 3, 1912.
- <sup>43</sup> "Says Tots Work at Home," *The Providence Journal*, December 16, 1912; "Rhode Island Socialists Observe Woman's Day," *The Providence Daily Journal*, March 1, 1915.
- <sup>44</sup> Mrs. Carl Barus, "Beneficial," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, January 15, 1912.
- <sup>45</sup> Historians refer to this concept about politics, social reform, and women's nature as maternalism. See Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Marian van der Klein et al., eds., *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare, and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
- <sup>46</sup> "Women Democrats Have Hotel Rally," *The Providence Journal*, October 16, 1919.
- <sup>47</sup> "Will Spread Socialism among the Working Girls," *The Berkshire Eagle* (Pittsfield, Mass.), February 20, 1912.
- <sup>48</sup> "Woman Suffragists Plead Their Cause," *The Providence Journal*, April 5, 1911.
- <sup>49</sup> Record of Meetings—September 10, 1908 - February 11, 1915, Folder 21, Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association Records, 1868-1930, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, R. I.
- <sup>50</sup> Hale, Margaret; Merrill, Elizabeth Goodard; Laughlin, Gail; Powell, Rev. Hannah Jewett; and Burnham; Mabel E. Orgelman, Anna E., "The Letter Box Gail Laughlin Writes on Suffrage Vote" (2018). *League of Women Voters* (69.129). 66. Maine State Museum, Digital Maine. <https://digitalmaine.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1065&context=lwvme>
- <sup>51</sup> Mrs. Carl Barus, "Beneficial," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, January 15, 1912.
- <sup>52</sup> "For Better Homes," *The Boston Globe*, September 12, 1909.
- <sup>53</sup> Alice Stone Blackwell, "Fact and Comment," *The Woman Citizen* (September 14, 1918) 3: 312.
- <sup>54</sup> "Women Urge Vote in Open-Air Talk," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, April 14, 1912.
- <sup>55</sup> Ida Husted Harper, ed., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 6: 1900-1920 (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Company, 1922), 568.
- <sup>56</sup> "Women at the Suffrage Convention in Washington," *The New York Times*, December 14, 1913.
- <sup>57</sup> "Preachers Discuss Feminine Suffrage," *The Providence Journal*, April 27, 1914.
- <sup>58</sup> "Kansas Woman Chosen Judge," *The Woman's Journal* 45 (May 9, 1914):150.

- <sup>59</sup> "Woman Suffragists Plead Their Cause," *The Providence Journal*, April 5, 1911.
- <sup>60</sup> Quoted in "Suffragists at State House," *The Bristol Phoenix* (Bristol, R.I.), February 13, 1914.
- <sup>61</sup> Sara Fittz, "How Rhode Island Won," *The Woman's Journal* 48 (April 28, 1917):97.
- <sup>62</sup> Sara L.G. Fittz, "'How We Won Suffrage:' 'Inside Play' of Rhode Island's Long Campaign Described by One of Its Leaders," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, April 29, 1917.
- <sup>63</sup> Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 180.
- <sup>64</sup> Quoted in Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer*, 210.
- <sup>65</sup> Woman Suffrage Passes R.I. House," *The Providence Journal*, April 18, 1917. Critics of Sumner accused him of being against woman suffrage because he was beholden to the Narragansett Brewing Company and opposed to temperance legislation.
- <sup>66</sup> "A Half Century with Rhode Island Suffragists," *The Providence Journal*, April 20, 1917.
- <sup>67</sup> "Rhode Island Women Given Right to Vote for President in 1920," *The Providence Journal*, April 18, 1917.
- <sup>68</sup> "The Suffrage Triumph: Rhode Island's Action Has Wide Significance (from the *New York Evening Post*)," *The Providence Journal*, April 21, 1917.
- <sup>69</sup> "R.I. Suffrage Vote Gratifies Leaders," *The Providence Journal*, April 19, 1917.
- <sup>70</sup> "Governor Beeckman, Prominent Woman Suffrage Workers and General Assembly Leaders Laud Passage of Bill by Rhode Island Legislature," *The Providence Journal*, April 18, 1917.
- <sup>71</sup> Sara Fittz, "How Rhode Island Won," *The Woman's Journal* 48 (April 28, 1917): 98.
- <sup>72</sup> See for example, Louise Michel Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Faye E. Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Laura E. Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed: Gender, Race, and Voting Rights in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2020); Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).
- <sup>73</sup> Record of Meetings—May 17, 1899 - February 20, 1908, Folder 20, Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association Records, 1868-1930, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence, R.I.
- <sup>74</sup> Althea L. Hall, "Civil Rights for Colored Citizens," *The Evening Times* (Pawtucket, R.I.), April 12, 1920.
- <sup>75</sup> Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony, Volume I: In the School of Antislavery 1840-1866* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 79.
- <sup>76</sup> Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony, Volume II: Against an Aristocracy of Sex* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 196.
- <sup>77</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois and Richard Candida Smith, eds., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Feminist as Thinker: A Reader in Documents and Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 202.
- <sup>78</sup> "Brayton Eulogized at Suffrage Hearing," *The Providence Journal*, March 3, 1910.
- <sup>79</sup> "Capitol Thronged; Suffrage Debated," *The Providence Journal*, March 10, 1915.
- <sup>80</sup> "Suffragist Hits Eaton and Sumner," *The Providence Daily Journal*, October 27, 1914.
- <sup>81</sup> Sara L.G. Fittz, "Should Women Attend 'Preparedness' Meetings," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, January 23, 1916.
- <sup>82</sup> Cora Mitchel, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Providence: Snow & Farnham Co., 1916), 4.
- <sup>83</sup> "Rhode Island Woman Appointed to Unusual Position," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, September 14, 1919.
- <sup>84</sup> Sara M. Algeo, "Aiding to Enfranchise Foreign-Born Women," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, March 17, 1918.
- <sup>85</sup> "'Cripples' Subject of Talk Given at People's Forum," *The Providence Journal*, September 16, 1918.
- <sup>86</sup> "Mothers' Pension Law Is Advocated," *The Providence Journal*, February 26, 1917.
- <sup>87</sup> "Change in System Urged," *The Providence Journal*, February 20, 1917.
- <sup>88</sup> Sara M. Algeo, *Story of a Sub-Pioneer* (Providence, R.I.: Snow & Farnham Co., 1925), 259.