

Josephine Anderson Pearson: Racism, Class and Gender
in the Southern Antisuffrage Movement

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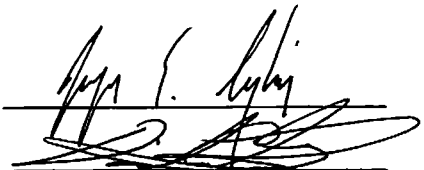
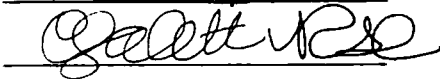
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Honors in History:

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Josephine Anderson Pearson



Josephine Anderson Pearson. Tennessee State Library and Archives. Courtesy of the Tennessee Historical Society.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Racism, Elitism, and Woman Solidarity.....	3
Chapter 1: Pearson's Horizons and Boundaries.....	18
Chapter 2: The War of The Roses: Pearson's Place in the Fight To Determine Women's Political Participation.....	29
Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	53

Introduction: Racism, Elitism, and Woman Solidarity

"Possibly, [my memoirs] may be for some historian to excavate for dissertations in the making!"¹ What kind of woman felt that her life was so important that a historian would write about her? Josephine Anderson Pearson (1868-1944) appears to come from humble beginnings, born to a middle-class family in Gallatin, Tennessee. But she became president of the Tennessee Antisuffrage League, and Tennessee, as the last state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, held a central role in the history of woman suffrage. Pearson is, therefore, important because she is a window through which the South can be viewed from the 1910s to the 1920s, when white elite southerners attempted to manipulate race, class, and gender in the woman² suffrage movement. The suffrage movement held a critical position, because it transpired in a period of change in the South. The South had been economically devastated by the Civil War and the following Republican reconstruction. Therefore, white elite southerners wanted progress. Elite white men and women who were southern

¹"My Story," Josephine Anderson Pearson Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, 227; also found in Josephine Pearson, "My Story." Votes for Women ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (Knoxville: Tennessee, 1995) 224-242.

²Frequently, people used the singular term woman, which "denoted unity of the female sex," to describe woman's rights and woman suffrage during this time (1900-1920); later the term became plural, and the act of seeking women's rights became feminism. See, Nancy F. Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 3-4.

progressives, or reformers,³ wanted economic change and social stability. They also desired a less democratic system of politics in which the poor, African-American, and uneducated could be kept out of politics in order to secure their own control over government.

Pearson was a well educated southern progressive, who moved among the political elite in Tennessee and worked for women's opportunities. She was also elitist, racist and fought against votes for women. Pearson rejected the vote because she believed that women should influence government through a qualified woman solidarity, one in which elite, white, and educated women worked together on issues that affected them by indirect influence or pressure groups outside of politics. This group of elite women could work together because they had common class and racial "interests" expressed in terms of morality, education, social work and religion. Pearson's definition of "woman" demanded qualification because she felt that only elite, white, and educated women deserved opportunities and could properly influence government; all "other" women were unfit. In order to keep women out of corrupted politics and make them a strong influence, Pearson believed that women's place in government should be a "separate but equal" position outside of politics. Pearson's significance is two fold. First, she is historically

³A southern progressive was a white middle-class southerner who wanted to enact economic growth and social stability in the South through reforms. Part of this reform included securing their class's control on government and society.

significant, because she reveals characteristics of southern antisuffrage women, or "antis," such as their role as southern progressives, their work for women's opportunities, and the conservative values that they placed upon women's role in the public sphere. Second, her significance is far reaching, because by advocating woman solidarity she elicits unsolved questions of women's political participation.

Suffragists were also southern progressives, but they pushed women's role farther; they wanted equality with men on an individual basis. Suffragists wanted women to influence the government directly through their individual votes, because they had become frustrated with the amount of time it took to get results from women's volunteer organizations and felt that an equal say in government was the most effective way that women could influence politics. Suffragists realized the limitations of the antisuffragists' "separate but equal" philosophy and wanted to be considered the equals of men with the same political voice. Many suffragists were also racist in their actions toward African-Americans, and those who felt sympathy towards African-Americans kept it private, because of the opposition that it would have created against the suffrage movement. Their sympathy may have been a product of elitism. Since the right to vote cut across both race and class lines suffragists hoped because of their sympathy that when "other" women got the vote they would vote in line with the suffragists'. Pearson was not alone in her elitism. Even suffragists only worked for changes for elite

white women like themselves.

Even though both "antis" and suffragists, as progressives, sought to keep their class in control of government, vicious attacks by antisuffragists, made suffragists unwilling to openly sympathize with African-Americans. Therefore, even though African-American men had gained the constitutional right to vote before any American women, most southern African-Americans were not allowed to vote until the 1960s because of poll taxes, literacy tests, and other discriminatory procedures. Southern progressives wanted social stability, but their contemporary definition of who deserved suffrage was ironic: it did not allow change in the most archaic and oppressive institution of the southern patriarchal society, racism.

Antisuffragists advocated woman solidarity and limiting the rights of the lower-class thus begging the question: Can a woman solidarity exist that cuts across race and class lines? Pearson said "no," but, she believed that a qualified woman solidarity could exist and would be very powerful. Suffragists, on the other hand, sought to give all women rights in order to influence government as individuals. The difference in philosophy of women's political participation reveals an age-old debate in the history of feminism: whether women should fight for their rights as individuals or as a group. As Nancy Cott has explained, this debate is inherent in all women's political actions, because pure individualism negates feminism and the basis for women's

collective action as well as self understanding.⁴

Antisuffragists and Suffragists both used mixed tactics that played both upon women's solidarity and on their individuality, because they both recognized the inherent tension.

Pearson, though an antisuffrage leader, speaks to the present because she puts her finger on a problem that women have not solved. Even through Pearson's "solidarity" is problematic, because it was extremely limited and placed women in a hypothetical separate sphere, she reminds women of the strength of woman solidarity. A "separate but equal" existence is in fact inherently unequal because women need equal rights to begin the battle in breaking down discrimination. Therefore, as women strive to break down discrimination they need to operate as individuals and equals with men, but not forget the strength of woman solidarity. Women have made progress in breaking through class and race lines, but the connection must be pushed farther. Of course, a universal woman solidarity is unattainable, but solidarity among a diverse group of women can succeed and be very powerful.

Studying Pearson reveals both the dynamics of the progressive South and the specific characteristics of southern antisuffragists. She reveals the ideas of the progressive South through antisuffragists' work for economic development, and the limits they placed on opportunities and the electorate. The characteristics of antisuffragists include their desire for a

⁴Cott, 19-20.

limited alteration of gender roles, their interest in reforms, their belief in the strength of woman solidarity, and their elitist views towards African-Americans and poor whites.

In order to understand southern suffragists and antisuffragists, it is important to understand the development of woman's role in the "Old South." The idealized "Old South's" patriarchal society revolved around elite white men who were expected to protect all weaker beings, including women, African-Americans and poor whites. In this society, race, class and gender framed the dimensions of power and inequality. In order to keep these groups from working together and gaining power, elite white men pitted them against one another. White elite southern women were expected to conform to the image of the southern lady, who was supposed to be gracious, sexually pure, subservient to men and religious. The image empowered elite white women because it allowed them to govern slaves and the poor, but it also disempowered them, because they were forced to remain subservient in all things to white men. Women were both the oppressor and the oppressed. Both women and African-Americans held subordinate roles which reinforced each other in the "Old South," because if either questioned their social status they threatened the power of white males.⁵ This was one of the reasons that the suffrage movement was slow to develop in the

⁵Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 1-21.

South.

In order to maintain power, white males prevented white women and African-American men from integrating as a method of social control. They made southern white women the dividing line between the races. A white woman was expected to be sexually pure, and white males protected her from the African-American male suspected of seeking to defile her. An African-American male sexually assaulting a white woman symbolized the destruction of the well-developed "southern racial state," because in doing so he crossed the line and destroyed white males' system of social control.⁶ The following quotation from David Chalmers's Hooded Americanism expresses the racial argument of a white southern male:

[White Womanhood] not only stood at the core of his sense of property and chivalry, she represented the heart of his culture. By the fact that she was not accessible to the Negro, she marked the ultimate line of difference between white and black. . . it was impossible to assault either the southern woman or the South without having implicitly levied carnal attacks on the other.⁷

Not only were white women exploited by the patriarchal society, but, as Anne Firor Scott argues, the image of the southern lady became a stumbling block for women's political participation. The southern lady was confined, by the definition of her role, to the domestic sphere or private realm of her home, and was subordinate in all things to her husband. Women did not

⁶Kathleen M. Blee, Women of the Klan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 14.

⁷David M. Chalmers, Hooded Americanism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) 21.

venture into the public sphere in order to pursue an education or a career, and men handled all public affairs, which included business and politics.⁸ The constraints on women in the "Old South" were one of the reasons the suffrage movement did not develop in the South during this time, as it had in the North and West.

Beginning with the Civil War, the "southern lady" image began to change as the "Old South" vanished. White women spent time working together to physically and spiritually rebuild their church communities. Women's church activity became one of the biggest factors in white women's advancement towards the public sphere, because it was an accepted pursuit for southern women, and helped them to gain independence and leadership skills.⁹ Through missionary work, women became involved in the correction and prevention of many social problems, such as substandard housing, malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment and juvenile delinquency.¹⁰ Anne Scott believes that southern women's political activity followed a logical progression beginning with church missionary societies (1870s), proceeding to the Women's Christian Temperance Union (1880s), women's clubs (1890s), and eventually suffrage.¹¹ Scott's progression fails to explain why,

⁸Scott, 43-55.

⁹Jean Friedman, The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 111-118.

¹⁰Scott, 142.

¹¹Ibid, 134-163.

if "antis" followed in the same path as suffrage women, they ended up as "antis," not suffragists.

After the Civil War, the elite white men and women in the South wanted economic reform and social control that maintained racial prerogatives. Dewey Grantham argues that the catalysts for change included urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of the middle-class.¹² Urbanization produced a class of men and women with leisure time, which they devoted to reforms. Reformers wanted to "impose a greater social order, foster economic opportunity and development, and to protect the weak and unfortunate in deserving cases."¹³ Not all reform was benevolent. People of the white middle-classes sought to impose a greater social and class order upon African-Americans through segregation. They believed that segregation would create social stability and make economic development possible. They worked for economic opportunity and development by supporting economic diversification, industrialization, and good roads, which facilitated transportation, urbanization, and better schools.

The Reformers also sought to improve government. Progressives believed that "To Restore 'good government' . . . the power of Negro and immigrant voters had to be curbed."¹⁴

¹²Dewey W. Grantham, Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983) xv.

¹³Ibid, xvi.

¹⁴J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1919 (New Haven: Yale University, 1974) 252.

Progressives moved away from a democratic form of politics in order to improve government, in their eyes, and maintain their class's control. At this time, the use of pressure groups to influence politics became more popular, which created a more non-partisan form of politics.¹⁵

The "New South" brought economic change and social stability, but to what degree were reformers willing to alter gender, race and class roles? This question produced the debate over woman suffrage. A suffragist, or "new woman," was a woman who rejected the constraints of the southern lady and wanted greater legal, educational, and economic opportunities for women.¹⁶ In contrast, many antisuffragists, including Pearson, combined progressive and conservative views about women's role. They wanted elite white women to have greater opportunities, but wished to restrict all women from entering an equal position with men in politics.

The contest for and against suffrage helps to explain the complex dynamics of the progressive period in the South and shows the close relation between conservatism and progressivism. In the small amount of literature available on antisuffragists (only a small part of which is on southern "antis"), historians depict "antis" as women simply stuck in the past. Elna Green, the most

¹⁵Michael E. McGerr, The Decline of Popular Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 66; see also Richard L. McCormick, The Party Period and Public Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 228-259.

¹⁶Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, New Women of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 94.

prominent historian writing on southern antisuffragists, argues that southern "antis" rejected the vote because they grew up in rurally conservative communities and defended the ideals of plantation elites. They were caught in a web of class, gender and race relations based upon a traditional patriarchal hierarchy. Green argues that "antis" believed that if women gained the vote their world would be destroyed:

Southern antisuffragists wished to protect as long as possible the last remaining vestiges of the 'world the slave holders made.' The patriarchy of the past, with its clearly defined race, gender, and class relations, provided a haven of security and stability in a changing and confusing world.¹⁷

Green also maintains that white southern "antis" belonged at the top of the social hierarchy and had the most to lose in a change of the status quo. These elite white women, therefore, fought against votes for women.¹⁸ Anastatia Simms casts Pearson in a similar light.¹⁹ Green and Simms discover characteristics of southern "antis" that are historically accurate, but they incorrectly characterize them and overlook that antisuffragists were active in the public sphere and wanted to alter gender roles to a limited extent. This thesis will show that antisuffragists had characteristics of southern progressives, were active in the

¹⁷Elna Green, "Ideals of Government, of Home, and of Women: The Ideology of Southern White Antisuffragism." Southern Women. ed. Caroline Dillman (New York: Hemisphere Publishing, 1988) 96.

¹⁸Elna Green, "Those Opposed: Southern Antisuffragism, 1890-1920." Diss. Tulane University, 1992, 230.

¹⁹Anastatia Simms, "'Powers that Pray' and 'Powers that Prey': Tennessee and the Fight for Woman Suffrage." Tennessee Historical Quarterly (Winter 1991): 203-225.

public sphere and wanted elite white women to have greater opportunities.

Not all historians have portrayed antisuffragists as conservative. Manuela Thurner deals specifically with northern antisuffragists and argues that northern "antis" favored the progressive movement and women's activism in public affairs, but believed their goals could be accomplished more effectively without the ballot.²⁰ They felt that giving women the right to vote would rob them of their political influence; women could then align with political parties and thus destroy their strategic political neutrality. This would, in turn, break up women's groups, which "antis" felt were very powerful in influencing the government. Thurner even claims that antisuffragists were the "heroines of feminism," because northern "antis" believed in a woman solidarity.²¹ This paper will show that southern antisuffragists actually came closer in philosophy to northern antisuffragists than historians have portrayed. Southern antisuffragists were similar to northern "antis," because they were also progressives and believed that women possessed a strong influence outside of politics. But even though they upheld the power of woman solidarity they were not the "heroines of feminism" that Thurner claims.

It is paradoxical that antisuffragists considered themselves

²⁰Manuela Thurner, "'Better Citizens Without the Ballot.'" One Woman, One Vote ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (Troutdale: New Sage Press, 1995): 203-220.

²¹Ibid, 205.

reformers, yet were racist. Race influenced the suffrage movement from the beginning in the South, but suffragists' attitudes about the race issue changed between 1890 and 1910. The development of the suffrage movement came late in the South, because the northern movement's antebellum philosophy had included abolitionism. Interestingly, while race retarded the development of the suffrage movement in the South, it became the catalyst for the southern suffrage movement in the 1890s. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler argues that if the South had not been searching for a way to disenfranchise African-Americans in the 1890s, the suffrage movement would not have developed in the South when it did.²² This search to disenfranchise African-Americans occurred after a period of conservative reconstruction in the South. Many white women saw this moment as their chance to gain suffrage, and argued that, if they voted, it would double the white population and out-number the entire African-American vote, therefore securing white supremacy.

As a new and more progressive generation of women stepped up to lead the suffrage movement in the 1910s, their ideas about race in the suffrage movement changed. One historian has argued that by the 1910s suffrage leaders were more sympathetic towards the needs of African-Americans and had to defend woman suffrage against verbal attacks by antisuffragists, who claimed that woman

²²Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 123-125.

suffrage would also mean suffrage for African-Americans.²³ This thesis agrees that antisuffragists were racist, but goes further to show that antisuffragists actually prevented suffragists from openly advocating votes for African-Americans. It also explores the possible reasons for the suffragists' sympathy with African-Americans. Both "antis" and suffragists were similar in their willingness to give up the rights of African-Americans for advancements they desired, and in their antipathy towards large changes in the southern institution of racism. The suffragists and "antis" were not alone in their elitism; women of the Ku Klux Klan, though an extreme case, behaved in a similar manner to the suffragists. Klan women, like suffragists, allowed African-Americans to be mistreated to secure their own rights. As Kathleen Blee argues, women joined the Klan because of its work for women's rights, showing white women's selfishness to gain rights for themselves even if it meant limiting the rights of another race.²⁴

This thesis will concentrate its analysis of racism, class and gender on the southern antisuffrage movement by looking at Josephine Anderson Pearson. Pearson was in some ways a unique example because her accomplishments prior to her antisuffrage activities were greater than those of other women of her time.

²³Suzanne Lebsock, "Woman Suffrage and White Supremacy: A Virginia Case Study." Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism. ed Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993) 62-100. Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 131.

²⁴Blee, 1-8.

She therefore felt that she could lead other women, and represent the interest of her class. Her prior accomplishments included an advanced education, a career as an educator, and work as a public figure, notably for good roads to aid economic development of the South. Pearson was a southern progressive because of her work for economic change in the South and her desire to limit the electorate. The advantages that she was given as a child, along with her privileged status, gave her the basis for her elitist attitudes. Although she was unique, she was not alone in her endeavor. Thus, her attitudes can be generally applied to other southern antisuffragist leaders and activists. The first chapter of this thesis concentrates on the development of Pearson's ideals, her unusual life and her work for women's advancement. The second chapter analyzes Pearson's presidency of the Tennessee Antisuffrage League and how Pearson, as an antisuffragist, characterized the southern antisuffrage movement. But the overall focus of the thesis will be to examine the dynamics of race, class, and gender as they apply to Pearson and the southern antisuffrage movement. Pearson shows that southern antisuffragists were not completely conservative as they have been portrayed--they had progressive ideals about women's role. Even though her philosophy was limited by her racism and elitism, she also had insight into the problem of woman solidarity.

Chapter 1: Pearson's Horizons and Boundaries

Pearson's early life set her up to become a paradoxical figure. Her parents gave her an impressive education along with the abilities of a public figure, in a society that had no place for a woman with these attributes, and they instilled in her southern values such as white supremacy and elitism. Pearson, therefore, sought to create a new place for herself and other southern white elite women in the professional world and in education. Her work later in life reveals not only her commitment to southern economic improvement and the opportunities she championed for elite white women, but also the limits that she placed upon women's advancement. She wanted women to be "separate but equal" to men, and she wanted to hold onto the construct of southern chivalry. Pearson's chivalry meant that women should be guided by men in their public roles. Pearson held no regrets about the public life she led or her philosophies, no matter how paradoxical they might seem now:

Hence, for these abridgements of my life, personal and professional, even of private touches at times, I offer no apology. However unsatisfactory this statement, I have no inclination to compromise, even if "memorably" published, as they best express, possibly, the personal author of my own Life's story.²⁵

Pearson came from a well respected family with deep roots in the South. Speaking of her family, Pearson stated: "[I am] a strictly 'southern production,' Thank God, my lineage, both

²⁵Preface to "Fading Tapestries," Pearson Papers, ii.

maternal and paternal, stretch way back through the colonial Carolinas and Virginia."²⁶ This heritage helped to instill in her an allegiance to the South, white supremacy and elitism. She was the only child of the Reverend Philip Anderson (of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South) and Amanda Caroline (Roscoe) Pearson, and was born on June 30, 1868 in Gallatin, Tennessee. The Pearsons moved to Monteagle, Tennessee, because the mountain climate was good for Amanda's poor health. The mix of the college of Sewanee and the local mountain folk made Monteagle a unique place: a center of culture, yet surrounded by uneducated "mountain folk." Pearson's family was one of the distinguished families of Monteagle. Her parents made their living as teachers, and when they moved to Monteagle they and two other prominent families opened a small "classical" coeducational academy. Pearson, speaking of her education and family, stated:

This gives me the liberty, first, to affirm to be well-born with unusual, careful rearing, by parents of marked genealogical distinction, of especial culture, and associations; also with no small amount of advantages.²⁷

Pearson felt great pride in her genealogy and her upbringing and repaid her parents for the advantages she was given in life by an intense loyalty. She never married and turned down several proposals because of her responsibility as an only child to care

²⁶"A Prominent Southern Educator, Writer and Leading Club Woman," Women's edition Memphis-News Section, August 1907, Pearson Papers.

²⁷Preface to "Fading Tapestries," iii.

for her parents until their deaths.²⁸ During this time, highly educated women had to choose between marriage and a career, and Pearson's responsibility to her parents made it a necessity for her to have a career.

Pearson's parents directed her early education and guided her to study Latin. Southern women were often educated in the classics, but very few women took their study to the same level as Pearson. Her parents also schooled her in other subjects like music, art, drama and English. One of the reasons the Pearsons gave Josephine a lofty education sprang from necessity; knowing that they could not have any more children, they wanted to ensure that she could support herself and her parents in their old age. Josephine thus took on some of the functions of a son and heir and pursued an education unusual for a woman of her day. Pearson first went to school at Gallatin Female College at the age of eight; she received a B.A. (1880) from Irving College in McMinnville, Tennessee at twelve years of age and an M.A. in Latin (1886) from Cumberland College in Lebanon, Tennessee at eighteen years of age. Pearson was talented in Latin, and became the first southern woman to win an award for her Latin Oration, which was a speech she presented in front of a panel in order to complete her M.A.²⁹ After she graduated from Cumberland College, she studied at Vanderbilt University and the University of Missouri until she took her first teaching job at age twenty-

²⁸Ibid, iii.

²⁹Ibid, ix.

two.³⁰ The prominence of Pearson's family and their connections with the elite allowed her to study at Vanderbilt, which, at this time, was open only to women with connections to faculty or prominent families.

Pearson's parents positioned her to become a public figure by encouraging her education, involving her in political movements and training her in public speaking. Women were not usually instructed in these typically male skills, which were viewed as unnecessary for women. Pearson described a birthday (probably her sixth) when she and her father were in Nashville, Tennessee visiting friends. They encountered Judge A. Frank McConnel and some other prominent men who challenged her to take the public school examination. McConnel promised he would give her five dollars if she passed, her father offered her a new dress, and each of the other men offered her a dollar. Pearson readily accepted their dare and passed the exam. She received all the money, the dress, and a certificate which stated that she had the knowledge and proficiency to teach all subjects required of public school teachers.³¹ Pearson also described how her mother encouraged her to train in speech and drama until, "I was as much at home on a stage as in my own home!"³² She even dreamed of becoming an actress and used her dramatic skills for the temperance cause. In her memoirs, she recalled temperance

³⁰Biographical Sketch, Pearson Papers.

³¹Preface to "Fading Tapestries," vi-vii.

³²Pearson, "My Story," 227.

meetings where she participated in dramatizations. For example, in one skit she bowed at the feet of a man who pretended to be inebriated and sang, "'Please Do Not Leave Me Tonight Dear Father' until the entire audience wept!"³³

As a career, Pearson chose education, one of the few open to women, but she was not content to remain in the classroom. She pushed the limits of her career onto the podium and to the forefront of women educators by using her position as a way to develop opportunities for women in education. She gave speeches across the country on women's education, and made women's education a major point in her reform work. Pearson's first teaching job (1890-1894) was as principal of McMinnville High School, where she taught both boys and girls. She left this job in order to dedicate herself professionally to the higher education of women. Her career was, therefore, shaped by separate women's institutions. She taught at many women's colleges, including the Nashville College for Young Ladies in Tennessee (1895-1897), Winthrop State Normal College for Women in South Carolina (1897-1899), Higbee School in Tennessee (1902-1908), and Christian College, which was affiliated with the University of Missouri (1909-1914). While at Christian College in Missouri, Pearson reorganized the Missouri junior women's college organization.³⁴

Pearson also advocated the formation of a women's annex to

³³Ibid.

³⁴"An Educational Review," Pearson Papers, 1-20.

Vanderbilt University and presented the idea to Chancellor James H. Kirkland in 1900. This proposition shows Pearson's ability to operate in the public sphere and her desire to expand women's opportunities. It also suggests the limitations that she placed on women's advancement, because she fought for a separate institution rather than equal attendance by women. Pearson also tied women's interest to the economic development of the South, for she believed that education for elite women would foster economic development. Chancellor Kirkland, Elijah E. Hoss (the editor of the "Christian Advocate" and formerly the preaching chair at Vanderbilt) and Pearson worked together to obtain a million dollars in funding from the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Their goal was to build a women's annex to Vanderbilt that would compare to Radcliffe College, and one million dollars would have been enough to start such an institution. However, the conference decided to distribute the funds among several schools, and therefore, the annex was never realized. Pearson, in her memoirs, expressed bitter disappointment over the loss of the funds and also the college. Pearson's close friend indicated that Vanderbilt did not receive the money because they had not played the politics correctly. The closest institution to a single sex college for women in Nashville was the ill-fated Nashville College for Young Ladies (1892-1899), where Pearson had been appointed Lady

Principal in 1895.³⁵

Not only did Pearson limit women through her construct of "separate but equal," but also by her elitism. The advancement she sought was only for elite white women equal to her social position. In a speech in 1918, she did state, "Personally, I am a firm believer in the necessity of educating, industrially, girls of all classes, and in this way dignifying all industries found suited to women."³⁶ But an industrial education did not equal that of the collegiate education that Pearson sought for elite women.

Pearson was a career woman, but above all she remained a dutiful daughter. While Pearson was at Christian College, her mother became severely ill and Pearson was forced to return home to care for her. Her mother died in July of 1915, but Pearson remained in Monteagle in order to take care of her ailing father. At her father's request, Pearson took up the fight for good roads in the South. This movement gave her the ability to combine her elitism and skills in public speaking and leadership with being a dutiful daughter and good southern woman. She was involved in this movement at her father's request and with his help. Pearson also, because of her elite status, felt a sense of noblesse oblige to the local mountain folk. She thought it was her duty

³⁵The Nashville College for Young Ladies closed in 1899 because its supporters withdrew their backing in order to fund the budding Belmont College. "An Educational Review," 3-8.

³⁶"The Evolution of Modern Industry in its application to girls and women workers," Pearson Papers.

to help them improve the quality of their lives through good roads. She became president of the Dixie Highway Association's Woman Auxiliary, which advocated building the Dixie Highway between Chattanooga and Nashville and running over Monteagle Mountain (by way of the Cumberland Divide). Pearson and others viewed this project as war work in the context of World War I. People considered good roads war work, because roads would help in the mobilization of troops and supplies. Pearson's war work was not typical, for most women made bandages or supported the cause in more "feminine" ways.³⁷

Pearson experimented with many tactics in her highway work, some of which she eventually used in the fight against suffrage. She used lady-like methods to support the auxiliary. These activities were seen as part of woman's duty and proper sphere. For example, the Auxiliary cooked dinner for all the men who worked on the highway. Also, she and her father hosted the Cumberland Divide Council and gave teas.³⁸

Pearson also used tactics unexpected of a lady, yet never once envisioned that her actions were radical. She told of an experience during the building of the highway which shows Pearson's belief in her exceptionality, rather than her function as a model for other women. In this instance, she thought she knew more than the male highway engineer. The engineer told Pearson that the road could not continue because of a boulder in

³⁷"Dixie Highway Association," Pearson Papers.

³⁸Ibid.

its path. This boulder was of extreme size and the engineer believed that the boulder could not be removed. Pearson believed that the engineer did not want to put forward the extra effort to blast the large boulder. So, she enlisted some men to help her climb below the boulder in order to examine the situation. She sketched the underside of the boulder and took the sketch to a secret meeting with Judge John Allison in Chattanooga, who was a very prominent man in Tennessee politics. The secret meeting led to the blasting of the boulder and a "very beautiful bend-from Monteagle to Chattanooga." This episode shows how well connected Pearson had become in politics, and that a woman of her social standing did not even need the vote; she was able to have her needs met by influencing a prominent man. Pearson further used her political connections by conducting a large amount of correspondence with prominent individuals in order to gain support for the highway.³⁹

Pearson's largest step into the public sphere occurred on October 20, 1917, when she became the first woman ever to address the National Good Roads Association. Pearson, in her address, not only explained the importance of good roads for the South, but expressed her belief in women's differences from men. These differences made women a strong political influence outside of politics, giving select women a basis for solidarity. She argued that "good roads" would benefit the rural communities by extending education, aiding all southern women and fostering

³⁹Ibid.

economic development in the South. Pearson argued that "good roads" would be especially beneficial to southern women because "as a general rule, women are more interested in educational, social and religious work than men and all of these, to a great extent, depend on the condition of Roads."⁴⁰ She also believed that rural communities needed assistance from elite white women. As part of progressive philosophy women started to expand "their characteristics and interest" beyond the private into the public sphere, because they believed that men needed the influence of women to clean up society.

The Dixie Highway Association gave Pearson a great deal of credit for the completion of the highway. She gained the support of the Chattanooga faction,⁴¹ managed to outwit the engineer who said the road could not continue and encouraged the workers who actually built the road, who included men of all walks of life, even professors from Sewanee. The Association built the highway over the Cumberland Divide and acclaimed Pearson for her work.

Miss Josephine Anderson Pearson by her faithful, unselfish and incessant labors in the interest of the Dixie Highway, has proven herself a great public benefactor, she has conducted a voluminous correspondence, invited those interested in the enterprise to her home and she and her father have royally and elegantly entertained them, she has by her earnest and untiring efforts contributed largely to the success of the enterprise and had finally seen the fruits of her labor in the assurance of the completion of

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹The route the Dixie Highway took had been a political debate between the Monteagle route and another in Knoxville. Pearson campaigned heavily for the Monteagle route, and was credited with winning the support of the Chattanooga faction. Ibid.

the Dixie Highway through the Cumberland Mountains.⁴²

Pearson was not a typical woman of her time. Her exceptionalism sprang from the opportunities she was given and the limited avenues that she discovered were open to women. She therefore sought to create a place for white elite women where they could have "separate but equal" opportunities with men. She was also able to negotiate a path as a public woman without violating conservative ideals of elitism and racism. The limits she placed on women's role included her new definition of chivalry (male guidance and patronage over women) and her unwillingness to fight for an integrated and equal place for women in education and politics. She desired opportunity for elite white women, but did not want to lose the construct of separate spheres which made select women a strong influence in politics.

⁴²Ibid.

Chapter 2: The War of The Roses: Pearson's Place in the Fight to Determine Women's Political Participation

Some progressive women wanted women to directly influence politics and sought political equality with men. Others, like Pearson, looked to influence politics as a "separate but equal" group. This difference in philosophy on women's political participation brought about the woman suffrage and antisuffrage movements. The suffrage movement in the South sought to settle women's style of political participation, and to manipulate African-Americans role in politics. Throughout the antisuffrage movement Pearson's role as a southern progressive was evident, because of her desire to limit the electorate to elite white educated men. She also hoped to limit women to participating in government as a solid group of women in a "separate but equal" sphere.

In order to understand the antisuffrage movement, a basic understanding of its opposition is important. The suffrage movement first developed in the North in 1848 with the Seneca Falls convention in New York, which was the first time that women and men came together to discuss women's rights in the United States. The woman suffrage movement in the South began at a much later date (the 1890s), largely because of the northern movement's close association with abolitionism. Also, the South in general was very resistant to changing its customs, including women's role. It took the advent of using woman suffrage as a

tool to disenfranchise African-Americans to jump start the movement in the South. The rights of African-Americans and women were intertwined. Once southerners rejected the idea of woman suffrage as a method to secure white supremacy they believed that votes for women would incite votes for African-Americans. This fear shows why Pearson was able to exclude African-Americans from her definition of woman solidarity. Suffragists wanted the vote for a political tool, in order to influence politics and to help them break out of their narrow sphere and claim equal political rights with men.⁴³ A suffragist, Sara Barnwell Elliot, expressed this argument: "We cannot keep the house clean; we cannot influence schools; we cannot get equal pay for equal work unless we get the ballot."⁴⁴

Antisuffragists had existed from the first moment that other women declared they wanted the vote but did not form into a national movement until 1911. The National Association Opposed To Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) was formed in response to women winning the vote in Washington state and California in 1910; the opponent finally seemed formidable enough to warrant resistance. Women "antis" became the toughest opposition that the suffragists faced. The National Association's largest responsibilities included sending assistance to affiliates and publishing flyers, posters and pamphlets. Antisuffragists rejected the vote, even

⁴³Scott, 165-167.

⁴⁴Elizabeth Taylor, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee (New York: Octagon Books, 1978) 71.

though they actively participated in the public sphere, because they believed that the vote would destroy the construct of separate spheres, and thus women's indirect and moral influence over men. Antisuffragists wanted women to be active in the public sphere, but they desired a "separate but equal" system for women in politics.⁴⁵

Josephine Dodge, president of the National Association, helped many local organizations get their feet on the ground. In fact, she helped to create the Tennessee League in 1916. Virginia Vertrees became the first president of the Tennessee organization, but had to resign because of declining health.⁴⁶ Virginia was the wife of John Vertrees, who was a prominent lawyer and strong antisuffrage supporter in Nashville. After Virginia Vertrees retired, she and her husband, John, chose Josephine Pearson as the new president of the Tennessee Division because of Pearson's previous antisuffrage activity. Pearson's earlier work included a study on suffrage in the western states where women had already won the vote and a subsequent lecture series. In Pearson's study, she set out to discover what benefits, if any, were gained from woman suffrage. In her lectures she argued that the states where women had received suffrage gained no benefits. Pearson had also caught the attention of the Nashville group in 1916 by defending "antis" in

⁴⁵Thomas Jablonsky, The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-suffragism in the United States, 1868-1920 (New York: Carlson, 1994) xxiii-xxvii.

⁴⁶Taylor, 81-83.

a newspaper editorial against a suffragist's attack, which was published in the Chattanooga Times. The suffragist claimed that "'antis', were allied with the Whiskey Element and the Red Light Districts of America!"⁴⁷

Pearson's personal conviction against suffrage came not only from her own beliefs, but also from a vow she made to her dying mother that, if suffrage ever came to Tennessee, she would fight against it: "Yes! God helping, I'll keep the faith, My Mother!"⁴⁸ Before 1910 four states (Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah) had already granted women suffrage. In fact, beginning in the year 1910, one state per year granted women suffrage until 1919 (excluding 1915-1916). Therefore, at the time of Amanda Pearson's death in 1915, the possibility that woman suffrage would come even to Tennessee was looming.

Contrasting the ideas of Pearson with her mother on antisuffrage shows an evolution of ideas on women's role through generations of southern antisuffrage ideology. They both shared a common commitment to antisuffrage, but differed on women's role. Women of an earlier generation, such as Pearson's mother, were very conservative in their views and were still caught up in the restrictive ideals of religion and gender of the "Old South." In an article, "Woman Suffrage, A Resume," which Amanda Pearson wrote to her friends in July of 1915 she discussed her reasons for rejecting the vote: "The gentleness and refinement of

⁴⁷Pearson, "My Story," 225-231.

⁴⁸Ibid, 229.

womanhood and the deference and chivalry [of men toward] womanhood are the two most important elements in nature, and the movement for women's political equality, if perfected, would destroy both."⁴⁹ Josephine Pearson still had conservative ideals about women, but she had gone beyond the ideas of her mother on the issue of woman's place. Josephine realized, through her education and training, that some women could act effectively in the public sphere, but she did not desire all women's political equality.

Because of Pearson's association with John Vertrees and the promise to her mother, historians have discounted Pearson's actions as those of a puppet acting out others' wishes.⁵⁰ Pearson was not Vertrees's puppet, though she did rely on him as an advisor. Pearson's association with Vertrees shows her belief in a new type of chivalry. She allowed Vertrees to advise her, but she made decisions on her own. Pearson resided in Monteagle; therefore, Vertrees and Pearson corresponded through letters, many of which contained reports on situations in Nashville and advice. For example, when a state vote on woman suffrage was forthcoming in South Carolina, Pearson wanted to help the antisuffrage cause there, but Vertrees advised her against it.

Upon Reflection, I deem it not altogether advisable for persons outside the state of South Carolina to be protesting to the senators of that state. It occurred to me it would be more effective and more advisable for the constituents,

⁴⁹Ibid, 227-229.

⁵⁰Simms, 203-225.

citizens of that state, to take course.⁵¹

In this case, Pearson did follow Vertrees' advice, but she did not always do so. In 1917 she addressed the Tennessee Legislature about antisuffrage against the express wishes of Vertrees.

Pearson restricted women's role by championing a "separate but equal" position for women in politics; she preferred a qualified woman solidarity to the vote. Indirect influence was separate from the male world of politics, and many antisuffragists believed that this form of participation was not only equal but superior to competing with men in a corrupted political system. Pearson believed that women were more effective outside of politics as a volunteer group, because women were more moral than men and their influence could be used not only upon their husbands, sons and brothers, but also on their state and local governments. It can be inferred from the way that Pearson praised women that she believed women were morally superior to men and above being involved in the corruption of politics. After woman suffrage was defeated in the 1917 state campaign, Pearson wrote to Vertrees exclaiming, "Chivalry is not dead in our South land, and womanhood will still hold her own high position untarnished with any historic [abuse] of politics."⁵² At this time southern politics was still largely

⁵¹John Vertrees to Josephine Pearson, 29 October 1918, Pearson Papers.

⁵²Josephine Pearson to John Vertrees, 2 February 1917, Pearson Papers.

carried out in male domains of bars and open fields, where liquor flowed and fights broke out.⁵³ Pearson also believed that women's groups should focus their influence on such "women's interests" as education, religion and social work.⁵⁴ "Antis" predicted that the vote would destroy women's special influence, because each woman would use her singular vote as her means of influence rather than influencing public affairs through powerful women's organizations. A pamphlet written and published by NAOWS, entitled "Why we oppose votes for women" (included among Pearson's collections of antisuffrage pamphlets) expressed this belief:

The question for intelligent women to decide is whether or not they want this influence destroyed. If they wish to give up the moral influence which a body of women, educated, public-spirited, non-partisan, can wield and influence so strong that legislators feel obliged to make what the world calls "ridiculous concessions" to it--if in its stead they wish to depend on political influence gained through the ballot, which can be applied only to one party, which can be entirely off set by the votes of women who are ignorant, boss controlled, and whose votes are purchasable, --if they prefer that, they will get their wish of woman suffrage in the east.⁵⁵

Pearson also felt that the vote was not the best way for women to solve problems, she believed that women should work to fix social problems through pressure groups instead of expecting them to be cured by the vote. Pearson criticized suffragists because they believed the vote was "the panacea for every human

⁵³Michael E. McGerr, "Political Style and Women's Power, 1830-1930." Journal of American History. (December 1990) 868.

⁵⁴"Dixie Highway Association."

⁵⁵"Why We Oppose Votes for Women," Pearson Papers.

ill!"⁵⁶ In a speech she gave several years after suffrage was won entitled "American Citizenship," Pearson again spoke about how the vote could not cure social problems. She talked of "our national tendency to seek salvation in the passage of laws and to deal with sins by statutes and not by education of consciences."⁵⁷

Before passage of the suffrage amendment, southern antisuffrage women did not publicly debate the issue of woman solidarity frequently because of the competing issues of race and states' rights. Many southerners were more concerned with how woman suffrage would affect race and states' rights rather than woman's role. For example, in a petition that Pearson wrote against suffrage, which was circulated by the Tennessee Antisuffrage Association, twelve reasons for rejecting suffrage were listed and only two dealt with women's place. One of the reasons for rejecting suffrage said:

Because women out of politics are non-partisans, who are able to represent a disinterested idea appealing to universal humanity, irrespective of party and are thus endowed with more power for good than they could exercise through voting.⁵⁸

This type of argument has been overlooked as existing in the South, not because it did not exist but because there were other very compelling issues that blocked the sight of historians.

⁵⁶"President's Message," Pearson Papers, 7.

⁵⁷"American Citizenship," Pearson Papers.

⁵⁸Tennessee Antisuffrage Association Petition, Pearson Papers.

Pearson, as a progressive, wanted to limit the electorate. She, therefore, championed woman solidarity in order to secure the elite class's control on government. Allowing women to vote meant allowing uneducated, poor, white and African-American women to vote. This would, in turn, dilute the power already held by elite, white, educated women; all women would have an equal voice. Pearson did not need the vote because she was able, through her connections, to influence top officials. If all women got the vote, officials might have had to cater to "other women" in order to be elected. Pearson went so far as to blame the beginning of the suffrage movement on lower class women, even though she knew that suffragists were equal in class to antisuffragists.

But the "Band Wagon Equal Suffrage Song," as an issue, started from the proletarian class calling for votes; [It] was an intellectual compromise, . . . [according to] my ideas of the intelligent American type of woman.⁵⁹

Pearson refused to give the vote to the women who really needed it in order to secure her class's influence on government.

Pearson's racist rhetoric developed as part of her elitism and desire for class control. Antisuffragists, through their rhetoric, prevented suffragists from openly advocating votes for African-Americans. They accomplished this by strengthening the fears of white southerners that woman suffrage would bring "Negro" domination to the South. In almost every speech or writing, Pearson mentioned the effects that suffrage would have

⁵⁹Pearson, "My Story," 230.

on white supremacy in the South. Pearson singled out a national suffrage parade in which a suffrage leader, Carrie Chapman Catt, walked between two African-American women.

The great international suffrage leader, Mrs. Catt, marching through the streets of New York with a Negro on either side of her! Was she thus proclaiming her ideal of the supremacy of the Negro-race that threatens the South, if Federal suffrage should ever come to us?⁶⁰

Antisuffragists' racist rhetoric prevented many suffrage women from openly advocating rights for African-Americans. In Tennessee, an active suffragist, Catherine Kenny, sympathized with African-American women who wanted the vote. In a letter from Kenny to Catt, Kenny discussed her hope that the race issue would not be prominent in Tennessee. But these sentiments remained hidden in private letters. The sympathy that suffragists showed privately may have been a product of their elitism. Elite white suffragists realized that the vote could cut across race and class lines, and hoped that because of their sympathy these women would follow the political interest of the elite white women when they got the vote. Catt and Kenny expressed this sentiment in their hope that, after women won the vote, "Negro" women "voted with the best."⁶¹ Even though suffragists sympathized with African Americans they were unwilling to risk their own suffrage to support African-Americans

⁶⁰"President's Message," 8.

⁶¹From Catherine Kenny to Carrie Chapman Catt, 16 November 1920, Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; From Anne Dallas Dudley to Carrie Chapman Catt, 3 February 1920, Catt Papers.

publicly.

Pearson also shaped the movement through her strong appeals to southern heritage and states' rights. She filled her antisuffrage speeches and writings with appeals to southern values. Pearson's statements were extreme, at times, for they claimed that woman suffrage would be the downfall of southern society. For example, in a letter to Governor James M. Cox, the Democratic presidential nominee, Pearson appealed to southern values (August 1920).

The very safety of southern civilization and the purity of Anglo-Saxon blood, is involved in this amendment for no less than three force bills, providing for the enforcement of the 14th, 15th, and 19th amendments, were introduced in the last congress, awaiting only ratification of this amendment for adoption.⁶²

This rhetoric touched whites' nerves in the South, because the "force bill" of 1890 threatened to make the South's disenfranchisement of African-Americans illegal. States' rights rhetoric shaped the suffrage movement by creating a rift in the southern movement. Even many southern suffragists sided with the "antis" when the fight for suffrage became the fight for a federal amendment, because they wanted the states to determine voting policies for themselves.

Pearson used progressive politics to try to defeat suffrage, thus showing the step she had taken forward into the public sphere. Some of these methods included open-air meetings and

⁶²From Pearson to Governor Cox, 5 August 1920, Pearson Papers.

newspaper publicity.⁶³ Before this time, these methods were not popular among women activists because they infringed upon the public sphere, but they became more popular during the suffrage movement as women moved into the public sphere. The tactics that Pearson used were also employed by suffragists. Pearson wrote letters to newspaper editors and press releases which were printed in the local papers. She also used tactics which involved her more directly in the public sphere: speeches, mass meetings, letters to legislators, petitions, teas and informational meetings. The Women's Tennessee Division also sent a letter to the citizens in July of 1920 encouraging them to contact their legislatures. One particularly racist excerpt reads:

The fate of white civilization in the South may hang on a few votes either way, and YOUR action may be the deciding influence with YOUR representatives, so please let your neighbors and your representatives know WHERE YOU stand in this great battle for States Rights, Honor and the Safety of Southern Civilization.⁶⁴

Pearson's most daring tactic came when she addressed the legislature in the 1917 campaign against woman suffrage,⁶⁵

⁶³Ellen Dubois, "Working Women, Class Relations and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894-1909." Unequal Sisters. ed. Ruiz and Dubois (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁶⁴From the Tennessee Division of Southern Women's League for the Rejection of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment to Tennessee Residents, 9 July 1920, Pearson Papers.

⁶⁵Pearson, "My Story," 235; There is some debate about when Pearson actually gave this speech. Anastatia Simms believes that Pearson is confused about the date, because Woodrow Wilson did not support suffrage until 1920. Pearson's confusion is understandable considering that she wrote her memoirs in 1939,

because it was not common for a woman to address the legislature. She took a large step out of the domestic sphere into not only the public sphere, but the male world of politics. Pearson gave the speech in response to a telegram by President Woodrow Wilson in which he advised that Tennessee pass the amendment for reasons of political expediency. Pearson recalled little of her speech but remembered that she said, "President Wilson has overstepped [his] prerogative as President of the United States! Will you follow his advice?"⁶⁶ After Pearson's speech, suffrage was defeated two to one and Pearson received resounding congratulations. All of these tactics included a combination of a solid women's group and individuals who spoke out for the cause, highlighting the inherent conflict between the two movements' goals and tactics.

The events that led to Tennessee becoming the "perfect thirty-six," or the state that secured the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, were complicated because each side refused to give up. Pearson helped to defeat suffrage in the 1917 state campaign but lost the fight against the federal amendment in 1920. On August 18, 1920, the outcome of the vote in the Tennessee Legislative House was uncertain until a roll call was taken. The House divided equally in the support of the

almost twenty years after the event. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, Votes for Women! 242.

⁶⁶Ibid, 233.

amendment. Many men did support suffrage for a wide range of reasons. Some believed, just as suffragists, that women deserved the vote; some hoped that if they helped women win the vote before the next election, the women would help them get re-elected. Many of these men also did not believe the racist rhetoric that antisuffragists spouted, for they believed that African-American women could be prevented from voting, just as African-American men had been--through literacy tests, violence, and trickery. Suffragists were down by one vote until Harry Burn, a young man from McMinn County who had been voting with the "antis," voted "yes" for woman suffrage. Burn claimed that he decided to vote for suffrage because of a letter that his mother had sent him to "be a good boy" and vote for suffrage.⁶⁷ This was ironic, because antisuffragists had championed indirect female influence over politics, yet suffragists won the last vote needed to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment by the influence of Harry Burn's mother. Suffragists, thrilled with the victory, showered the house with yellow roses--their symbol.

Despite the suffragists' victory, the "antis" would not accept defeat. The Speaker of the House, Seth Walker, supported the "antis" and moved to reconsider the amendment. Walker stalled the motion to reconsider for two days while antisuffragists clamored for votes. In desperation, thirty-eight legislators (named the "Red Rose Brigade" after the emblem of the antisuffragists) fled to Alabama. These men fled in order to

⁶⁷Simms, 218.

break the quorum and prevent the amendment from being brought up for reconsideration. Their strategy did not work, for without the antisuffrage men, a vote easily passed to bring the amendment up for reconsideration, and there was no one there to protest the absence of a quorum. A vote was then taken on the reconsideration, and women again won the right to vote. On August 26, 1920, Washington officials declared the Nineteenth Amendment ratified.

The antisuffragists refused to quit even at this point. They claimed that there had been no quorum when the vote was taken, and it was, therefore, illegal. Walker even went to Washington to plead their case. Along with other antisuffragists, Pearson was very bitter in defeat. Pearson, referring to the defeat, said:

I never in all the years before or since felt so empty a void in my life, as Lost Ideals! [I felt] not defeat, but disgrace for my native state, and my country! . . . But, that we men and women had to lose dishonorably--in defense of every compromise with the Nation's and the State's executive--embarrassed my self-respect, and it also lost something of trust never quite restored!⁶⁶

Pearson envisioned elite white women with new opportunities in education and careers, but she wanted women to have a "separate but equal" existence in politics and education. Her philosophy on women's political participation also gave her an accepted avenue to keep women like herself in control of women's issues in politics. Not only were women moving into the public sphere, but with the passage of the amendment, a decision had

⁶⁶Pearson, "My Story," 241.

been made to bring women directly into politics. The South changed faster than Pearson was willing to accept, and her carefully laid plans to bring women into the public sphere without mauling them in a world of corrupted politics failed.

Conclusion

I think Pearson is perplexing and paradoxical, because she was a progressive but also an elitist, and because she worked for women's opportunities yet rejected woman suffrage. These are the contradictory characteristics that make her interesting and allow insight into issues of race, class, and gender in the southern antisuffrage movement and into American women's movements. It is sad that Pearson was unable to progress beyond her ideas on women's role, and elitism. She was still able to make some progress for women in education and for economic development in the South, but women's role progressed farther than she desired. Therefore, by the mid-1920s, Pearson appeared very conservative compared to many of her contemporaries.

After Pearson withdrew as president of the Antisuffrage League in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment had been declared ratified, she continued her public efforts on behalf of women's education, white elitism, and southern values. In a letter to the editor of the Nashville Banner, Pearson discussed her commitment to leading the South forward, and having a southern man as president was one way to accomplish this. Pearson said, somewhat mischievously, "Even a former Tennessee antisuffrage President would vote for a Southern candidate for President of the United States."⁶⁹ In 1930, she spoke to the Association of

⁶⁹From a letter to the editor of the Nashville Banner, 10 August 1924, Pearson Papers.

the South West Texas College for Teachers on the need to educate women in order to make them responsible voters. Pearson said: "[Women] must be made intelligent voters . . . Her training in this must be fundamental, as well as broad on all state and national issues!"⁷⁰ Pearson believed white women must be given a proper education in order to protect politics from the influences of the uneducated, demonstrating her continued elitism. Pearson also remained involved in the Dixie Highway Association, and in 1935 gave her last speech before the Good Roads Association.

Even though Pearson remained concerned with political issues, she could never bring herself to vote. A family friend, a local mountain man from Monteagle, offered to vote for Pearson. He said, "You aint agoing to vote is you-you fit it too long and too hard! Tell us what you want voted and we'll vote for you!"⁷¹ Pearson accepted his offer, and William D. Bennett cast his ballot according to her advice every year. This gesture fit into Pearson's philosophy of indirect female influence, because she was able to influence how a man would vote without voting herself. Her racism also continued to influence her reluctance to use the ballot. While she was living in Memphis between 1931 and 1932, her friends finally convinced her that she should register to vote, and drove her to the assigned voting precinct on the day of the election. However, when Pearson went to cast

⁷⁰"Ideals-Past and Present-Their Influence on Education, Character and Culture of our Womanhood," Pearson Papers.

⁷¹Pearson, "My Story", 242.

her ballot, a group of "Negro" women ran in front of her. Pearson tore up her registration and walked out, never to return.⁷² Pearson spent the last years of her life in Nashville writing her memoirs ("Fading Tapestries") and letters to the editors of newspapers. She died on November 3, 1944, and was buried in Monteagle Cemetery.

Making sense of a loser in a historical battle is difficult, because such a person often has different ideas from those followed by the course of history. Pearson was a southern progressive and reformer. She championed change in gender roles, but she was unwilling to do away with the system of separate spheres. She worked for economic development in the South, yet sought to restrict universal democracy through elitism. She advocated elite white woman solidarity in pressure groups (a "separate but equal" position outside of politics) to secure her class's "control" of government. Pearson believed herself to be an exceptional woman; she felt she could lead groups of women and influence men. Her sense of importance is reflected in the way she wrote her personal memoirs, organized her papers and planned to have them placed at the Tennessee State Library and Archives so that they could one day be used for "dissertations in the making."⁷³

What does it say about me, the historian who fell into Pearson's trap and wrote about her? I do not think that Pearson

⁷²"Fading Tapestries," Pearson Papers.

⁷³Pearson, "My Story," 224.

used me to have her story told, but I used her to tell my story. Even though Pearson and I have gained a rapport as writer and subject, she is presented with every flaw flushed out. The historian that Pearson had in mind was someone who would glorify her and her ideas as being correct. The most interesting thing about her to me is that if I had lived in the 1920s I could have conceivably been like her, considering that we both are from Tennessee, have strong southern roots, and studied at Vanderbilt among other similarities. The possibility of which is horrifying, because of her philosophies on race, class and gender. But studying her has allowed me to understand not only her philosophies, but the larger dynamics of southern life at that time. It has also given me a different perspective on the problems of feminism.

Though Pearson's ideas may seem inconceivable to me, some very significant lessons can be learned from her. She instructs the student of the suffrage movement that southern antisuffragists were like their northern counterparts, because they actively participated in the public sphere and desired a limited change in women's role. However, the southern movement also shows that despite commonalities between the northern and southern movements, the distinctiveness of the southern movement must be understood as well.

More broadly, Pearson's significance lies in the questions she raised about race, class, gender and politics, in particular, the extent and quality of women's participation in politics after

they won the vote. Were "antis" right about women being more powerful as a non-partisan group? Were they right to claim that women would cease political lobbying after gaining the vote? Tennessee women, and many women of the South, did back down from political activity after they won the vote. Some women not only quit volunteer groups, but did not use their right to vote. In the first presidential election in which women could vote (1920), the number of voters did rise, but only by a small margin: in the 1916 presidential election, 153,282 people had voted, and in 1920 there was an increase to 206,558 people. Just four years later, in the 1924 presidential election, the number of voters decreased to 158,682. (This trend cannot be blamed solely on the apathy of women, because at this time there was also a national trend toward lower voter turnout.⁷⁴)

Also, after the suffrage campaign, several prominent Tennessee suffragists retired from public activism. Anne Dallas Dudley, the first president of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, retired from public view. Dudley retained a membership in the Tennessee League of Women voters, but not an active leadership role. Abby Milton, the last president of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association and the first president of the Tennessee League of Women Voters, resigned in 1922 from the League of Women voters and dropped out of public life.⁷⁵ Both

⁷⁴Ruth Anne Thompson, "After Suffrage: Women, Law and Policy in Tennessee, 1920-1980" Diss. Vanderbilt University, 1994, 22-23.

⁷⁵Ibid, 24-25.

women could have had an active public life ahead of them because they were still fairly young; Abby Milton was thirty-four in 1920,⁷⁶ and Dudley was forty-four.⁷⁷

Pearson's predictions were not completely correct, because many elite women did not cease political activism. Visible participation did seem to decline, because the fight for, and against, suffrage had involved a frenzy of atypical activity. Women who remained politically active after 1920 fought for social reforms such as regulation of child labor, education and broader governmental issues, but did not work for specific women's rights apart from women's jury service. Many women quit participation in women's groups to support political parties; therefore, as Pearson had feared, woman solidarity was weakened and women's issues became lost among partisan politics.⁷⁸

The irony is that Pearson, an antisuffrage leader, has a lesson for today's society about achieving women's rights. Women had trouble unifying behind any goal that all women desired, such as equal pay and equal rights. Women debated whether they should stand together as a group claiming common interest, or as individuals, in order to make progress as equals to men. The example of Pearson, her racism and elitism notwithstanding, suggests that women should reevaluate the strength of solidarity.

⁷⁶Abby Crawford Milton, Interview, August 1983, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁷⁷Wheeler, Votes for Women!, 162.

⁷⁸Thompson, 240.

Recent feminist thought concentrates on erasing societal sex definitions, but success at this would destroy the woman solidarity that might be needed to erase sex definitions. Individual action can only take women so far before the support system for the cause of women's rights is lost. As can be seen in the suffrage and antisuffrage movements, as well as in other women's movements, individual action and solidarity cannot stand alone. Therefore, a combination of both is the best tactic for women in achieving equality.

Solidarity among women could be a powerful weapon in accomplishing women's progress, but can this solidarity cross race and class lines? It is evident that the South in the 1920s was a highly stratified society. The public acceptability of Pearson's elitist definition of woman solidarity, and the elitist actions of suffragists towards African-Americans, show why it took such a long time to begin breaking down race barriers in the South. The rights of women and African-Americans have been connected since the days of slavery, because both subordinate roles helped to uphold the southern patriarchal society. Yet both groups were set at odds, despite their common oppression. White women have infrequently taken up the flag of their African-American sisters. Instead, white women joined the Ku Klux Klan, because of its work for "women's rights," in the fight for woman suffrage white women were secretive about their sympathy towards African-American rights, and "antis" were blatantly racist to keep woman suffrage from being passed. The women in these

movements used African-Americans in order to get what they desired.

Now, the barriers among race, class, and gender can be broken to achieve woman solidarity, because American society has become increasingly less stratified. For example, the movement for women's rights grew out of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. White and African-American women began in the sixties to identify with each other against a common oppressor, white men, but they still were not necessarily sympathetic towards one another. White middle class women should shed elitist attitudes (like Pearson's), and compare themselves with African-American and lower-class women in order to identify a thread of commonality among themselves. All women, no matter what race or class, experience many of the same things, such as motherhood and discrimination in the work place. These common characteristics need to be pushed farther to a universal woman solidarity that would be based solely upon women's common gender and experiences. Of course, a perfect solidarity of all women is unattainable, but solidarity among a diverse group of women can exist and be very powerful.

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