

THE POLITICS OF PERSUASION: THE LANGUAGE AND LIMITS
OF GENDER REFORM IN THE CAREER OF REBECCA LATIMER FELTON

by

MARGARET ELIZABETH BREARLEY

(Under the Direction of KATHLEEN A. CLARK)

ABSTRACT

Rebecca Latimer Felton, 1835-1930, was the first female senator in the United States. In 1922, when Felton was 87, the governor of Georgia appointed her to fill the position vacated at the death of the previous senator. Upon receiving the appointment, Felton declared that it was a sign that the men of Georgia recognized the achievements and efforts of Georgia women. Only two years earlier, however, Georgia had been the first state to refuse to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. The senatorial appointment, ironic as it was, allowed Felton to retell the story of her own efforts for gender equity as a linear, progressive narrative, one in which the position seemed an appropriate capstone. This thesis traces topography of Felton's long career seeking gender equity, with particular attention to her rhetorical tactics, her successful public persona, and her many oft-overlooked failings.

INDEX WORDS: Rebecca Latimer Felton, Georgia, gender, women's rights, woman suffrage, South, Civil War, Nineteenth Amendment, southern politics, rhetoric, women

THE POLITICS OF PERSUASION: THE LANGUAGE AND LIMITS
OF GENDER REFORM IN THE CAREER OF REBECCA LATIMER FELTON

by

MARGARET ELIZABETH BREARLEY

B.A., FURMAN UNIVERSITY, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2010

© 2010

MARGARET ELIZABETH BREARLEY

All Rights Reserved

THE POLITICS OF PERSUASION: THE LANGUAGE AND LIMITS
OF GENDER REFORM IN THE CAREER OF REBECCA LATIMER FELTON

by

MARGARET ELIZABETH BREARLEY

Major Professor: Kathleen A. Clark
Committee: Stephen W. Berry, II
James C. Cobb

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2010

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the folks who got me excited about history—namely, my mother, Tammy Brearley, and my cherished Furman University professors, Lloyd Benson and Timothy Fehler—and to Edwin Lewis, for enabling me to study what I love. Thank you, all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In graduate school, I have read *a lot* of books. I used to chuckle to myself about how many authors began their acknowledgments with a reference to the debts they had amassed, ones they could only hope to repay. Now, I get it. Graduate school, and in particular, thesis writing, has shown me how extensive my support network is and how fortunate I am to have the one that I do. Kathleen Clark has helped me translate my enthusiastic, fast-paced ramblings into a much more coherent argument. I am thankful for her well-constructed, thoughtful guidance and her patience. Professor and friend Steve Berry is one of the most enjoyable and thought-provoking conversationalists I know. In class or over a beer, brainstorming with Steve has helped shape how I see History in this world. As a seminar professor, Jim Cobb demonstrated for me how effective a teacher can be when they show equal dedication to their students and their discipline. His students are better for it; with his example, I hope that mine will be, too. Readers Kelly Byers, Tim Fehler, and Erika Mosteller slogged through the worst of this project with me. I am immensely thankful for their fresh eyes, keen insights, and willing spirits. I am so fortunate to have shared two years in this academic community with people who are enthusiastic about History and who care about this world. My graduate student colleagues routinely impress me, and their company has been a delight. And lastly, I am lucky to love and be loved. Thank you, Paul Greathouse, and my family members, John, Tammy, Lauren, Michael, and Caroline Brearley. You all mean the world to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 “DON’T SMILE AND SAY PSHAW!”: 1886 TO 1900	23
3 “THE DUTY OF MOTHERS”: THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY MOMENT.....	58
4 “VIRTUE AND BRAINS”: THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN	84
5 CONCLUSION.....	114
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	121

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In October of 1922, at the death of Senator Thomas E. Watson, Georgia Governor Thomas Hardwick appointed Rebecca Latimer Felton to fill the vacant senatorial position in the interim before the next senator, who would be elected the following month, could take a seat.¹ The appointment, which would make Felton the first female senator, made national news; with a thirty-nine-word headline, the *New York Times* proclaimed eighty-seven year old Felton the “first of [her] sex so honored.”² While it was doubtful that “Mrs. Felton [would] actually have an opportunity to qualify and sit in the Senate,” as her successor would be elected before the next congressional session began, the position was at least nominally secured.³

Fortunately, Felton later recounted, the newly-elected Senator Walter F. George “graciously refrained from presenting his credentials” at the November session until she had presented her own and taken a seat, rendering her a “full-fledged Senator.”⁴ While she only “sat” for forty-eight hours, that was ample opportunity for her to begin to define the significance of the appointment.⁵ Indeed, Felton was eager to proffer her own interpretation of the event, one in which she presented the senatorial appointment as a fitting recognition by men of women’s efforts, rather than allow the more obvious interpretation to take root, one that would expose the token nature of the appointment. Only three years earlier, in 1919, the Georgia Legislature had

¹ Rebecca Latimer Felton, *The Romantic Story of Georgia’s Women*, as told to Carter Brooke Jones (Atlanta: *The Atlanta Georgian and Sunday American*, 1930), 44.

² “Georgia Woman, 87, is Named As Senator; Mrs. W.H. Felton Is Appointed By Governor Hardwick to Fill Watson’s Place, First of Sex So Honored, Will Elect Successor Before She Can Take Seat, but Pay and Perquisites are Hers,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1922.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

refused to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, a decision that had been in keeping with the state leaders' lackluster record regarding not only suffrage, but other reforms urged by Felton to benefit or empower Georgia women, as well. While other dissenting states simply abstained from ratifying the amendment, Georgia legislatures were proud to go on record as the first state explicitly *to reject* the amendment.⁶ That Georgians could applaud themselves for appointing a woman for the Senate seat fewer than three years later appeared particularly disingenuous, especially in light of the brevity of the interim. It was in this context, then, that Felton sought to define the significance of the seat as more substantive than symbolic; in so doing, she hoped to demonstrate women's efforts to better their status in society—including her own extensive endeavors on behalf of women—as both worthwhile and successful.

“The women of the country have reason to rejoice,” Felton trumpeted in her inaugural address to her fellow senators.⁷ “This day a door has been opened to them that never was opened before.”⁸ Although she kept her senatorial address brief and spoke only for a few minutes, Felton capitalized on the legitimacy afforded her by the title “Senator” for the remaining eight years of her life. In her 1930 book, *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*, Felton framed her personal success as a collective achievement by the elite white women of her state.⁹ Remarking on the sentiment she felt as she delivered her senatorial address, Felton wrote: “I felt as I stood there, not that it was a personal triumph, but a well-deserved tribute to the women of Georgia and of the nation. I was merely the instrument.”¹⁰ In the same chapter, entitled “Senator Felton,” Rebecca defined more specifically what she believed women had done to earn such a

⁶ Rebecca Felton, “Came Upon the Invitation of Senators,” a 1919 address to the Georgia Legislature, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81,1.

⁷ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 44-47.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

“tribute” and the approval by men it conferred. She explained, “It was a gesture of recognition to the thousands of women who had worked so faithfully for the advancement of womankind and for the betterment of their communities and their nations.”¹¹ Through diligent effort, Felton argued, Georgia’s women had “moved steadily toward a greater destiny.” After more than half a century of struggle, the “emancipation of women” had occurred, and the “idea that boys have more sense than girls” had been squelched.¹²

In “a conservative old state like Georgia,” Felton wrote, such a transformation was “more startling than [any changes] in the new West or in the industrial East and North.”¹³ Felton recollected that in her childhood, quite “a stir” took place “the first time a woman lifted her voice in public at our little country church.” “Who in that day,” she continued, “would have had the hardihood to predict that the time would come when Georgia women would hold public office?”¹⁴ Downplaying the element of personal achievement the appointment signified, Felton presented it as a worthy capstone to the story of Georgia’s women. Women had been granted suffrage with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, but the senatorial seat evidenced to Felton that “equal rights [had indeed] been granted,” and that Georgia men had come to terms with women’s new social position.¹⁵ Women, Felton argued, had “won” the right to civic participation, and “it [was] up to them to make the best use of their long-awaited citizenship.”¹⁶ With masterful manipulation, Felton replaced women’s apparent failure, as evidenced by Georgia’s rejection of the woman suffrage amendment, with her senatorial appointment, which she presented as the hard-earned victory of women’s valiant crusade.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Felton concluded her book with an expression of pride in the progress the state had made and an optimistic outlook for the future of Georgia's women: "The star of Georgia is ascendant. The Empire State of the South moves toward a great and glowing future. With the shadows of a century lengthening about me, I salute the women of Georgia, and wish them well."¹⁷ Having "watched it [“the transition”] for nearly a century," Felton proclaimed with confidence that progress for Georgia's women would steadily continue through the following century, long after she passed.¹⁸ With her enthusiastic—and overly optimistic—assertions, Felton hoped to redefine the past in order to breathe new life into a faltering women's movement.¹⁹ Furthermore, Felton aimed to cement a positive legacy of the efforts made by southern women within her lifetime, including her own.

Many historiographical renderings of Felton have been clouded by the legacy that she carefully crafted and promoted, in which she inflated the significance of her senatorial seat; instead of acknowledging Felton's willingness to wield rhetoric to achieve her objectives—and her skill in doing so—these uncritical portrayals present both Felton and the progress of southern women much as Felton did in her final years. These depictions either focus solely on the senatorial appointment, as Josephine Mellichamp's 1976 *Senators from Georgia* does, or they overlook the token—and paternalistic—nature of the appointment, such as in Zell Miller's portrayal of Felton in *Great Georgians*.²⁰ While Felton emphasized the senatorial seat as a clear-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, eds. *Through Women's Eyes: An American History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 481. In many ways, "women's opportunities in the work force and access to political influence" were still limited in the 1920s and 1930s, despite the notable changes—and ostensible improvements—in their roles and rights.

²⁰ Josephine Mellichamp, *Senators from Georgia* (Huntsville, Alabama: Strode Publishers, 1976); Zell Miller, "Rebecca Ann Latimer Felton," in *Great Georgians* (Franklin Springs, Georgia: Advocate Press, 1983), 62-66 (quote on page 62). Zell Miller offers the following analysis of Felton's senatorial appointment: "Thus, Rebecca Latimer Felton climaxed her long, colorful, controversial career as a political mover-and-shaker by toppling the walls of male chauvinism in the World's Greatest Deliberative Body on November 21, 1922."

cut victory for equality and a fitting conclusion to her decades-long campaign to improve women's status, the appointment was actually an ambiguous indicator of her own career's success. Indeed, as a magnanimous gesture from powerful men to a single woman, the appointment of Felton to the senatorial seat was in keeping with the very traditions of patriarchy and paternalism that she had worked so hard to overturn. That Felton was actually the second choice for the position, which Governor Hardwick first offered to the deceased senator's wife, suggests that a number of women might have sufficed for the intended purpose of the governor, solely on the basis of their sex and status as widows to former legislators.²¹ Additionally, Felton was a friend and political ally to both Senator Watson and Governor Hardwick, and thus, she was a reasonable *personal* choice by the governor. While this connection does affirm Felton's success in securing a position of influence in the political culture of Georgia, it detracts from her assertion that the appointment represented a broader change in the hearts of Georgia's men regarding women's role in state politics.²²

Analyses such as those by Mellichamp and Miller, which overemphasize or misinterpret the importance of the senatorial seat, make the events of Felton's life appear inevitable and overlook the nuances of her intentions and activity. As the title suggests, A. Louise Staman's 2006 *Loosening Corsets: The Heroic Life of Georgia's Feisty Mrs. Felton, First Woman Senator of the United States* falls into this category, as it builds progressively to what Staman deems a much-deserved position in the Senate, which she attributes to Felton's feisty perseverance.²³

²¹ John E. Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960), 140.

²² Felton, "Marking Progress," *Macon Telegraph*, 1918; Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 141.

²³ A. Louise Staman, *Loosening Corsets: The Heroic Life of Georgia's Feisty Mrs. Felton, First Woman Senator of the United States* (Macon, Georgia: Tiger Iron Press, 2006).

In 1960, John Talmadge published *Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Story Decades* in an attempt to add dimension to the single-faceted portrayals of Rebecca Felton.²⁴ To present her as propelled by her own intentions, rather than fate, Talmadge offered his conjectured narration of Felton's decision-making thought processes; in so doing, Talmadge, who was trained academically in English, not History, rendered Felton more of a character than a historical actor. For example, Talmadge offered the following explanation of Felton's decision to write two speeches to offer to the Senate, so that she would be prepared whether she was offered or denied a seat:

The Washington papers had carried stories about the Republican meeting, the adverse opinion of Senate officials, and the warning that one Senator could block her. Even some of the women had doubted that she ought to risk being publicly embarrassed. The very idea! As if she would come all that way and not even try for her seat. And she didn't propose to just sit there either and let them turn her down. She may have told George she'd let the Senate "decide," but if they didn't decide in her favor they were going to hear from her. She'd look like a fool unless she said something. Carefully she wrote down her angry objections and went over them again.²⁵

Thus, while *Rebecca Latimer Felton* provides a well-researched and readable narrative, Talmadge does not offer a historical argument. For instance, Talmadge attributed much of Felton's personality to her Georgian heritage, for "Georgians have always been noted for their stubbornness."²⁶ Furthermore, the 1960 book lacks the benefit of more recent scholarship, particularly in the domains of gender and race. Talmadge argued that that Felton's self-confidence could be attributed, at least in part, to "kindly, fun-loving Negroes," who would

²⁴ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

“praise her and pet her and make her feel important” when she was a child.²⁷ On the whole, Talmadge’s work should be appreciated more as a foundational contribution to understandings of Felton than for its current relevance.

While for decades Talmadge’s work was the most oft-cited portrayal of Felton, LeeAnn Whites’ series of four essays, originally published between 1988 and 1998, has usurped the position once held by Talmadge’s monograph as the accepted, authoritative scholarly interpretation of Felton.²⁸ With these essays, Whites has reconciled many components of Felton’s persona that others have dismissed as simply paradoxical, such as her “conservative” racial politics and her “progressive” gender politics, though Whites’ models for doing so are not without flaws.²⁹ Furthermore, as her work on Felton is in essay form, there are a few limitations established by the medium in which she writes. While Whites writes at length about Felton’s life, even the collective entirety of the four essays fails to convey the significance and perspective provided by such a long lifespan as Felton’s ninety-four years.³⁰ Examined individually, the strengths and weaknesses of Whites’ arguments become readily apparent.

In her essay entitled “Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Problem of Protection in the New South,” Whites argues that there were inherent tensions in Felton’s attempts to “reconcile the old

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ LeeAnn Whites, “Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Problem of Protection,” in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Leacock (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 41-61; LeeAnn Whites, “Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife’s Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76 (Summer 1992): 354-72; LeeAnn Whites, “Love, Hate, Rape, Lynching: Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Politics of Racial Violence,” in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and its Legacy*, ed. David S. Cecelski and Timothy By. Tyson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 143-62; LeeAnn Whites, “The De Graffenried Controversy: Class, Race, and Gender in the New South,” *Journal of Southern History* 54 (Aug. 1988): 449-78. More recently, these essays on Rebecca Latimer Felton have been published more recently as part of LeeAnn Whites’ anthology, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). It is this edition and pagination that is referenced for the purpose of this examination. “The De Graffenried Controversy,” 127-150; “The Problem of Protection,” 151-166; “The Wife’s Farm,” 167-176; “The Gender Politics of Racial Violence,” 177-192.

²⁹ For an example, see Mary A. Hess, “A Call to Honor: Rebecca Latimer Felton and White Supremacy,” M.A. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1999. “Rebecca Felton is, like her mentor, Tom Watson, a paradox.”

³⁰ Whites, “The Problem of Protection”; Whites, “The Gender Politics of Racial Violence.”

values of protection and seclusion with the new realities of independence and public status for women.”³¹ According to Whites, Felton was nostalgic for an antebellum world in which white males provided security for their female counterparts. Whether buffering women from economic, sexual, social, or racial vulnerabilities, antebellum elite white men were expected to protect white women at any cost, according to Felton.³² Seen in this context, Felton’s post-war public and political activities, Whites argues, were not “as a result of any rejection of her domestic status but [as] an effort to protect it.”³³ Asserting that “no clear-cut... power for women” was established in Felton’s lifetime, Whites effectively avoids the “senatorship as summit” model of Felton’s life once championed by historians, opting instead for the following analysis:

Ironic as it may appear in light of the Georgia legislature’s refusal to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment less than three years earlier, the token appointment of Rebecca Felton as the first woman to sit in the U.S. Senate was perhaps the most fitting expression of the pattern of elite white gender relations that had developed in the postbellum South. As an honor graciously bestowed on her by the governor, not a right that Felton herself had earned, it marked the end, not the beginning of a notable political career.³⁴

While Whites appropriately concludes that the elite white men of the South maintained their paternalist prerogatives into the 1920s, her analysis is less successful in regard to Felton’s own efforts and intentions for realizing gender equity in southern society.

Whites argues that “the decline of social and economic power of the planter class” after the war simultaneously “opened the door for the emergence of greater gender equity between the

³¹ Whites, “The Problem of Protection in the New South,” 151.

³² *Ibid.*, 153.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

sexes” and “reinforced the value of home ‘protection’ and thus, the ideal of gender dominance by men.”³⁵ Indeed, in the 1880s and 1890s Felton did expect men to protect their wives as part of their obligations as men. What Whites overlooks, however, is that Felton consciously employed rhetoric of an imagined antebellum past to persuade men to fulfill their traditional masculine roles in very new ways, many of which involved providing new opportunities and even allocating power to women, such as decision-making authority within their households, increased education and economic independence, and a greater say over their children’s lives—all of which profoundly challenged men’s power within their households, which in turn established their capacity to act in public as well.³⁶ In Felton’s ideal, which was decidedly *not* “gender dominance,” the elite white men and women of the South would retain their gender distinctions in a society that equally valued the needs and interests of each sex, and husbands and wives would share in the decision-making processes of their individual households. Thus, Felton neither “agonized over the trade-offs between freedom [for women] and protection,” nor was she “impelled backward to nostalgia for the hierarchies of patriarchy [of the Old South].”³⁷ Felton’s apparent adherence to traditional gender expectations in the late nineteenth century was a rhetorical tool, not a reluctant concession in an effort to preserve the status of elite white women in the hierarchies of the South; thus, the story of Rebecca Latimer Felton was not “ambivalent and contradictory” as Whites argues in “The Problem of Protection.”³⁸

In a second essay, “The Wife’s Farm,” Whites argues that Felton shifted from “progressive gender reform to reactionary race politics.”³⁹ In the early part of the essay,

³⁵ Ibid., 165.

³⁶ For more on this subject, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁷ Ibid., 154.

³⁸ Ibid., 164.

³⁹ Whites, “The Wife’s Farm,” in *Gender Matters*, 174.

regarding the gender reforms, Whites correctly identifies that Felton sought to achieve gender equity by entreating men to address their attentions toward their homes and reform their activities therein.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Whites offers a valid explanation of the challenge Felton faced: “Only when farm men recognized domestic life as primary in the construction of their *own* self-worth, in their *own* understanding of what constituted the basis of their manhood, only then would they truly be able to value it in their wives.”⁴¹ Whites argues that Felton used “social analogies,” such as comparing the treatment of slave women and farmer wives, “alternatively to shame and to goad” southern men.⁴²

Indeed, Felton did occasionally employ such tactics, and she did so increasingly in the twentieth century; however, in the 1890s, her primary tactic focused less on getting men to act out of “goodwill” and empathize with their wives interests than Whites’ argument suggests. Felton did explicitly acknowledge that southern women were “entitled to rather more respect” than they often received; in her addresses to men, however, Felton appealed to men as the self-interested creatures she believed them to be rather than simply trying to “shame” or “goad” them into becoming selfless.⁴³ Leveraging southern traditions of manhood, Felton offered new definitions of men’s obligations as husbands, fathers, and legislators that would promote gender equity; if men wanted to preserve their manhood, Felton argued, they would act to improve the status of their wives, including their capacity to share in financial decision making, which they were obligated to do.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Felton, “Address Made in Atlanta at State Convention,” 1887, in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*. 294.

Certainly, Felton rhetorically invoked southern traditions of shame by suggesting that men would default on their manhood if they did not fulfill their obligations to women.⁴⁴ However, even as she did employ shame, she did not seek to detach men from their own interests entirely. Felton did not strive for the “emancipation of the southern farmer... from its thralldom to the market” as Whites argues.⁴⁵ Instead, Felton proposed to men that by fulfilling their gendered obligation to provide better conditions, opportunities, and shared authority for their wives, they would not only preserve their manhood, but they could also achieve financial success and a flourishing South. Thus, while humiliation could potentially come to the man who failed to heed her advice, Felton did not rely on shame alone to direct the activities of men, as she was keenly aware that their intense self-interest could trump any shame she could leverage. As years progressed, however, Felton would increasingly employ shame unabashedly, particularly in her fight for woman suffrage; in the woman suffrage movement of the 1910s, Felton no longer understood women’s rights to be exclusively achievable through the elite white men of Georgia, so she could openly use shame with less concern as to the repercussions.

The second half of “The Wife’s Farm” focuses on what Whites believes is a turn by Felton to “a gender politics grounded in white supremacy [that] indicated her own fears of the hopelessness for a gender politics grounded in economic, or class, equity with white men.”⁴⁶ Though Felton did go out of her way to trumpet the alleged crime of black-on-white rape and famously condoned lynching outright, for Felton such arguments were not a sign that she had given up on gendered equity with white men, whether measured in class terms or otherwise. Rather than seeking primarily to uphold white supremacy when she employed the rhetoric of

⁴⁴ For more on southern tradition and shame, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Wyatt-Brown argues that “the reigns of guilt and shame” were “internalized from an early age [and] could be extremely dangerous” (133).

⁴⁵ Whites, “The Wife’s Farm,” 171.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

rape, however, Felton was utilizing another tactic to persuade men of their obligations to women, as she expected men to act as protectors against women's racial fears. Ultimately, when men failed to heed her urgings by the turn of the century, Felton enlisted the help of other white women to hold their men accountable to both women's interests and those of society. Whites argues effectively that "white female gender privilege [was] inextricably fused to race," but her insights on racist language from Felton are misguided. Rather than a sign that Felton had given up on gendered equity or transferred her attentions elsewhere, such language was an indication that Felton was redoubling her efforts to hold men accountable to issues of women's interest, racial or otherwise.⁴⁷

Indeed, many historians have focused on Felton's racial views. As Whites mentions in "The Gender Politics of Racial Violence," Felton delivered a speech in 1897 on Tybee Island that made headlines for its "sensational" racial language.⁴⁸ In her argument regarding the protection of white women from rape by black men, Felton issued her most oft-quoted remark. If "lynching [is required] to protect woman's dearest possession from the ravening human beasts—then I say lynch, a thousand times a week, if necessary," Felton argued, demonstrating both the extent of her expectations for white men and her racist views.⁴⁹ As this quotation and her senatorial appointment are the two most well-known features of Felton's life, it is not surprising that many historians have undertaken examinations of Felton's racism and its relationship to Felton's more progressive attempts at gender reform. Although some have deemed the two facets difficult to reconcile, the common denominator is actually quite simple: Felton sought to improve the position of elite white women in society through whatever means

⁴⁷ Ibid., 176. In fact, Felton devoted relatively space to lynching in her speeches and editorials; certainly the controversial nature of the subject has magnified

⁴⁸ Whites, "The Gender Politics of Racial Violence," 181.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

necessary, whether by calling on men to protect women's interests or by increasing women's right to promote their own interests.

Indeed, Felton's racial convictions were shaped by the society in which she lived, and she was no less racist than many of her contemporaries. Even still, Felton did not argue about the threat of black men as frequently as the intensity of her remark on lynching would suggest. Indeed, even as Felton sometimes turned to racist rhetoric to further her cause for white women, she also realized that by identifying black men as dangerous she risked providing justification for—white men to curtail the role of white women in public. Thus, Felton limited her arguments about troubled race relations to instances in which she was promoting white women's interests and race could be leveraged, either to encourage white men to act, such as with prohibition legislation, or to justify women acting, such as in the woman suffrage movement. This thesis argues that Felton's efforts to improve the status of elite white women were the driving force in her career; thus, her rhetoric about African Americans will be considered in so far as she utilized contemporary discussions of race to further that goal.⁵⁰

Throughout her career, Felton's primary objective remained the same: to rectify the gender disparities between elite white men and women of the postwar South. For Felton, the Civil War placed in stark relief the inability of women to survive in society independent of men. Furthermore, Felton believed women to be undervalued domestically and underrepresented socially. Throughout the course of her career—which began officially when Felton joined the Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1886 and ended with her death in 1930—Felton pursued a variety of campaigns to procure a more equitable relationship between men and women and a more agreeable position for women in society. During this forty-five year career,

⁵⁰ For studies which focus more exclusively on Felton's racial views, see Mary A. Hess's "A Call to Honor" or Whites' "Gender Politics of Racial Violence."

Felton's understandings shifted in regard to the following: what the ideal expression of gender equity in society was, who was responsible for such a change, and how she could best encourage the responsible party to take action.

Felton's own life experiences, including the hardships and dislocations of war, helped to shape her commitment to gender reform and provided a strong foundation for her eventual career in public life. Rebecca Ann Latimer was born in 1835 in DeKalb County, Georgia, to a slaveholding family of strong standing socially and financially.⁵¹ Years later, in her 1919 book, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, Felton devoted thirty-eight pages to her "kinspeople," asserting that even at the risk of "appearing egotistical," it was necessary to account for her lineage.⁵² After providing a "compilation of genealogical data" to demonstrate her connection, Felton transitioned to the history of Georgia, and credited "this influx of cultivated people," her own family members, who hailed "from states that had superior advantages in wealth and culture," with uplifting the state of Georgia.⁵³ These early advantages trickled down the family line, and Felton enjoyed the best of life in Georgia.

Provided by her family with the finest education that could be obtained and a well-connected social network within which to succeed, Felton thrived both academically and socially.⁵⁴ She was extensively educated, attending school from the age of five through her 1852 college graduation from Madison Female College at age seventeen. The impact of this education on Felton was two-fold. First, education provided her with training in the machinations of rhetoric and oratory. As a student, Felton took courses such as composition, and later, as valedictorian, she delivered her first public address at her graduation ceremony, on which the

⁵¹ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 10.

⁵² Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁴ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 6-9.

Augusta *Chronicle* reported that she “read in a clear and beautifully-modulated voice” with “freshness of her religious emotions and her genuine enthusiasm.”⁵⁵ Rebecca prized her educational opportunities, which she believed enabled her culturally and morally, and many of her agendas later in the century centered on making education available to other white women.⁵⁶ By the 1910s, when elite white women were indeed increasingly educated, Felton would cite the growing class of educated elite white women as a justification for women’s suffrage.⁵⁷

Shortly after graduation, Rebecca married the graduation speaker, William Felton, the son of a locally prominent family, who had already achieved success as a doctor, minister, and politician.⁵⁸ While her family was likely pleased by her new husband’s status, it is improbable that they could have predicted the trajectory that her life—and career—would take alongside him. Later, Rebecca’s lineage, name, and networking would enable her to obtain a position of public prominence. First, however, the couple established themselves in Cartersville, Georgia, and began a family shortly after their 1853 marriage. Within the decade, the couple had—and lost—three children, two of whom died during the family’s wartime displacement as refugees in Macon, Georgia.⁵⁹ Years later Felton would cite her children as evidence of her maternal nature and their deaths as justification for her to care for the orphans of the Confederate dead, as she had lost the opportunity to mother her own children.⁶⁰ Although the Civil War inspired elite

⁵⁵ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 8-9, 11. These quotations from the Augusta *Chronicle* article are found in Talmadge’s analysis on page 11.

⁵⁶ Felton, “McRae Address,” August 1899, RLF MS81 11:4; Felton, “Underprivileged White Girls,” an address to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, approximately mid-1890s, RLFMS81 11:4; Felton, “Textile Education for Georgia Girls,” 1898, RLF MS81, 11:5.

⁵⁷ Felton, “The Women of Our Country,” 1916, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 3.

⁵⁸ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 9, 11-12, 14.

⁵⁹ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 13-15. William Felton already had one child, Ann, from his first marriage to Ann Carlton who died shortly after giving birth to Ann. The Feltons had son John Latimer in 1854, daughter Mary Eleanor in 1856, and son William Harrell, Jr. in 1859. Mary died in infancy, William died of measles during the war, and John died of malaria, also during the war.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Felton, “Wards of the State,” 1895, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Box 9.

white southern women to act in different ways, the Civil War shaped the “entire adult life [of the elite white woman], upsetting all the normal expectations for a woman of her class and education, and leaving memories that never faded,” argues Christopher J. Olsen, a historian of Fanny Andrews.⁶¹

During the war, Felton tasted her first true experience of life in public as a member of a Ladies’ Aid Society, which provided supplies and support to Confederate troops.⁶² After the war ended, necessity continued, as the Feltons found their plantation in physical and economic ruin. In an effort to rebuild their finances and their community, the couple opened a school in which both William and Rebecca taught.⁶³ In the 1870s, William Felton campaigned for Congress and served two terms, and Rebecca played a substantial role in each campaign and term. During the campaigns, she served as campaign manager for her husband, and then in Washington, she served as his secretary.⁶⁴ In the late 1870s and early 1880s, the Feltons began a newspaper as a platform from which to promote William and his political agendas. In the 1880s, when the manager they had employed left the job, Felton took the reins herself. Writing extensively, Felton honed her style of address and her areas of interest at the newspaper, and this experience was a formative stepping-stone to the career of public speaking that she would soon adopt.

In the mid-1880s, Rebecca transitioned from “their” politics to her own, and Chapter Two, “Don’t Smile and Say Pshaw!,” focuses on her efforts between 1886 and 1900. Two decades after the close of war, the tumultuous post-war conditions of the South still had not been

⁶¹ Christopher J. Olsen, “Eliza Frances Andrews (1840-1931): ‘I Will Have to Say ‘Damn!’ Yet, Before I Am Done with Them,’” in *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times, Vol. I*, ed. Ann Short Chirhart and Betty Wood, 147-172 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 149.

⁶² LeeAnn Whites, “Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Problem of Protection in the New South,” in *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 151-165. 153. Though Felton writes about her work during the war to help soldiers, I have not seen her explicitly identify the organization as a Ladies Aid Society (LAS), but to help place it in a regional context, I thought it best to acknowledge Whites’s finding that it was a LAS.

⁶³ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 23.

⁶⁴ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 25, 30.

rectified, and women appeared just as vulnerable socially and economically as they had been twenty years before. Even as Felton was personally familiar with political goings on, and had even developed a voice of through newspaper writing, she entered the southern political culture via an organization of women. By joining the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1886, Felton gained access to a public forum from which to speak and advocate for reform. While Felton devoted her rhetorical skills to a number of causes, the redistribution of power along gendered lines was her chief concern. Although she believed men and women to be very different creatures, Felton expected that society should address the distinct needs of the sexes equitably. Felton gained her footing in the public forum through the WCTU, and once the United Daughters of the Confederacy was formed in 1894, Felton spoke regularly at their events as well.⁶⁵ As a talented and enjoyable orator, Felton quickly established herself as a legitimate public speaker, capable of operating even outside the bounds of women's organizations.

Whether arguing for temperance or legislative provisions to care for the descendants of Confederate dead, Felton hoped to shift men's focus away from "caring for their own promotion" so as to end "the absolute ignoring of the other sex and its large majority of interests."⁶⁶ As Felton's position in the public sphere was tenuous, she was careful to present herself as an ideal southern woman while simultaneously demonstrating enough assertiveness to affect change. Felton's solution was to couch the actions she desired of men in terms of male obligation and tradition and to cast her own role as traditionally feminine. While other southern women, such as Mildred Lewis Rutherford, crafted their own public roles in similar ways, most

⁶⁵ DuBois, *Through Women's Eyes*, 281.

⁶⁶ Felton, "Textile Education for Girls," September 7, 1898.

did so to promote much narrower platforms, such as education, or extensive platforms that were not intended to empower women as Felton did.⁶⁷

Indeed, the changes that Felton desired for women, such as increased domestic authority or financial independence, were far from traditional, however; by calling on men to fulfill their obligations as defined by their roles as husbands, fathers, and legislators—and as subtly redefined by Felton—she hoped to persuade men to care for women’s needs in dramatically new ways. If men did not act as she prescribed, she suggested that they could no longer consider themselves honorable southern men. Any man who wanted to preserve his manhood and restore the South was to act in ways that would benefit and improve the status of his wife and daughter, according to Felton. As she challenged southern men to improve the condition and capacities of southern women, Felton was careful, however, to embrace conventional understandings of separate male and female roles and identities, and she emphasized the ways in which changes benefitting women would simultaneously benefit men and southern society at large.

Chapter Three, “The Duty of Mothers,” discusses the moment at the turn of the century in which Felton’s strategy changed. Frustrated with men’s refusal to fulfill the obligations that she had outlined, Felton endorsed a strategy in which she encouraged elite white women *en masse* to advocate for their own interests. If women sufficiently influenced public opinion, Felton hoped, perhaps men would be forced to tend to issues of women’s interest, such as prohibition. Felton suggested journalism, volunteer organizations, and petitions as options for women to promote their own interests. While Felton herself was comfortable in public, many of her male and female contemporaries were not as enthusiastic about women joining that arena. Again, using language of obligation and tradition, Felton placed the new behaviors she endorsed in traditional

⁶⁷ Sarah Case, “Mildred Lewis Rutherford (1851-1928): The Redefinition of New South White Womanhood,” in *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times, Vol. I*, ed. Ann Short Chirhart and Betty Wood, 272-296 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 272.

terms. Speaking primarily to women, now, and mirroring the rhetoric of women reformers throughout the country who argued that women had a particular duty to act as ‘social housekeepers,’ Felton argued that as women were virtuous, moral creatures, they had an obligation, as mothers and women, to share their virtue with the men of society, who were innately incapable of promoting morality for society. Whereas even before the Civil War women had promoted this morality, albeit in a more subtle fashion, within their homes, in the twentieth century Felton encouraged—and even necessitated—that southern women do so beyond the bounds of their homes. In so doing, women could halt the moral declension of society *and* contribute to the momentum of progress that characterized the twentieth century.

To preserve her legitimacy as a public figure, and in particular, as one worthy of emulation by masses of elite white southern women, Felton had to devote additional energy to crafting a viable public persona. Felton presented herself as she wished to be perceived, and downplaying both the more controversial elements of her life, such as the time she had owned and managed a newspaper in the 1870s and 1880s, and the more conservative elements of her life, such as the ideal woman she had presented herself to be in the late nineteenth century. Still promoting gender difference, Felton sought gender equity at the turn of the century with an army of elite white women to help her promote the reforms she desired.

Chapter Four, “Virtue and Brains,” begins with Felton’s frustrations at the failure of public agitation to produce comprehensive gender reforms, either in the legislative books or in the hearts and mentalities of elite white men. As she had not been able to persuade men of a masculine obligation to care for women’s needs in the previous century, and women, *en masse*, had been ineffective in obtaining wide-sweeping reforms via men in the early twentieth century, Felton shifted tactics yet again. As men seemed to be the problem in addressing the issues of

women's interest, Felton decided that women should be enfranchised. To men, Felton presented the issue as one in which they had lost their privilege; by failing women in a number of ways, and in particular, by causing and losing the Civil War, men had lost their claim on the exclusive privileges of manhood, such as suffrage.⁶⁸ If men were interested in regaining their masculinity, Felton argued, they could do so by acknowledging the morality of mothers and the capabilities of women and responding to this dual entitlement accordingly—by providing women with the franchise. Even as northern suffragist—and former president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)—Anna Howard Shaw “ridiculed antisuffragists for their constant appeals to traditional images of women” in 1914, Felton employed such traditional images in a southern context to promote woman suffrage.⁶⁹

To reinforce her argument, Felton reminded elite white men that one of their failings was that they had given newly freedmen the vote, even as—so she argued—those men had not asked for it, did not want it, and were not prepared for it. As elite white women were entitled, prepared, and interested, men would be foolish—and indeed irresponsible—not to grant them suffrage, Felton argued. So as to not appear too desperate, Felton avowed that women would obtain the vote with or without the help of the men of Georgia. Even though Felton would prefer Georgia's men to enfranchise women, her confidence that the vote would be secured for women regardless allowed her to speak with an emboldened tone. Thus, the time was limited in which

⁶⁸ Other southern women, such as Mary Gay, continued to rally behind the “Lost Cause” ideology even well into the twentieth century. While Gay, who lived eighty-nine years between 1829-1918, was alive for roughly the same time period as Felton, her beliefs followed a much different trajectory. As Felton decried the elite white men who had instigated the Civil War, Gay was “famous for wearing mourning clothes in honor of her Civil War dead” in the “last years of her life,” explains historian Michele Gillespie in “Mary Gay (1829-1918): Sin, Self, and Survival in the Post-Civil War South,” in *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times, Vol. I*, ed. Ann Short Chirhart and Betty Wood, 199-223 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 199.

⁶⁹ Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4-5, 57.

men could regain their masculinity before their shameful betrayal of Georgia women would be overturned by national fiat.

In 1918, southern congressmen, including Georgia's own representatives, attempted to defeat the vote in the House of Representatives for the Suffrage Amendment.⁷⁰ Felton chided the men of Georgia for neither taking care of women nor allowing women to take care of themselves with the vote, and Felton brazenly declared that southern chivalry had vanished.⁷¹ In 1919, when the vote was up for ratification, Felton again entreated the men of the state, this time to ratify. Instead, the legislature opted to refuse to ratify, a decision that stung Felton, who deemed the men "the most uncompromising woman-haters in the known world."⁷² Felton looked forward to the time when Georgia had to "take it all back" once women were granted suffrage.⁷³ Frustratingly, many of the objections that Georgia's men used to justify their opposition to woman suffrage came from a political culture based on understandings of distinct gender roles that Felton had helped to entrench in her efforts to preserve her own legitimacy, though Felton did not acknowledge her complicity as a contributing factor. How is it, then, that Felton is remembered primarily as a success story?

Chapter Five, the Conclusion, explains that after nearly fifty years of advocating for gender equity, Felton had had very few concrete successes. Nevertheless, Felton *was* able to maintain a public presence for almost half a century. Felton's rhetorical tactics, including her attention to tradition and her strategic self-positioning, helped ensure her personal success, as gauged by her staying power and her eligibility for the senatorial appointment. These very tactics, however, also contributed to her demise, as she helped entrench tradition and gender

⁷⁰ Felton, "Opposing Equal Suffrage," *New York Tribute* editorial, 1918.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Felton, "To the Georgia Senate, Assembled in Atlanta," 1919.

⁷³ Felton, "Some Reasons Why the General Assembly Failed to Ratify," editorial sent to the *Atlanta Constitution*, 1919.

inequity more than she affected reforms that established gender equity. Ironically, the token senatorial appointment, which said more for Felton's personal career than for her political career, enabled Felton to use self-presentation in a new, more effective way; by aligning her story, the story of Georgia's women, and a progressive narrative that ended in suffrage and a senatorial seat, Felton was able to rewrite her story and craft the legacy she wanted preserved.

CHAPTER 2

“DON’T SMILE AND SAY PSHAW!”: 1886 TO 1900

In the wake of the Civil War, after fire had ceased and troops retreated, the destruction of the South was immeasurable. Beyond body counts and buildings razed, which generated a host of challenges to rebuilding, the very order of society had been subverted, an upheaval that was felt by all. Stability, which had hinged upon antebellum hierarchies of race, class, and gender, was toppled by the abolition of slavery, the evaporation of wealth, and wartime alterations in gender capacities.¹ “‘All the relations of life’ became simultaneously vexed and uncertain,” explains historian Drew Gilpin Faust.² The debilitated elite, who had once enjoyed the society’s prerogatives, were eager to dictate the manner in which the South—and its hierarchies—would be rebuilt and their power restored. The enormity of the task, however, rendered a quick solution impossible; indeed, for years, prominent public figures issued and modified templates for the postwar South. Thus, when Rebecca Felton entered the public forum in her own right in 1886, she understood the healing process of the South to be ever ongoing and the Civil War still, more than two decades after it concluded, to be a legitimate lever for influencing public opinion.

William and Rebecca Felton had endured a multitude of hardships during the war, suffering from both the widespread troubles of the South and more intimate, familial heartaches.

Dr. Felton cared for soldiers as a physician, while Rebecca Felton nursed the wounded, sewed

¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 6-7, 51. While several repercussions of the war contributed to the financial instability of the postwar South, many southerners, including Felton, identified the abolition of slavery as one of the primary causes for financial ruin. Because emancipation was uncompensated, slave owners were forced to absorb the cost of the lost capital when slaves were freed. Former slaveholders found their financial losses troubling but were even more fearful of losing their power and social standing, as those could be much harder to regain than dollars and cents.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

uniforms, and prepared other goods for soldiers' use.³ The biggest challenge to the Feltons' lifestyle, however, was not their new roles, but their wartime displacement. Fearing for their safety in Cartersville, Georgia, the family relocated with many of their slaves to the area near Macon, Georgia. As refugees, the Feltons experienced food shortages and uncomfortable living conditions, but their primary hardship was sickness.⁴ During their stint near Macon, the family lost both of their children, two young sons, William and John, to measles and malaria, respectively, deaths that Rebecca Felton attributed to their poor living conditions.⁵ While Felton grieved the loss of her sons for years, she identified other elements of her refugee experience as points of pride.⁶ Felton later claimed that she had been the primary advocate of the family move to Macon, and with similar satisfaction she recounted standing up boldly to a trooper who invaded the family's refugee home. As Felton recounted the story, she spoke assertively to the officer and persuaded him to allow the family to keep their prized saddle horses.⁷ Historian Drew Faust's analysis that "the refugee experience could... reinforce class perceptions and identity," as only the elite could afford such a move, appropriately describes Rebecca Felton's wartime experience.⁸ It was this identity—that of a bold, self-displaced, and self-sacrificing elite

³ John E. Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960), 18; Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also: Addresses Before Georgia's Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 101-102.

⁴ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 21; Rebecca Latimer Felton, *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*, as told to Carter Brooke Jones (Atlanta: *The Atlanta Georgian and Sunday American*, 1930), 18-19.

⁵ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 22-24. William Felton had a daughter, Annie, from a previous marriage who was still alive at the time. Both of the couple's children together, however, died during the war. Later they would have two more children, one of whom would die in infancy.

⁶ George C. Rable argues that the refugee experience was a decided marker of "the collapse of civilian morale"; *Civil Wars* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 201. While Felton's review of her time as a refugee does demonstrate her anger at the gall of Sherman's army, her experiences as a refugee subsequently served as points of pride, and in a sense, morale boosters, even though the experience as a refugee was not explicitly a positive one.

⁷ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 21.

⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 7.

woman—that Felton most readily claimed in the decades following the war, though her public career also led her to present alternative personas, depending on her audience and objective.

At war's end, the Feltons returned to their Cartersville plantation and found “desolation and destruction everywhere, grinding poverty.”⁹ “We had no crops, our home was in ruins, and we faced destitution,” Felton later recalled, explaining that “necessity spoke” and that she and her husband realized that they “both must become wage-earners” to rebuild their lives.¹⁰ The Feltons opened a school near their home, where Rebecca taught piano lessons and shouldered her half of the academic teaching responsibilities. After this two-year incursion into the wage-earning world, Felton later recollected, she “went back to the life of a farmer's wife,” in the “new South,” which “struggled grimly out of its ashes and poverty.”¹¹

While Rebecca Felton's recollections accurately portrayed the state of the Felton farm and the couple's experiences as teachers, her assertion that her life returned to that of a farmer's wife was deceptive. Intentionally couching her personal activity in traditional, socially acceptable terms was a tactic that Felton employed frequently throughout her life, and this 1930 framing was no exception. Even though Felton could—and often did—officially claim a status as a farmer's wife, the more notable cultivation in Felton's life between the late 1860s and early 1880s had little to do with crops or soil; instead, it was this period in which Rebecca Felton was nurturing her understanding of public forums, political processes, and rhetorical finesse. Later, Rebecca would wield her familiarity with these domains in attempts to achieve her own objectives for the South and for herself.

⁹ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

In 1874, Dr. Felton ran for Congress, a process in which his wife played no small part. It was a “whirlwind campaign which I managed,” Rebecca later reflected, recounting her contributions:

From June until the election in November I was in the thick of it. We had no daily paper in the district and only two little weeklies. Working day and night, I wrote hundreds of letters and sent them all over 14 counties... I made Dr. Felton’s speaking appointments, planned other speakers for him, answered newspaper attacks—in short, did everything a campaign manager does.¹²

With the help of Rebecca, Dr. Felton secured the position, which was quite an accomplishment given the political quagmire of his congressional district, and the family relocated to the Washington, DC.¹³ As her husband had “no appropriation for clerical help,” Rebecca shifted her efforts from those of campaign manager to “Dr. Felton’s secretary”:

I learned how to draft my husband’s bills, and I kept track of the House calendars, the committees, and all legislation in which he was particularly interested. And then there were the letters to be written and requests of constituents pressed before the various governmental departments. It was a busy life.¹⁴

To canvass for Dr. Felton in a subsequent congressional race in the late 1870s, the Feltons began a newspaper. The *Free-Press* was intended to promote the independent ideals

¹² Ibid., 30.

¹³ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 32-34. The Democratic Party had recently regained control of the state, and in 1874, the State Executive Committee decided to endorse Colonel L. N. Trammel for the seat from the Seventh District. Newspapers with Democratic leanings, such as the Atlanta *Constitution*, published articles and editorials supporting Trammel, as well. Although William Felton shared many of the Party’s beliefs, he was disgruntled with how domineeringly the party was operating within the state, and decided to run against Trammel as an Independent. Talmadge quotes Felton as claiming that he was a member of the “producing class” of Georgia, whose efforts “were only serving to cancel... the expenditures of the legislature.” Talmadge argues that Felton’s intention was to dismantle “corruption in the party’s entrenched hierarchy.”

¹⁴ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 30.

William Felton espoused—and to deny the charges that Dr. Felton was a radical or a sympathizer to the North.¹⁵ Although Rebecca’s role at the newspaper in its early stages was relatively small, as she wrote only the occasional article to promote her husband or defend him against an attacker, her role quickly evolved in scope. By the 1880s, Mrs. Felton wrote regularly, and at the death of the newspaper’s editor in the middle of the decade, Rebecca took the reins of the paper, writing, editing, and running the production on her own.¹⁶

While Rebecca spent the two decades immediately after the war engrossed in her husband’s endeavors, other elite white women were wrestling with their own changed position in society. During the war, according to historian LeeAnn Whites, necessity had drawn elite, white women “out of their dependent status and into the independent place previously occupied by their men,” with many of these women “forming autonomous public organizations, entering wage labor, and directing their own households.”¹⁷ After the war, according to Whites, elite white women were “in a critical position,” in which they had to determine whether they would “continue to pursue the apparently independent roles the war had opened to them” or “‘stand by their men’ and in that way play a critical role in the reconstruction, rather than the further deconstruction, of southern white manhood.”¹⁸ Although a number of women’s organizations developed immediately after the war, the most notable of which were the Ladies Memorial Associations (LMAs), Whites insists that their public presence “constituted no assertion of

¹⁵ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 50-52. Felton’s ideals were not particularly radical, even by the party’s standards, but by distancing himself from the Democratic Party apparatus, he became an easy target.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80; Rebecca Latimer Felton, “The Southern Woman as a Journalist,” 1900, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, 27.

¹⁷ LeeAnn Whites. “Stand By Your Man,” in *Women of the American South: A Multicultural Reader*, ed. Christie Farnham (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 136. Earlier historical arguments, such as George C. Rable’s *Civil Wars*, offered arguments that after Confederate defeat women were “aimless and disoriented” and thus were uninterested in participating in public activities, retreating instead to their own private, domestic lives. Since Rable’s 1989 argument, subsequent historians have largely agreed that women participated in the public sphere in a substantial way, though they have differed in their analyses of what motivated women to participate and what their objectives were for society.

women's individual rights, autonomy, or equality with men."¹⁹ Instead, she argues, such organizations were simply a very public assertion by women eager to accept "their own continued subordination" and restore "their men's self image" in exchange for the stability of antebellum gender hierarchies.²⁰

While subsequent historians have acknowledged that elite women worked to reconstruct southern manhood in the decades following the war, they have also argued that southern women acted to further a diverse set of interests and succeeded in establishing themselves as a significant presence in late-nineteenth century public life. That elite white men approved—and encouraged—such public demonstrations by women reflects the strength of the Lost Cause ideology, according to historian Karen Cox, who explains that "among other things, this class-based narrative [the Lost Cause ideology] held elite white women in high esteem and suggested that their wartime sacrifices afforded them a place of honor in the postwar South."²¹ Although their creation might have been intended to maintain traditional roles and hierarchies, the increasing presence of women's organizations contributed to "a continued enhancement of female consciousness," explains Drew Faust.²² Building on the momentum established by the Ladies Memorial Associations, a number of women's organizations emerged in the 1870s and 1880s. While many southern women coalesced under the explicit banner of defending Confederate honor, a plethora of additional motivations inspired women to organize, argues

¹⁹ Whites, "Stand By Your Man," 136, 141; Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 3.

²⁰ Whites, "Stand By Your Man," 140.

²¹ Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 1-2, 10. Cox explains that Lost Cause adherents promoted "Confederate culture," which Cox understood to be "based on the historical memory of its believers," "often racist," and frequently harking back to the Old South, which was "idealized as a place where a benevolent planter class worked in harmony with its faithful and contented labor force." Furthermore, in "Confederate culture," "women remained wedded to their traditionally prescribed roles," "Confederate soldiers [were] remembered as heroes in spite of military defeat," and white supremacy was of the utmost importance.

²² Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 253.

historian Stacey Michele Horstmann: “Women organized to spread religion, to reform and protect the morality of their society, to instill national and sectional patriotism, to improve the physical conditions of their communities, and albeit rarely—to acquire rights for themselves as women.”²³ The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which was founded by Frances Willard in 1874 as a platform from which to advocate temperance, ultimately pursued a much more expansive slate of reforms and became a powerful force in southern political culture.²⁴ In 1886, it was through the platform of the WCTU that Rebecca Felton transitioned from promoting her husband’s political ambitions to embracing and promoting her own personal agendas.²⁵

While Felton couched her desires for postwar reforms in traditional terms, she did not wish for a return to the patriarchal order that defined antebellum southern households and society. In the antebellum South, argues Stephanie McCurry, “southern men, like other republicans, established their independence and status as citizens in the public sphere through the command of dependents in their households,” a reality that Felton did not find appealing.²⁶ Indeed, Felton was skillful in casting her desired reforms in terms of an *imagined* antebellum ideal—and she certainly shared her peers’ nostalgia for antebellum hierarchies of race and class—but she her proposals included real and significant changes to the organization of gender in southern society. In particular, she wanted to alter the balance of power between men and women to enhance women’s happiness, financial independence, and control of their own destiny as well as their children.

²³ Stacey Michele Horstmann. “Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women: The Political History of White Women’s Organizations in Georgia, 1880-1920” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2000), 10.

²⁴ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 26; Horstmann, “The Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women,” 2, 21, 40. Horstmann identifies other reform efforts that the WCTU adopted, including compulsory education and raising the age of consent for girls.

²⁵ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 26.

²⁶ Stephanie McCurry, “The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina,” in *The Journal of American History* 78 (Mar., 1992), 1245-1264. 1246.

Two decades earlier, the Civil War had placed in stark relief the gendered disparities existent amongst elite whites. Felton believed that during the war and the ensuing devastation, women's limited access to power—in all forms, socially, economically, and otherwise—had exacerbated the hardships that inescapably accompanied war. What Felton found even more disconcerting in the 1880s was that men had done so little since the war to acknowledge—and appreciate—the contributions of women, whether measured in women's wartime sacrifices or the value of their peacetime endeavors.²⁷ Furthermore, men had failed to either improve the condition of women or augment women's abilities to help themselves.²⁸ Instead, southern society, including organizations of women, continued to champion its broken—and even fallen—men, rather than addressing the many ills that plagued southern women and society.

Felton believed southern men had been lionized for long enough, especially as she understood their sacrifices on behalf of women and the South to have ended at the close of the Civil War. Southern women, in contrast, had suffered and sacrificed daily, often unwillingly, as the inequities of the entrenched gendered hierarchy provided them with few alternatives. Felton recognized that, with limited power with which to actuate change or meet their own needs, women were, unfortunately, at the disposal of their male counterparts. She aimed for a restored South, complete with rehabilitated men whom she could hold accountable to the needs of women. Felton intended to hold men to a new, higher standard in relation to women, one that extended beyond antebellum understandings of protection and into a new terrain in which men shared their power and privilege with women.²⁹

²⁷ Felton, "Address Made in Atlanta at State Convention," 289, 291, 294.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 290-291, 294.

²⁹ There are a few significant departures here from LeeAnn Whites' argument in "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Problem of Protection in the New South," in *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Whites argues that "the decline of the social and economic power of the planter class, which opened the door for the emergence of greater equity between the sexes, simultaneously reinforced the value of home 'protection' and thus the ideal of gender dominance by men" (165).

Success for Felton and, she believed, the South, would be a world in which men recognized and promoted the interests of women; furthermore, it would be a society in which women were able to provide for their most basic needs and function independent of men, whom she believed the Civil War had proven to be fragile, quite literally.³⁰ Felton believed men and women to be distinctly different creatures, though she expected southern society, which, in 1886, was in the hands of men, to value equally and respond equitably to the different needs of each sex, including the new needs of women that the Civil War had illuminated.

Rebecca Felton faced a number of challenges to implementing her mid-1880s vision for the South. Her objective was itself an obstacle: as men possessed the power in the late-nineteenth century, both within households and in the political realm, it was men who would have to relinquish the power to women in order to achieve her goal of a revitalized society in which power was distributed more equitably between the sexes. For obvious reasons, many, if not most, men would find Felton's plan itself unappealing or even threatening. Felton faced another foundational challenge to enacting her vision, however. In the nineteenth century,

Felton did recognize men to be "dominant" in the sense that they had access to many instruments of power, such as formal politics, but she saw the potential abuses of that dominance as far from ideal. Thus, she attempted to reform the ways in which men exercised their political abilities to make them explicitly not "dominant." Whites also asserts that "elite white women in the postwar South" were filled with "nostalgia for the hierarchies of patriarchy," (164-165) and that Felton "looked back longingly to the old days when protection and seclusion had been the experience of women of her race and class" (154). While Felton did couch her desires in traditional terms, by alluding to an imagined antebellum ideal, she did so in an effort to make her arguments palatable to the men and women to whom she appealed. Thus, even as Felton was eager to help usher order into the postwar South, she frequently critiqued the antebellum era for its subjection of women, and she perceived her ideal new South to be an improvement upon the pre-war South, not simply an attempt to reinstate the old orders of the antebellum South. Furthermore, Whites argues that Felton entered the "public arena, not as a result of any rejection of her domestic status but in an effort to protect it" (153). While Felton did intend to, in a sense, protect domesticity, she expected to simultaneously improve it *substantially* by correcting the gender disparities that had long resided within the household.

³⁰ Felton, "Address Made at State Convention in Atlanta." In the 1880s and 1890s, Felton understood the fragility of men in terms of their very life and death. The "belching cannon" and "storm of musket balls" were to blame for demonstrating how frail men were (Rebecca Felton, "Wards of the State," 1895, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Box 9). Decades later, in her campaign for women's suffrage in the 1910s, Felton would adopt a new understanding of men's fragility during the Civil War, one which focused not on the social fragility caused by war, but on that caused by a lack of manhood and chivalry (Rebecca Felton, "Southern Congressmen—Opposing Equal Suffrage," editorial written for the New York Tribute, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 2).

explains historian Mary P. Ryan, “women hardly found a commodious, legitimate, or powerful place in the polity.”³¹ Thus, as a woman, Felton's very ability to promote any agenda, even an appealing one, was tenuous.³² In the 1870s, Rebecca had become acutely aware of public sentiment regarding women who were perceived to be brazen, upstart, or even simply too close to the political sphere. In her husband's 1878 campaign, an editor of the *Rome Courier*, who opposed William Felton's politics, had criticized Rebecca for attending her husband's political rallies.³³ Later, when William Felton won the election, other newspapers that opposed Dr. Felton's political leanings capitalized on the opportunity to insult Dr. Felton and denounce his wife with headlines such as “The Election of Mrs. And Mr. Felton” and “Mrs. Felton and Her Husband Returned.”³⁴ Thus, in the mid-1880s, Rebecca Felton recognized that to secure her objectives she would need to take great care in shaping her public image.

As Felton did not personally have political power, she relied on her rhetorical skills to influence those who did have direct access to political apparatuses: elite white men.³⁵ From

³¹ Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 4.

³² In her *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), Jane Turner Censer concludes that “during the 1870s and 1880s, many southern women promulgated an ethic that emphasized ‘nondependence’ in domestic or other roles. This ideal, which included self-reliance and female capability, can be found not only in private writings but also in the fictional heroines created by southern women” (7). Felton possessed such a worldview, but she brought hers into the public sphere in an effort to enact change along such lines. Even so, Felton similarly understood the importance of subtlety in an environment recognized to be hostile to such suggestions by these women whose writings Censer analyzed.

³³ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 47-48. The editor, B. F. Sawyer, had long suspected Rebecca Felton of writing anonymous editorials on behalf of her husband under pseudonyms such as “Bartow” and “Plowboy.” While Sawyer could not prove that Felton had penned those articles and criticize her for those offenses, he took advantage of what he could definitively assert, and criticized her for her presence at the political rally. Sawyer described as the rally “rough and tumble,” and thus, unfit for ladies, implying that Rebecca Felton's presence stripped her of her femininity.

³⁴ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 48. Talmadge cites these articles as appearing in the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Herald*, and he accessed them as clippings in Rebecca Felton's scrapbooks. I rarely consulted Rebecca Felton's scrapbooks for this project. Since Talmadge's research in the 1950s, the scrapbooks have been placed on microfilm. Because it is difficult to assess the dates and sources of the clippings, as well as the importance of the clippings to Felton, I limited the scope of my analysis to Rebecca Felton's correspondence, speeches, editorials, and other non-scrapbook documents.

³⁵ Rebecca Montgomery explains that in the 1890s, southern women “were shut out from the formal political process and denied the full benefits of state institutions and services”; *The Politics of Education in the New*

1886 until roughly the turn of the century, Felton sought to affect change through persuasion. In particular, Felton was careful to couch her new objectives in the context of traditions to which elite white men already professed allegiance.³⁶ Furthermore, by citing her appeals as expressions of a womanly responsibility to hold men accountable, rather than as a citizen's right to an answerable government, Felton hoped to move men to action—and preserve her public legitimacy—by appearing as the picture of feminine deference.³⁷

It is not surprising, then, that in 1886 Rebecca Felton decided to access the public sphere via the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Indeed, Felton was eager to join an organization by which she could lobby against the ills of alcohol abuse, but her role in the organization also provided Felton a stepping-stone to achieve other objectives, as well. By joining the momentum and social acceptability that organized women had been building for the past two decades, Felton was able to merge her personal strengths, such as her communication skills and familiarity with the public and political domains, with the decade-long legitimacy of the WCTU. The WCTU provided a respectable rostrum for women, so Rebecca could focus her energy toward justifying her incursion into the public sphere, tending to her public persona, and crafting her arguments to maximize their efficacy.

In 1886, the same year that Rebecca joined the WCTU, she issued, with her husband listed as a co-author, an editorial in the Cartersville *Courant* explaining her stance on women and

South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 14. This certainly was true for the late 1880s as well.

³⁶ In her dissertation, "The Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women," Stacey Michele Horstmann argues that women were "aware that they were carefully negotiating their way through a mine field of changing gender politics" (20).

³⁷ While LeeAnn Whites acknowledges that Felton presented herself with feminine deference, she argues that such a role was Felton's ideal; actually, while Felton did believe in gender difference, feminine deference was *not* part of her intended society. For more on Whites' understanding of Felton's ideal, see Whites, "Problem of Protection in the New South," 152.

public affairs.³⁸ Women “have abiding interest in all that pertains to good government, good society, good morals, and good behavior,” wrote Felton.³⁹ She continued, “Whatever betides this nation bears fully and directly on women and children. Without a solitary exception these weaker vessels are affected by all of our good or bad laws, and to that extent we have an interest in public affairs.”⁴⁰ Speaking on behalf of women as a collective entity, rather than as an individual, Felton aimed to legitimate the presence of women in the public sphere, by suggesting that their presence was a natural extension of womanly virtue. With a biblical reference to “weaker vessels,” Felton sought to acknowledge her familiarity—and compliance—with traditional gender roles, such as those ordained by Christianity.⁴¹ Even as Felton sought to justify an increased presence of women in the public arena, she explicitly asserted that women were disinterested in joining the electorate. “Without the right to vote (and perhaps we should be perfectly candid here) and with no desire to vote, it is our high privilege to look out on public matters without constraint or prejudice,” Felton wrote, avowing that women were “agreeably disfranchised.”⁴²

In practically the same breath that she averred women were uninterested in the vote, Felton found herself petitioning the Georgia legislature. Felton had delivered her first public speech, her “maiden oratorical effort,” at the 1886 WCTU state convention in Macon, GA.⁴³ Felton’s speech, “explaining the horror of the leasing system, particularly the herding of women convicts along with male prisoners,” was so impressive that the convention encouraged Rebecca

³⁸ Doctor and Mrs. W. H. Felton, “Accepted with Thanks,” *Cartersville Courant*, 11 February 1886. The article, whose primary purpose was to express thanks on behalf of the paper for the donation and compliments offered by a prominent society member, was credited to both of the Feltons. Within the article, however, plural pronouns of “we” and “our” in reference to women (and decidedly *not* in reference to the couple) reveal the authorship of Mrs. Felton.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ 1 Peter 3:7.

⁴² Felton, “Accepted with Thanks.”

⁴³ Felton, *The Romantic Story*, 26-7.

to compose a petition to the Georgia legislature on behalf of the organization.⁴⁴ Thus, Felton's position within the WCTU rose quickly from rank-and-file member to regular speaker, a move that likely reflected both her oratorical capabilities and her widespread public recognition as the wife of a prominent Georgia politician.

The following year, in 1887, Rebecca delivered an address at the WCTU state convention on temperance, the issue on which the organization had been founded and a cause to which Felton would devote years.⁴⁵ Even as Felton spoke to an all female audience, she spoke self-consciously, carefully positioning herself as a traditional woman. Indeed, it was important that Felton present herself as a socially acceptable woman to gain the support of her female contemporaries, but Felton included several statements that appear to have been for the benefit of her male contemporaries as well. As newspapers often reprinted speeches and wives could relay Felton's messages to their husbands, Felton carefully crafted the image she wanted others to associate with her name. Responding to the lack of public, or male, support for many of the organization's efforts, Felton acknowledged the "criticism that is hard to ignore when it comes through channels that we are accustomed to revere and respect."⁴⁶ Whether speaking for the sake of an unexpected male listener or providing her female audience with a defense that they could supply to doubters, Felton offered assurance to those skeptical of women's increasing public presence: "So far as I can understand or am informed, we are seeking no office that any of the politicians can claim—there is no intention or desire to usurp any power or privilege that

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Rebecca Latimer Felton, "Address Made in Atlanta at State Convention, After Prohibition Had Been in Force Two Years and Was Then Defeated" (1887), in *Country Life in Georgia*, 289-295.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 289.

belongs of right to man.”⁴⁷ While women were indeed hopeful for temperance, Felton explained, their advocacy itself was neither self-interested nor self-promoting.⁴⁸

In the same speech, Felton presented a model upon which she would build similar arguments for the following decade:

I am of the opinion that a lady who is the woman of all work in the family—trainer of children—housekeeper and cook—seamstress and servant—mistress and maid—counselor and waiting woman—nurse and general standby in all difficulties—graduated and accomplished in so much work, and in so many useful ways, is entitled to rather more respect than some accord her.⁴⁹

Women toiled diligently on behalf of their families, as they had for years, Felton argued, fulfilling their roles ably, yet men undervalued women’s efforts. For Felton, the various relationships between men and temperance demonstrated the many ways in which men failed to live up to their responsibilities to women. The most blatant offender to women was the drunkard. Felton bemoaned the effects of alcohol within the home to her female audience. “Oh! Mothers, sisters, wives, daughters... there is no blight which can so fatally wither your domestic happiness as the awful curse of drunkenness,” lamented Felton, who understood drunkenness to be an exclusively male endeavor.⁵⁰ She indicted men’s indifference to the effects of alcohol on women as readily as she had indicted the drunkard. Although Felton *hoped* men would prize domestic happiness as she did, she *expected* that they should rally to protect women’s safety,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 292.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 289. Note that Felton claims to be “disinterested,” connoting her impartiality, and not “uninterested,” which would suggest a lack of interest or concern.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 294.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 290.

another casualty of the “drink Demon.”⁵¹ “What is politics intended for, in the name of Heaven, if it refuses to protect life and property,” Felton asked.⁵²

Beyond her explicitly gendered arguments identifying men’s responsibility to appreciate and protect women, Felton issued a third criticism of men in her speech on temperance, this one directed at the men who disapproved of women’s temperance work: “sneer at women’s weak effort, if you will, but the time thus wasted would be better employed in vindicating your own patriotism and manhood.”⁵³ Women’s efforts were “a natural sequence to their motherly love,” Felton argued, invoking divine approval of women’s efforts with the suggestion that “God helps those who help themselves.”⁵⁴ Significantly, Felton also affirmed an additional duty of women, that of holding men accountable, claiming that she doubted it could be “womanly to endure such evils quietly”: “Say, oh! men of Georgia, wouldn’t I be less than a woman not to cry out for safety?”⁵⁵ In the early 1890s, Felton offered a similar explanation of women’s duty to hold men accountable: “I say I should be a sorry woman having the opportunity if I failed to warn, to entreat, to cry out for relief!”⁵⁶ Although Felton would later argue more explicitly that all women were entitled to this right, in the 1890s, her efforts focused on justifying her personal right to lobby on behalf of women’s interests.

By the 1890s, Felton had developed a public persona that could operate independent of an organization, and she regularly made public addresses in a variety of forums. Clearly, not all Georgians approved of Felton, a woman, speaking in public. In the aftermath of criticisms for speaking publicly, Felton cancelled in 1892 a series of public addresses intended to garner

⁵¹ Rebecca Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” approximately 1891 or 1892, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11, Folder 5 17.

⁵² Felton, “Address Made in Atlanta at State Convention,” 291.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 292-3.

⁵⁶ Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 11.

support for a Georgia exhibit at the upcoming World's Fair. An article in the *Savannah Morning News* offered a defense of Felton's efforts. "She should not have been deterred from her purpose by the opposition of one man in Atlanta who does not approve of women speaking in public. A hundred men would have supported her," the article claimed.⁵⁷ "She is a woman of great intelligence and a very earnest worker on behalf of anything that has for its object the promotion of the best interests of Georgia. She is a forcible writer and an eloquent speaker."⁵⁸

Even with the support of many, it is not surprising that Felton regularly began her addresses with an explicit acknowledgment that her audience had solicited her presence. "You were so kind to urge my coming," Felton vocalized to an audience of mill workers in Roswell, Georgia in the early 1890s.⁵⁹ Felton began other addresses similarly, such as one that she began, "With thanks for the courteous invitation which brings me before your organization at this hour."⁶⁰ While offering such gratitude to an audience appears in many ways a natural beginning to a speech regardless of the speaker's gender, in the context of ongoing controversies regarding women in public, Felton certainly believed that any approval she cited could buttress her legitimacy in the public domain. Regularly Felton provided her audiences with touchstones with which to validate her pursuit, such as by relaying the approval of her respected male contemporaries or the gratitude of individuals whom she had helped charitably.⁶¹

At the very heart of Rebecca Felton's arguments was her effort to persuade men to take action to restore the *South and* address issues of women's interest. She endeavored to hold men

⁵⁷ "Mrs. Felton's Withdrawal," *Savannah Morning News*, 1892.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Felton, "Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia," 1.

⁶⁰ Felton, "Farmers' Wives and Their Needs," approximately mid-1890s, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11, Folder 5. 1. This document was not dated, but contextual clues, including a reference to the recent Chicago World's Fair, suggest that this address was delivered in the mid-1890s.

⁶¹ Rebecca Felton, "UDC Address: Underprivileged White Girls," in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11, Folder 4, 7-12; Rebecca Felton, "Teachers of Bartow County," approximately 1900, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, 1.

accountable to the allegiances they had professed, such as their pride in the Confederacy, and to roles they had acknowledged, such as those of legislator or husband in order to further her aims for women and the region as a whole. Even where Felton urged an audience of women to take action, she steeped her arguments in tradition, placing women's efforts in terms that she hoped would win the approval of their male peers by not explicitly threatening male authority.

For instance, in an 1898 article to convince the Georgia legislators to fund education for Georgia mill girls, Felton pursued several lines of persuasion. First, Felton flattered the efforts the legislature had taken in other endeavors. "I am glad Georgia is wide awake to the building of men to take the place of those who have borne the burdens of life, and which must fall unfinished from their lifeless hands," Felton wrote, invoking the memory of the Confederate dead.⁶² The roughly thirty years since the Civil War ended had been marked with "penury and idleness," and Felton thought the "new movement" of the legislature was a "good one," which would usher the state into "progress and prosperity."⁶³ "Men [routinely] took the lead in caring for their own promotion," Felton argued, and it was time for them to "end the absolute ignoring of the other sex and its large majority of interests."⁶⁴ To guard against appearing too narrowly focused on the needs of women, Felton emphasized that her proposal would not derail the existent plans regarding Georgia's boys; rather, it would enhance them. "I wish to emphasize my great interest in the education of our boys. I would not rob them of a single dollar, nor deprive them of a friend to education," Felton argued. Instead, she intimated that with proper energy devoted to the education of Georgia's girls, Georgia mills could become "formidable rivals to the

⁶² Mrs. W.H. Felton, "Textile Education for Georgia Girls," newspaper unknown, September 7, 1898, in Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

northern plants,” a claim which would have obvious appeal to southern men.⁶⁵ In other words, education for girls and women could enhance, rather than detract, from southern men’s opportunities. Even as Felton alluded to the shame men would encounter were they to fail to uphold their obligations, she readily offered a potential benefit they would procure by heeding her suggestions; years later, an emboldened Felton would use stronger, shame-inflicting language without immediately tempering her claims.

Beyond appealing to the men of Georgia as loyal southerners, self-interested industrialists, and experienced voters, Felton supplicated men as fathers. Certainly there was not, Felton contended, “an honorable man in Georgia who would admit that his own daughter was degraded by the accident of sex beneath the sons.”⁶⁶ Within the framework Felton built to support the education of textile girls, any man who opted not to support the matter would be defaulting on his obligations as a southerner, a man, and a father. While the majority of her argument was directed towards the actions men should take, Felton did offer an explanation for the necessity of women, herself included, advocating on behalf of girls. “As long as mothers furnish the pupils (and nobody has yet discovered a plan to obviate the burden of maternity for the human race),” Felton explained, “so long will women be of value in looking after the domestic, if not the scholastic, needs of those whom the public purse educates.”⁶⁷ Indeed, Felton noted, it would be “selfish and ignorant” to overlook the needs of Georgia girls by pretending that “the proper sphere of a woman [was] dependent and domestic.”⁶⁸ By couching her arguments in terms of paternal and maternal responsibility, Felton embedded the newness of her argument, the education of mill girls, in the time-honored traditional gender roles.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

This 1898 article, “Textile Education for Georgia Girls,” therefore, showcases her attempts to affect change by holding men accountable to various male identities, and in that sense, it portrays an accurate picture of many of Felton’s persuasive tactics.⁶⁹ What the “Textile Education” article does not demonstrate, however, is that many of the changes Felton sought for southern society could not be addressed in a single piece of legislation. While a legislative appropriation of funding could make great strides in textile education for mill girls, many of Felton’s other agendas were of a much greater scope, requiring both legislative adoption *and* cultural adaptation. These larger arguments are better understood from a wider vantage point. By looking at Felton’s arguments during the 1880s and 1890s as a collective entity, rather than as a laundry list of specific reforms, her objectives become clearer.

Taken *en masse*, Rebecca Felton’s efforts between 1886 and the turn of the century reveal a comprehensive campaign for the redistribution of power between elite white men and women. Power, measured both as the ability to act and the ability to influence the actions of others, would dramatically improve the lives of late-nineteenth century women, she believed. According to Felton, women had been at the mercy of men for too long, whether in the home, the community, or the formal political arena. For elite white men, who had lost both economic and social power with the dissolution of slavery, relinquishing power to women was not an appealing prospect. Thus, Felton had to tread carefully in her attempts to acquire power for her female contemporaries. Wielding the tools of obligation and tradition, Felton aimed to empower white women by persuading men to act on women’s behalf, both in the household and in politics, and by persuading men that women were themselves worthy of exercising power, whether by

⁶⁹ Ibid.

contributing to household decisions, spending their own money, or engaging in philanthropy.⁷⁰

Felton stressed to men that adherence to their traditional obligations should not be seen as a burden or detriment; rather, by remaining true to their proper roles as men, albeit in the new ways Felton outlined, men and the South would thrive.⁷¹

Rebecca Felton emphasized three key arenas in which women needed increased power. First, Felton believed women deserved domestic power, including a voice in financial decisions, which she did not think southern men in the 1890s afforded their counter sex. Too frequently, in Felton's opinion, women were "the first victims" and "the greatest sufferers" of domestic hardships, yet they were "helpless as Laocoon."⁷² Speaking candidly to an audience of farmers regarding the needs of their wives, Felton highlighted that women were frequently subject to the actions of their men:

When the farmer puts his name to the bottom of that note or mortgage, he signs for his wife and minor children. When the screw is put on, it pinches them, and I say it boldly, the agony, the dread, the torment comes to the woman who cannot help herself and must endure until the end comes.⁷³

⁷⁰ In "The Two Faces of Republicanism," McCurry identifies Charleston minister John B. Adger's belief that "human beings did not have the same rights, but only the specific ones attached to their role." According to McCurry, "ministers and politicians," and indeed, all elite white men, "offered an elaborate theory of providential relations and particularistic rights" instead of "natural rights and universal equality" (1250). Thus, what Felton was proposing, in terms of the domestic empowerment of women, was potentially threatening as "arguments about female submission... [had] confirmed masculinity" in the antebellum era (1253).

⁷¹ In *All that Makes a Man*, Stephen Berry argues that "as patriarchs, men were expected to provide a varied constituency... with an array of goods and services... To the degree that a man could convince himself that he was providing these things, he became (in his own mind) provider, lawgiver, governor, autocrat" (19). Felton recognized this model and attempted to leverage it against southern men.

⁷² Rebecca Felton, "Wards of the State," 3.

⁷³ Felton, "Farmers' Wives and Their Needs," 5.

Felton believed that men needed to revalue women, which they could demonstrate by improving domestic conditions, permitting women to participate in household decisions, and by representing their wives and domestic interests politically.

Even as she disagreed that the “home was the center as well as the circumference” of women’s existence, as she felt had been the case for antebellum southern women, Felton did understand the home to be of critical importance to both women and the South as a whole, but she also believed that men needed to act decisively to improve conditions for women and children within their homes.⁷⁴ “What I want to see—and what I believe the country needs—is a general direction of public effort into making homes happy,” Felton argued, urging her audiences to turn their “point of view to the inside, rather than the outside of human life.”⁷⁵ Southern men had made some strides in the restoration of the South, but in their efforts for southern renewal, men had neglected the home. “The trouble with the South since Emancipation has not all centered about race troubles, bad and increasingly bad as they are admitted to be, but we have overlooked... the uplifting of our domestic life,” Felton avowed.⁷⁶ She stressed the foundational importance of the home, explicitly calling upon an imagined antebellum ideal.⁷⁷ “As compared with the antebellum homes... I am obliged to say that our latter days do not seem to have been our best days,” Felton acknowledged regretfully, though she assured her male audience members that they had the potential to alter the course of the South and emphasized that doing so would be

⁷⁴ Rebecca Felton, “Southern Women Before and Since the War,” newspaper unknown, July 17, 1892, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Box 9.

⁷⁵ Rebecca Felton, “McRae Address,” August 1899, in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11, Folder 4. 9-10.

⁷⁶ Rebecca Felton, “Improvement of Farm Homes,” an address made before the Farmer’s Congress in Macon Georgia, date unknown, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, 4.

⁷⁷ Glenda Gilmore argues that many “middle- and upper-class white women of the United Daughters of the Confederacy fictionalized the antebellum period” to suit their needs; *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 94. Felton frequently used such an imagined antebellum existence as a means of appealing to men of the still-healing South.

in their self-interest.⁷⁸ With a “revival of interest in our homes,” Felton promised, “the manhood of the South will emerge from these shades and gloom,” as attention to homes would restore a “feeling of security” to the South.⁷⁹ By restoring their homes, men would restore themselves, Felton argued, implying that by disregarding the home, and the women within it, men were discarding their own manhood.

Understanding that men might not consider themselves answerable to her personal interpretation of their manhood, Felton invoked a higher authority to which she felt men would feel compelled to answer, their God. Felton leveraged the contractual obligations that married men had made by committing to the covenant of marriage. A successful home, she argued, was dependent upon “unity of the sexes in every relation of life, with... due regard to the marriage tie, in full agreement as to the control and management of children and in perfect unanimity in regard to home affairs, inside and outside, all the way through.”⁸⁰ Speaking directly to the members of her audience at McRae in 1899, Felton entreated men to give their wives “an even chance”: “Young husband, as you look into your dear wife’s eyes, remember she is considered by divine authority to be your own other self.”⁸¹ Wives were the “lawful partners” of their husbands, Felton frequently noted, often reminding her audiences that Christians, whom she assumed her audiences to be, had “the promise that He will grant mercy and blessings to those that keep his commandments.”⁸² Woe to the men who failed to faithfully fulfill their husbandly duties—or heed Rebecca Felton’s urgings.

⁷⁸ Felton, “Improvement of Farm Homes,” 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁸⁰ Felton, “McRae Address,” 24.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸² Felton, “Improvement of Farm Homes,” 5; Rebecca Felton, “Address before the Congress of Mothers,” February 19, 1897, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Reel 10, 4.

“The first *duty* of a Georgia farmer is the prompt attendance to the domestic improvement of his home,” Felton noted, adding “farmer” and “Georgian” to the list of male identities that were answerable to women’s needs.⁸³ Rather than leave the expression of those duties subject to interpretation, Felton provided an extensive list of ways by which men could make the home “a symposium of domestic love with equal duties and equal responsibility, where a man’s responsibility and a woman’s duty are counted” equally.⁸⁴ Women, Felton argued, wanted “greater advantages for our children and ourselves,” namely “labor saving helps” for women’s domestic work and “freedom from hand toil.”⁸⁵ Men were obliged to ensure that their wives did not become “actual servants in the form, martyrs in feminine garb.”⁸⁶ In addition to reducing the workload of their wives, men were to encourage the happiness of their wives, perhaps with “plenty of books” and “good music,” two of Rebecca’s personal favorite pastimes.⁸⁷

By acting upon their obligations as husbands to treat their wives as true partners and help to provide for their happiness, men could better enable women to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. Thus, Felton was careful to emphasize the familial and social good that her proposals would generate. “The best labor ever spent” by a man would be “devoted to making that wife and mother happy.”⁸⁸ A happy mother, who was “comfortable in mind,” would be better able to attend to the “cares and duties of motherhood.”⁸⁹ The repercussions of women’s happiness would echo through generations, by giving “motherhood a chance to secure to her offspring the blessings of civil liberty.”⁹⁰ Women, as mothers, “should be tenderly shielded, carefully protected, and her way made pleasant if not easy because every sudden shock, excited nerve,

⁸³ Felton, “Improvement of Farm Homes,” 4. Here, emphasis has been added to “duty.”

⁸⁴ Felton, “McRae Address,” 8-9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 20, 26-27.

⁹⁰ Felton, “Farmers’ Wives and Their Needs,” 9.

painful thought, cruel treatment, or harsh impulse can be and is often impressed upon an innocent life,” Felton argued.⁹¹ A mother’s “excessive mental strain” could “produce nervous diseases in children,” and these children were “the future citizen[s] and tax payer[s]” of society.⁹² Thus, even men who did not readily feel compelled to provide “proper recreation and diversion to make [their wife] the happy-hearted woman she deserve[d] to be” could at least, out of self-interest, promote the interests of their wives to ensure their offspring—and the South’s future—were healthy.⁹³

A final tactic Felton used to persuade men to fulfill their domestic obligations—and in so doing, increase women’s domestic power—was to present the sacrifices of Confederate soldiers as the ultimate expressions of domestic duty. “I have often imagined the wounded man’s feelings as he was lifted to the amputating table and as he caught a glint of probe and scalpel,” Felton shared. “How many silent prayers went up for those dependent on him and how keen was the foreboding that they might never see the father and husband again?”⁹⁴ Such allusions to the Confederate wounded further emphasized the obligations of southern men as “survivors of the struggle to whom are granted the blessings of peace and permission to work for and sustain [their] loved ones.”⁹⁵

Regardless of which identity resonated with the men whom she addressed, be it “husband,” “father,” “Georgian,” “southerner,” or “Christian,” Felton called on men to fulfill their domestic obligations accordingly, both in their homes and in public. In 1897, speaking to the National Congress of Mothers, Felton explained: “I think the world has reached a place where women not only have the liberty to express an opinion, but the considerate, sensible

⁹¹ Felton, “Address before Congress of Mothers,” 4.

⁹² Felton, “Farmers’ Wives and Their Needs,” 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁴ Felton, “Wards of the State,” 9-10.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

husband and fathers are willing to accept these ideas on important questions as worthy of respect and attention.”⁹⁶ Even as Felton asserted women’s right to a share of authority within their homes, she acknowledged men to be the conduits through which women’s needs would be addressed in politics.

During the late 1880s and the 1890s, Felton frequently called upon men to represent women’s domestic interests politically, and she cautioned men to remember their priorities, which she carefully outlined for them. “A man’s first duty and highest ambition should be the security and comfort of those committed to his care by the obligations of husband and father before he essays to serve his country,” Felton counseled.⁹⁷ In 1891, Felton pleaded for men to “save the children from this Drink Demon,” a cause which she supported unstintingly throughout the decade.⁹⁸ In 1895, Felton lobbied for women’s access to education as an extension of their motherly duty. “The best way to educate the boy is to educate his mother, for she is his teacher. If she has opportunity she will give her child all she is able to bestow, prompted by mother love and family pride,” Felton argued.⁹⁹

In 1897, in one of her most oft-quoted addresses, Felton lobbied for southern men to represent women’s most intimate interest, their “innocence and virtue,” or sexual purity, through whatever means necessary, including lynching.¹⁰⁰ Despite the explicit racism expressed here, Felton’s racism was usually more implicit. For Felton, blacks primarily served as a rhetorical foil; rather than making arguments that specifically addressed the role or position of blacks in society, Felton reinforced her agenda for white women by positioning her arguments in relation

⁹⁶ Felton, “Address Before Congress of Mothers,” 2.

⁹⁷ Felton, “Improvement of Farm Homes,” 4.

⁹⁸ Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 17.

⁹⁹ Felton, “Wards of the State,” 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Macon Telegraph*, August 18, 1897. I was pointed to this source by LeeAnn Whites’ footnotes to her article, “Love, Hate, Rape, Lynching: Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Gender Politics of Racial Violence,” in *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 177-192.

to the status of blacks. The relative *absence* of blacks in Felton's arguments in the late nineteenth century is perhaps a more telling indication of her stance. Felton considered southern society—and northern philanthropy—too preoccupied with the racial uplift of ex-slaves, and she hoped to redirect society's attention toward white women and children. "Northern philanthropy is taking care of the colored girls—and I would not rob the beneficiaries of an opportunity or a dollar, but the white girls on the poor farms must have help or they will become serfs in the progress of civilization."¹⁰¹

In addition to domestic authority, Felton lobbied for increased economic independence for southern women, and she tailored her arguments to fit the class and situation of women.¹⁰² "After the war, hard times came to thousands and tens of thousands of poor Georgia women. Many were left widows... they had no way to make a dollar," Felton explained in the early 1890s.¹⁰³ Unable to participate in the market without a man to represent them, widows were unable to provide for their needs, and they often had no "barrier to hunger or cold."¹⁰⁴ Fortunately, Felton relayed, "enterprising and philanthropic southern men" had built cotton mills in which women could labor, safe from "hard work in the sun," which was "too hard for her constitution and unsuited to the sex."¹⁰⁵ Yet even as Felton detected a partial "revival of the public conscience in regard to woman's work" in 1892, many still looked upon working women with "false pride."¹⁰⁶ Felton defended wage-earning women, who were frequently the

¹⁰¹ Felton, "Underprivileged White Girls," 11.

¹⁰² This is not a new idea for women; even at the Seneca Falls Convention, nearly half a century earlier, the participants discussed the issue of economic independence for women, according to Elna Green in *Southern Strategies*, 2.

¹⁰³ Felton, "Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia," 4.

¹⁰⁴ Felton, "Southern Women Before and Since the Civil War."

¹⁰⁵ Felton, "Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia," 4.

¹⁰⁶ Felton, "Southern Women Before and Since the Civil War"; Felton, "Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia," 1.

descendants of “poor men” who had made “loyal soldiers” for the Confederacy.¹⁰⁷ In 1891, *The Century Magazine* of Baltimore, Maryland, published an article that Felton deemed an “unfair, unjust, and untrue account of Georgia mill labor,” and she jumped on the opportunity to defend the South, southern women, and the importance of financial empowerment for women.¹⁰⁸ Mill-laboring women were “literate,” “neatly dressed,” and “lived comfortably but economically.”¹⁰⁹ Having to provide for one’s self was not desirable, but being able to was critical. Felton responded to the “attack” in *The Century* by defending the women as “heroines, brave and true.”¹¹⁰ In an address to a group of mill workers shortly after the article’s 1891 publication, Felton declared, “I am proud to enroll myself as the friend of every woman, who from choice or necessity, becomes a wage worker in any honorable industry.”¹¹¹ That Felton was still making explicit defenses of “the blessed opportunity for wage earning” for women four years later, in 1895, confirms that public opinion had not resolved itself to women working as Felton had.¹¹²

Although elite society was largely distanced from the world of mill labor and wage earning, Felton understood that the position of elite women could be just as tenuous as those of lower classes. Accordingly, Felton developed a plan that would financially empower elite white women. If women could preemptively learn financial independence, then they would be prepared for any crisis that jeopardized their status and comfort. “If they are so unfortunate as to become widows, they will know something about business and not feel obliged to rush into matrimony to get some chap to manage for her,” Felton explained.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Felton, “Wards of the State,” 2.

¹⁰⁸ Felton, “Mrs. Felton’s Trenchant Pen,” September 24, 1891, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11, Folder 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 1.

¹¹² Felton, “Wards of the State,” 7.

¹¹³ Felton, “McRae Address,” 20.

Furthermore, Felton's familiarity with the wage earning labor of mill women highlighted an issue that troubled her. Mill women earned wages for *their* own labor, hired labor received retribution for *their* own labor, yet married male farmers reaped the benefits of both their own labor *and* the domestic labor of their wives. To these men, Felton asked: "Did it ever occur to you that she is like other laborers, worthy of her hire? Suppose you go into the market to hire help—what would you pay for such services as she gives you so willingly?"¹¹⁴ Felton was appalled that farmers took for granted the extensive efforts of their wives, and she cheekily offered the following observation: "Agriculture in the United States is conducted under the scriptural injunction: the farmer man and the farmer woman is one, and the man is that one, for he is the only one known to history."¹¹⁵

To counter what she perceived as a dramatic misinterpretation by men, Felton proposed a strikingly new model for farm couples, which she entitled "The Wife's Farm."¹¹⁶ "Now gentlemen, I would like to ask, if you can pay tithes to church and state cheerfully, why shouldn't you give your wife a crop, small of course, to be sold when she so decides and the money to be used as she pleases?"¹¹⁷ Felton thanked southern men for their chivalry, which they took pride in, but suggested that she would rather see their appreciation for their wives measured—or valued—in "dollars and sense, common sense."¹¹⁸ Felton anticipated that men would find such a concession of dollars—and power—painful. "Don't smile and say Pshaw! I mean every word of it," she insisted.¹¹⁹ Felton used two strategies to persuade men that they were obliged to share such financial power with women. First, she reminded them of their

¹¹⁴ Felton, "Farmers' Wives and Their Needs," 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁹ Felton, "McRae Address," 18.

marital vows. “Take your wife into partnership both in name and in fact,” she instructed.¹²⁰

Secondly, Felton suggested that men apply the same reasoning to the exchange of labor within their marriage as they would with their business dealings: “A woman may love her husband, and he may be all that is love-worthy, but that love is not hurt, but always strengthened by the common every day justice that can and must obtain between businessmen.”¹²¹ A husband should provide his wife with money that she could spend “as she desires” because “she earned it and her work had paid for it.”¹²² Thus, men were not to treat the transaction as “a favor, a bonus, [or] a sort of tip”; men sharing their financial power with their wives was obligatory, not benevolent.¹²³

In the same manner that she argued for domestic power for women, Felton reinforced her proposals for financial empowerment by suggesting the benefits that men would incur by adhering to their obligations. “She will spend that mite of money for you and yours, but with the spending there will come a blessing on your head that will be so sweet it will fairly overwhelm you, it will be so sweet and refreshing,” Felton promised.¹²⁴ Once men demonstrated that they valued both the love and the labor of their wives, women would have a “new zest” for laboring; furthermore, women would become increasingly thrifty and able to “make a little go a long ways.”¹²⁵ Thus, the money men devoted to their wives would be an investment, not lost capital, as the farm itself would benefit from the increased efficiency and economy that financial independence fostered in the wife.

The third type of power for which Felton campaigned on behalf of women in the late 1880s and 1890s was social power. Felton believed women to have shown themselves capable

¹²⁰ Felton, “Farmers Wives and Their Needs,” 12.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Felton, “McRae Address,” 20.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Felton, “Farmers Wives and Their Needs,” 12.

¹²⁵ Felton, “McRae Address,” 20.

in both philanthropy and mission work, though she perceived southern men to be too hesitant to approve of women's public activity. In her efforts to secure domestic and economic power, Felton had stressed the gender differences between men and women. For instance, Felton had suggested that men and women had differing responsibilities as fathers and mothers, even though they parented the same child. In the arguments she constructed to obtain social power, however, Felton spoke collectively across gendered lines, highlighting the similar obligations of men and women. For instance, as "Southern patriots," men and women shared a responsibility to preserve the integrity of the Confederacy.¹²⁶ "No honorable Southern man or woman can desire to shirk this duty," Felton explained in an 1895 effort to provide for orphans of fallen Confederate soldiers. Using plural personal pronouns, Felton explained that "we" and "us," which referred to elite white men and women, shared collective obligations: "We are not absolved from such allegiance because the Confederate cause went down in defeat. Nothing can release us from this obligation until every possible opportunity for their relief has been exhausted."¹²⁷

Even as Felton stressed the similarities between men and women's obligations, she was cautious to delineate some boundaries between the sexes.¹²⁸ Women, as southerners and Christians, might have interest in caring for orphaned children, but there were several issues that Felton claimed did not interest women. "In the name of common sense," Felton asked, "what could we... women care about free trade or the tariff, who got elected last year or who can make the trip next year in politics?"¹²⁹ In regard to "currency talk," which dominated many political conversations in the economically tumultuous 1890s, Felton argued that women were not

¹²⁶ Felton, "Wards of the State," 2.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 3.

¹²⁸ That Felton expected her argument regarding boundaries between the sexes to resonate is not surprising. According to Stephanie McCurry, in "The Two Faces of Republicanism," antebellum farmers and planters "were empowered by the exclusionary boundaries of the public sphere. Their republicanism... was centrally configured around the politics of the household and around the public meaning of domestic dependencies" (1246-7).

¹²⁹ Felton, "McRae Address," 11.

interested in engaging in the specifics of the debate. “Women don’t care if it’s gold or silver or a greenback, as long as its good for a dollar’s worth of anything to eat or to wear,” said Felton.¹³⁰

As Felton relayed the efforts of women, she framed their successes as ones for the general benefit of the world, rather than as achievements particularly on behalf of women. While a specific characteristic of women, such as their “superior tact,” might enable women in their efforts, the end goals that women pursued were “for the well-being of humanity and the evangelization of the world.”¹³¹ What man—or woman—could argue that they were opposed to the pursuit of such noble causes? Rather than allowing men to fail to make such a connection on their own, Felton clearly established a connection between men’s approval of women’s efforts and the identities that men claimed, such as “Christian” or “southerner.” This rhetorical strategy was structured in the same way as Felton’s arguments for domestic and financial power; if men disapproved of women’s public activity, they were shedding the identities they prized. In 1895, Felton used this tactic in her address, “The Wards of the State”: “It is possible that we may encounter political antagonism or sectional hatred in pursuing this line of duty, but I do not think we shall meet such opposition from patriotic, Christian-hearted men and women.”¹³²

Rebecca Felton devoted even more energy—or words—to tending to her own public image. Recognizing that in many ways her prominent public position as a woman was unfamiliar—and potentially threatening—to her contemporaries, Felton worked hard to present herself as an ideal southern woman: feminine, Christian, southern, and white.¹³³ Felton regularly

¹³⁰ Rebecca Felton, “Currency Talk,” date unknown, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Reel 9.

¹³¹ Felton, “Southern Women Before and Since the War.”

¹³² Felton, “Wards of the State,” 3.

¹³³ While the “white” dimension of Felton’s persona was very important to her ability to speak publicly, Felton did not make as many explicit assertions to her own whiteness as she did with her southern identity, femininity, Christianity, motherhood. Instead, whiteness typically factored into her arguments in regard to other individuals, or it was left unsaid, but not considered unimportant. In *New Women of the New South*, Wheeler offers the following definition of “the ideal Southern lady”: “serene and compassionate... preserver of religion and

mentioned that she valued motherhood, and that the loss of several of her children had only exacerbated her desire to mother and care for others.¹³⁴ “I am the mother of five children, four of them have been for a long time in Heaven,” Felton explained to an audience of men and women in 1899.¹³⁵ Felton regularly referenced her “Almighty Master” and offered thanks to “His providence.”¹³⁶ While Felton and many of her contemporaries would have expected that most public speakers in the South be devoted to southern interests and steeped in Christianity, as a woman, Felton had other, additional characteristics she was expected to possess and other lords to whom she should answer. Felton frequently made reference to “her liege lord” and her marital status, though she avoided offering her husband’s commentary on her public presence.¹³⁷ Years later, at the end of her life and after his death, Felton would speak candidly about his support of her actions. In the 1890s, however, she was more cautious, likely in part as she was hesitant to repeat the attacks on his masculinity during the campaigns of the late 1870s.

Perhaps the most common assertion Felton made regarding her intentions in the public sphere was that she was a Georgian. “Every interest that I have had in life—and I have passed my sixtieth birthday—has been attached to farm operation here in Georgia, because my father was a farmer,” Felton claimed in 1891. Nearly a decade later, in 1899, Felton was still loudly proclaiming her Georgia heritage. “I am a Southern Woman, born and raised within twenty miles of the city of Atlanta, when it was in Dekalb County, not Fulton, and there was no city of Atlanta

morality, inspiration to her husband, and the conduit of Southern values to future generations of Southern statesmen... [and reliant] upon chivalrous Southern men to represent her interests in the outside world” (6-7). Felton adhered to many dimensions of this, while updating and reworking the way she “relied upon chivalrous Southern men.”

¹³⁴ Rebecca Felton, “Some Influences Which Affect Life and Character,” 1898, in Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, 30.

¹³⁵ Felton, “McRae Address,” 26-27.

¹³⁶ Felton, “Address to Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 4, 11.

¹³⁷ Felton, “Some Influences Which Affect Life and Character,” 30.

there,” Felton shared with an audience in 1899.¹³⁸ Older than many familiar Georgia establishments, including the capital, Felton regularly presented her age—and thus, experience—as a means of legitimizing her interest in supporting Georgia, her familiarity with antebellum values, and her general experience.¹³⁹ Beyond the simple equation of years spent in Georgia, Felton demonstrated the extent to which she valued the South and its traditions: “I am moved by my love for native state and especially for the women of Georgia,” explained Felton.¹⁴⁰

As explicitly as Felton defined her identity as a Christian, a mother, and a wife, she took care to distance herself from more threatening images of female assertiveness. In the early 1890s, speaking to an audience of mill workers of both sexes, Felton outlined her intentions:

I do not claim to be an orator or elocutionist in the accepted meaning of the use of the words as applied to public speaking. I am simply a Georgia woman whose heart is full of devotion to Georgia’s best interests, civil and religious. I have had no previous education or particular training for public address. I come only with a heart full of anxiety.¹⁴¹

Of course, by the time she offered this disclaimer, Felton had written hundreds of articles and delivered dozens of speeches. Felton finessed her extensive experience to suggest that even though she had spoken publicly numerous times before, her *intention* had never been to subsume herself into the traditionally male role of oratory. Speaking to the Congress of Mothers in 1897, Felton offered her remarks with a disclaimer: “I mention the fact of my own ignorance as an

¹³⁸ Felton, “McRae Address,” 1. Felton capitalized Southern and Woman, and she also spelled Dekalb without capitalizing the K.

¹³⁹ Although Felton was not promoting suffrage at this time, her attempt to carve out an acceptable public space was in keeping with the care southern suffragists used in the 1890s to “present themselves and their causes as nonthreatening and in accord with traditional Southern values” (72-3).

¹⁴⁰ Felton, “McRae Address,” 11-12.

¹⁴¹ Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 10.

apology.”¹⁴² Proffering her agendas as proposals, rather than as demands, was a more acceptable, feminine route. When speaking to audiences that included men, Felton was even more pointed in how she bounded her abilities, and thus, her intentions. “I cannot speak with the wisdom of a man,” she confided to an audience in 1898.¹⁴³ Even as Felton hoped her address would have the impact that a man—or his legitimacy—might, she considered it important to not appear overconfident in her abilities or overeager in her ambitions.

Felton knew that her southern audiences would understand politics to be the province of men, and so Felton repeatedly defined her own public actions as falling outside the realm of politics. “So many objectionable adjuncts are attached to political life and so many dubious things are expected” of politicians, Felton claimed, distancing herself from that arena.¹⁴⁴ By drawing a careful line between her own activity and “politics,” Felton simultaneously sought to render her own reform efforts more respectable *and* reassure southern men that she—unlike women’s rights advocates in the North—had not set her sights on the franchise. In 1892, addressing the men of her audience, Felton chided: “If your politics are dirty, too dirty for women, hadn’t you better turn around and clean up the premises before you berate the woman who has nothing to do with your politics! We women generally clean house after you, but this is your own work.”¹⁴⁵ While Felton claimed to desire honesty and morality in the political sphere, she repeatedly insisted that women were neither responsible for the mess nor interested in cleaning it. “So far as I know,” Felton asserted, “Georgia women are not seeking any office that belongs to man of a right. You haven’t made politics so attractive as to make them lovely or

¹⁴² Felton, “Address Before Congress of Mothers,” 3.

¹⁴³ Felton, “Some Influences Which Affect Life and Character.”

¹⁴⁴ Felton, “Improvement of Farm Homes,” 3.

¹⁴⁵ Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 17.

desirable.”¹⁴⁶ Felton aimed to successfully evince political changes without damaging her legitimacy by appearing an incursion in the male realm of politics.

While Felton’s legitimacy was still intact at the close of the century, so too was an inequitable distribution of gendered power. Even as Felton’s diligent efforts made some strides, such as the establishment of an Industrial School for Girls, most of her successes were personal, such as her appointment as a representative to the Board of Lady Managers.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Felton was more successful in presenting herself as a legitimate, though not entirely uncontroversial, public woman. Through her deliberate and persistent adherence to traditional gender expectations of women rhetorically, Felton secured a public position from which she could make a number of arguments. However, the security of Felton’s position did not translate into much success in her efforts to redistribute power between elite white men and women. In the wake of the war, men had already lost considerable power; while elite white men were interested in restoring the South, and thus willing to grant funding to projects such as industrial schools, these men were assuredly *not* interested in relinquishing any additional power. To many of these men, Felton’s nominal adherence to traditional gender roles made her palatable, but not necessarily convincing.¹⁴⁸ What Felton could not have realized was that by remaining securely within the gendered bounds for women, she was helping to entrench, not relax, such gendered stereotypes; in her future efforts, even with different strategies, Felton would find herself limited by the gendered understandings of a political culture she had helped to reinforce.

¹⁴⁶ Felton, “Address to the Mill Workers at Roswell, Georgia,” 17.

¹⁴⁷ Rebecca Felton, “My Recollections of Large Expositions,” in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature Woman’s Clubs, Women’s Organizations, and other Noted Occasions* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 108.

¹⁴⁸ Chapter 3 will provide more extensive, specific reports from Georgia men on Felton’s late-nineteenth-century position in public.

CHAPTER 3

“THE DUTY OF MOTHERS”: THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY MOMENT

For Rebecca Felton, the threshold to the twentieth century offered several opportunities for reflection on the past century and anticipation of the century to come. In an address entitled “Women in Philanthropy, Social Progress, and Religion in the Twentieth Century,” delivered at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia at the turn of the century, Felton tendered an optimistic appraisal of women in the nineteenth century: “The twentieth century might well say, if given speech, ‘I found woman enjoying royal prerogatives in learning, in philanthropic endeavor, and well to the forefront of social progress,’ all three of which were either withheld or scantily furnished to the sex at the beginning of the nineteenth century.”¹ In the same address, Felton shared her synopsis of women’s achievements in the United States during the previous century. As a member of the Women’s Board of the Chicago World’s Fair, Felton had been assigned the task of editing a report on the accomplishments of all the women’s organizations represented at the 1893 fair. Reflecting on her findings in her Macon address, Felton remarked that a true record of women’s contributions to society could “only be made during the cycles of Eternity.”² “Every kind act performed, every sufferer relieved, every child of man rescued, every weary heart comforted, every home blessed, will send out circling waves of good influences to bless, revive, and renovate the world of humanity,” Felton professed, pleased with the impact that the

¹ Rebecca Felton, “Women in Philanthropy, Social Progress, and Religion in 20th Century,” at Wesleyan College, Macon, Georgia, approximately 1901, in Hargrett Rare Books & Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 1, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

“womanly tenderness” and “self-sacrificing devotion” of “mothers and wives” on the country.³ Felton regretted that expense had prevented many southern women’s organizations from displaying their work in Chicago, but she nonetheless trumpeted their work in her appraisal of women’s contributions: “The memory of their work, the influence of their personality, and the effect of their faithful service will long live in song and story.”⁴

That Felton spoke of women’s undertakings not only with approval, but also with pride, is not surprising. By the start of the twentieth century, Felton herself had devoted nearly fifteen years to actively promoting the merits of women and their right to contribute to the social good. Women’s organizations, particularly those in the South, recognized Felton as a visible advocate on their behalf, and they were grateful for her efforts.⁵ In 1902, the president of the Women’s Press Club of Georgia wrote to inform Felton that the organization had “unanimously elected” her to share “words of wisdom” with the club.⁶ She pleaded for Felton to accept the offer:

I need not tell you how much we want you and need you—your very presence and words combined are invaluable. Now dear Mrs. Felton, don’t refuse us, and be sure you wear that white bonnet. I can see you now with my mind’s eye—how sweet you looked; now, this is not taffy. I mean it. Hoping to have a favorable answer from you soon.⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ By the turn of the century, southern women had primarily engaged in work with churches and moral reform societies, explains historian Stacey Michele Horstmann in “Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women,” though increasingly women were participating in organizations that were not explicitly moral or religious in purpose, such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Neither the GFWC or the UDC had “legislative or partisan politics” in mind initially, but “seeds were planted for a political agenda that would flower during the early twentieth century,” argues Horstmann (20, 84-5).

⁶ A.C. King to Rebecca Latimer Felton, 12 March 1902, in Rebecca Latimer Felton, in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Women’s Clubs, Women’s Organizations and other Noted Occasions* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 213.

⁷ Ibid.

Many women's organizations were understandably Felton enthusiasts, as their objectives largely aligned with—and often benefitted from—Felton's personal efforts to secure power for women domestically, financially, and socially.

A still better testament to Felton's ability to reach audiences, regardless of their gender and in spite of her own, is that she received similar speaking requests from men. At the end of 1899, John Temple Graves, a prominent public lecturer, wrote to Felton, "How charmingly you write, and how charmingly you speak!"⁸ Felton's writings and speeches had long been renowned for her impassioned delivery and their often-controversial subject matter. In 1893, Clark Howell of the *Atlanta Constitution* had written Felton requesting that she authorize him to publish one of her editorials with her name attached to it, instead of anonymously as she had submitted it. "News is mighty dull right now," Howell confided, "and we want something to shake things up."⁹ By 1900, however, Felton had secured a reputation founded on more than her ability to entertain a crowd; rather, Felton impressed her contemporaries with both her articulation and her intentions.

In 1903, T. Kelly of the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote Felton soliciting her assistance in the preparation of a series of books designed for southern public schools. "I do not know of anyone more competent to prepare the text for these readers and whose name would give them more prestige than yours," wrote Kelly, complimenting both Felton's abilities and her reputation.¹⁰ Even those who disagreed with Felton's viewpoints and agendas acknowledged that she was well

⁸ John Temple Graves to Mrs. Felton, October 16, 1899, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 3.

⁹ Clark Howell to Mrs. Felton, January 5, 1893, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 3.

¹⁰ T. Kelly to Rebecca Latimer Felton, November 2, 1903, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 3.

intentioned. In 1902, James Gray wrote to Rebecca on behalf of *The Atlanta Journal*.¹¹ “While we frequently do not agree with your view,” Gray confessed, “we nevertheless appreciate the fact that you are always and under all circumstances a friend of the paper.”¹² Whether members of the southern public tended toward Kelly’s appreciation of Felton’s abilities or Gray’s hesitance to embrace her views, they widely attended her lectures, eager to hear the woman billed in 1903 as a “brilliant and gifted woman” with “large experience and rare intelligence.”¹³

Felton was undoubtedly pleased, and relieved, by the predominately positive reception that the public by now afforded her. In at least two respects, then, Felton’s nineteenth-century efforts could be measured a success. Felton had sufficiently juggled her many identities, including the ostensibly incongruous roles of “woman” and “orator,” enabling her to maintain a legitimate position in the public forum, even among male audiences. Furthermore, women had demonstrated remarkable abilities in various forms of public work, substantiating Felton’s claims that women were entitled to increased social power; such social power would be measured both in the ability to act themselves and in the ability to influence men to act on their behalf, politically. “Women were united in love for humanity,” wrote Felton of nineteenth-century women. Yet their male counterparts had hardly demonstrated esteem for womankind, and they certainly had not yielded women any real power in ways that Felton had proposed such as the redistribution of authority within families and households.¹⁴

Even as women had capitalized on what social power they could grasp, Felton believed men were obstructing any further social advancement for women. To Felton, education for elite

¹¹ James Gray to Rebecca Latimer Felton, April 28, 1902, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Gifted Woman Coming,” Brunswick, Georgia newspaper, April 3, 1903. Felton was billed similarly in *The Press* on November 2, 1903 in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81.

¹⁴ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy,” 9.

white women would allow “the mothers of the race,” to “fill the position” for which they were created by the “Almighty Master,” namely that of providing “unsleeping vigilance and undying affection for the human race.”¹⁵ Near the end of the nineteenth century, however, Felton had to contend with the limits imposed on higher education for women in her state. In 1897, the student-run newspaper, *The Red and Black*, of the all-male University of Georgia published an article opposing the possibility of women attending the university.¹⁶ The article contended, according to Felton, that while women might be entitled to an education, the university itself was “entirely unfit for girls,” and such a “scheme,” women attending the university, was “unwise, impracticable, and not economical.”¹⁷ In much stronger language, Felton responded with her own interpretation of what the editorial conveyed to women:

The Red and Black says to the women of the state, “Hands off. We are the favored ones, we are the superior sex. Because we were born men and you were born women, we are the favorites. We deserve it all. We are alone entitled to that forty-six thousand dollars. Get away, it belongs to us, we are not ready for you. We won’t divide, it’s ours. Retired to your accustomed shades. At a more convenient season, like King Agrippa, we will call for your presence.”¹⁸

Felton proposed that a better message from the male student body would have been, “We have had the exclusive right to University opportunities for an indefinite period, we would be selfish to shut you out any longer, and we bid you welcome!”¹⁹ Even more galling to Felton was her perception that university men preferred baseball to their books and were still willing to deny

¹⁵ Rebecca Felton, “Women in the University,” 1897, editorial written to the *Atlanta Constitution*, in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3. The sum of money referenced is the amount that the State of Georgia allotted for the University of Georgia between June 1897 and June 1898.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

women access to education.²⁰ Felton denounced the university men for such selfishness: “I am ashamed of this greedy lot of cormorants, who like the selfish ox in the manger, won’t eat, and won’t let anything else eat the provender!!!”²¹ “Women,” Felton suggested, “should go in the University, if for no other reason than to stop these eternal base ball, foot ball, Germanizing, hopping, cotillion clubbing proclivities of a crowd of silly boys whose heads need educating, rather than their heels.”²² Women students would not, Felton promised, “so willfully disregard the obligation and duty imposed upon them.”²³

In the realm of domestic power, Felton was still waiting in 1902 for legislators to “throw around this high and holy calling,” namely motherhood, “the protection it needs and would call for if it was awake to its danger.”²⁴ Addressing her concerns to the Georgia Sociological Society, Felton explained that the very “hope of the nation” rested upon men recognizing—and acting upon—their obligations to the domestic needs of women.²⁵ Among the needs that Felton deemed critical was the requirement of health certificates for couples trying to obtain marriage licenses, to help insure that only upstanding citizens, and not those attracted to “lust and liquor.”²⁶ As Felton believed drunkards spawned drunkards, she considered marriage regulation, which could help regulate heredity, to be an important reform for society.²⁷ “Why is it that the world does not recognize the fact, that motherhood and all the problems of human life are indissolubly connected and cannot be divorced, since every human being must have its mother?”

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Ibid., 5-6.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Rebecca Felton, “The Problems that Interest Motherhood (Read before the Georgia Sociological Society, Atlanta),” June 1902, in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also Addresses Before the Georgia Legislature, Women’s Clubs, Women’s Organizations, and other Noted Occasions* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 283.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 282-3

²⁷ Although Felton did sometimes advocate for the sterilization of unfit parents, here she is arguing for regulations in licensing.

Felton asked, reaffirming her position that the needs of women were not simply self-interested, but for the good of the South.²⁸ Nineteenth-century men had not protected southern society, including the women and children whom they were obliged to represent as husbands and fathers. “The evils... that go with drunkenness” still raged on society, and there was not a “general provision to reach crimes against motherhood.”²⁹

In another early twentieth-century opinion, Felton highlighted yet another example of the lack of provision for protecting women’s interests in Georgia law. Felton’s article, entitled “Wife Does Not Own Her Own Children in Georgia,” relayed a judge’s decision to award the children of a disputing couple to their father, in spite of the fact that he had mistreated their mother.³⁰ Felton’s incensed response underscored a number of ways in which she believed men had failed to fulfill their obligations. First, the husband’s cruel treatment of his wife demonstrated that he had failed to uphold his responsibilities as a husband. “I will not call him husband,” Felton penned, and she moved on to admonish the faults of the judge.³¹ The judge had “allowed [the mother] no ownership of her children,” Felton fumed, noting his disregard for maternal rights. Particularly irksome was that the judge had cited Christianity to defend his decision.³² “Personally, I’m old fashioned,” explained the judge. He continued, “I believe in the Bible. I think the husband should be the head of the family and that the wife should obey him,” and then proceeded to scold the woman in question.³³ Felton, however, declared, “If he based

²⁸ Ibid., 280.

²⁹ Ibid., 283.

³⁰ Rebecca Felton, “Wife Does Not Own Her Own Children in Georgia,” in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 4, 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

his decision on an interpretation of the Bible, with its various translations, I'd rather hear the code of Georgia in this particular case."³⁴

Regardless of whether the defect lay in the law itself, issued by legislators, or in men's failure to adhere to the law, men were disregarding their obligations to women, which, Felton asserted, made her "blood run hot with indignation."³⁵ "Why is it," Felton asked, dumbfounded, in an address entitled "The Duty of Mothers," "that the manhood of Georgia cannot rise in truth and majesty and say to this people, 'Our wives shall have clean homes to live in and our children shall have clean homes to be born into, if every saloon in our borders must go out of business!'"³⁶ Felton continued her assault, rattling off a list of obligations men had abandoned by failing to act against alcohol abuse:

How dare you, as honest citizens, as upright and intelligent men, as professing Christians, license a crime promoter that fills this whole land with violence and destruction? If I had a daughter, whose danger was so great, I would thank the Father to take her up a thousand times in babyhood than to see her endure such unutterable suffering.³⁷

In spite of her own determined optimism, as represented in her assessment of the condition of women for the 1893 World's Fair, Felton's efforts over nearly two decades to redefine men's obligations had resulted in little change in the power and position of women within individual households or society at large. Felton was exasperated with her personal inefficacy. "I feel sure I have been working with a small pick and shovel for twenty years at

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rebecca Felton, "Duty of Mothers," in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 1. 28. Felton specifically mentions that it is the early twentieth century in this piece, but she does not specify a year.

³⁷ Ibid.

least with small evidence of progress,” Felton lamented in 1902.³⁸ The following year, in a speech at a State Agriculture Society meeting, Felton suggested that the tactics of persuasion and influence had run their course. “The legislature sits up and looks wise, but when we plead like a woman for the life of our child... the legislature laughs in our faces,” Felton complained.³⁹ She continued, “If I belonged to the voting class they wouldn’t laugh in my face but one time, but so long as I am what I am, what do they care?”⁴⁰ As women were not voters, they lacked the standard mechanism of civic accountability. In its stead, Felton had attempted to wield obligation and persuasion to hold men accountable. By the onset of the twentieth century, however, Felton realized that she could not rely on southern men to initiate, or even execute, comprehensive reform on behalf of women. Rebecca Felton was ready to try a different approach.

Early in the new century, Rebecca embraced a new strategy, one intended, first and foremost, to encourage women *en masse* to take over the reins of southern reform efforts by advocating assertively on their own behalf.⁴¹ Years later, Felton would pursue woman suffrage to satisfy these requirements, but in the first years of the 1900s, Felton had an alternative vision: female public agitation. Felton identified the “apathy and indifference of the public,” which she presumed to be male, as one of the chief obstacles to the implementation of practices and legislation to address women’s needs.⁴² “Nothing will be done on this line, until public thought

³⁸ Felton, “The Problems that Interest Motherhood,” 283.

³⁹ Rebecca Felton, “Some Questions to be Answered,” approximately 1903, in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 11, Folder 5. 12-14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that the era in which Felton tried to encourage female public agitation was the same era that Elna Green identifies in *Southern Strategies* as “the doldrums” of the woman suffrage movement in the South because it was “sluggish and unexciting” (4). While this may have been true for the suffrage cause, it is not an adequate representation of other variations of advocacy for increased rights for women, such as the public agitation strategy that Felton adopted.

⁴² Felton, “The Problems that Interest Motherhood,” 281.

has been awakened,” Felton explained to a women’s organization at the turn of the century.⁴³ “Agitation precedes reform always.”⁴⁴ As public agitators, women could “set the pace for society,” she argued, believing “public opinion must be educated,” and women were right for the task.⁴⁵

Thus, Felton shifted her emphasis on obligation in the early 1900s. After assessing her failure to push men to live up to their obligations as husbands, fathers, and community leaders, she altered her rhetoric to focus on the obligations of *women* to agitate on behalf of much needed change and reform. By “agitation,” Felton meant that women should assume a more public role in society, such as that of a journalist, an educator, or an active member of a women’s organization. From such public roles, Felton expected women to promote women’s interests and enlighten the public on the necessity of such reforms.⁴⁶ In so doing, women could encourage the public, and in particular, the voting public, to prioritize women’s agendas.⁴⁷ “Women, mothers, wives, and daughters should come to the front with full hearts and high hopes,” an enthusiastic Felton declared.⁴⁸ “Untiring purpose, universal endeavor, individual example, and organized effort, for present helps and benefits are the demands of the hour, the call of the twentieth century,” Felton proclaimed, rallying her troops.⁴⁹ Whether women acted collectively by acting together, such through women’s organizations, or collectively as an amalgamation of individuals, such as many independent journalists espousing similar ideals, women’s impact was to be felt by society as a mass movement.

⁴³ Rebecca Felton, “Rescue Work,” in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 2. 9. Context clues in this address suggest that it was written between 1900 and 1902. It is not clear which women’s organization Felton was addressing.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ Felton, “The Southern Woman As Journalist,” 1; Felton, “Rescue Work.”

⁴⁷ Felton, “The Southern Woman As Journalist,” 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

As Felton encouraged women to penetrate the public sphere, she certainly hoped that the impact of their efforts could be measured in political terms, such as in the votes of legislatures or the rulings of judges. “All reforms must be agitated until public opinion crystallizes into law,” Felton stressed, identifying agitation as “the only way to accomplish a purpose or secure a benefit” from “governing authorities.”⁵⁰ Even so, in the early years of the twentieth century, Felton neither identified her actions as political nor expressed a desire for the vote, for herself or for other women. By the twentieth century, a few states had adopted woman suffrage, and Felton had acknowledged that woman suffrage might one day even occur on a national scale.⁵¹ Nevertheless, with her strategy of public agitation, Felton intended for women to successfully *influence* political realms, not to formally *participate* in political procedures. Thus, she envisioned an army of female public agitators, not political actors.

While Felton was accustomed to life in the public sphere—and agitating public opinion—her new strategy presented a marked departure for most southern women, and convincing southerners that it was appropriate for women to take on a more assertive role was a particularly daunting task, given the strong association between women’s rights and abolitionist agitation as well as other radical political causes. In the postwar beginnings of her public career, many of Felton’s efforts had focused on improving the quality of life for women, through increased appreciation from men for their efforts, a voice in the financial management of their household, and laws, such as prohibition, that would better protect them. Men were the primary objects of Felton’s directives; as men held the majority of southern power—domestically, financially, and

⁵⁰ Rebecca Felton, “Southern Women and Farm Life,” in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 1. 22.

⁵¹ Felton, “Southern Women Before and Since the War,” 1892. At the time of this article, Wyoming (1869) and Utah (1870) had enacted equal suffrage for women, and a number of other states had granted women partial suffrage, according to H. W. A. Brands and others, eds, *American Stories: A History of the United States* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 622.

socially—she presumed that most efforts to obtain power for women required that men voluntarily share their authority or act on behalf of women, rather than women seize power for themselves. Indeed, Felton’s emphasis on voluntary reform efforts had encouraged a number of women to move beyond their homes and participate in women’s organizations. In many ways, though, even women engaging in philanthropy remained fairly shielded from civic machinations, engaging primarily with the individuals whom they sought to help charitably, or, more likely, engaging with other women of their own race and class within the organization. With the exception of the representatives for the women’s organizations who interacted with the public as spokespersons, most women did not have experience voicing their interests publicly. In the twentieth century, Felton maintained the importance of women’s organizations, though she also began to highlight the contributions women could make as individuals, independent of organizations. Furthermore, Felton’s suggestions encouraged women to promote their own interests, not just those of others, such as Confederate orphans or mill-worker women. Instead of Felton alone attempting to hold men accountable on behalf of all women, all women would agitate public opinion on behalf of women’s interests in an effort to hold men accountable.

Felton recognized that her new agenda was potentially unnerving for many women and likely unfamiliar for most. Accordingly, Felton devoted significant energy to persuading southern women of the acceptability, merits, and necessity of embracing the public sphere. For Felton’s plan to succeed in holding men accountable through mass agitation, it was necessary that she convince women that her suggestions were not only tolerable or acceptable, but compelling enough to warrant their actions. Furthermore, it was important that Felton present herself as a woman worth heeding. Felton had occupied a quite visible position in society for a while, and most southerners were familiar with her ideologies and activities. Consequently,

Rebecca needed to reconcile the traditional woman she had presented herself to be, the visible woman she had been, and the new woman she was encouraging others to become. Felton had an ambitious agenda to pursue, one which required considerable rhetorical finesse.

As Felton presented it, 1900 signified something more than an additional year beyond 1899. Indeed, the turn of the century served as an entity that Felton could characterize in various ways to promote her objectives. The turn of the century embodied a new, fast-paced world, according to Felton, and she alternately presented the era as marked by “progress” or “upheaval,” depending on her argument. As she had with her rhetorical use of the Civil War, Felton brandished tradition as a means of encouraging activities that contributed to her goal, and she used newness and change as a justification for any new social behaviors she wanted to introduce. For instance, in the late-nineteenth century, Felton had encouraged men to uphold traditional roles, such as those of husband and legislator, but to fulfill them in new ways, such as through the empowerment of their wives, a change in male behavior that she claimed was necessitated by the event of war.

Using the cusp of the century as an opportunity to reflect and assess society, Felton offered the following appraisal of the world at the twentieth century, one that bore a striking resemblance to her personal frustration with the failure of the male sex to heed her urgings:

It clamors for true things. It is disgusted with shames and frauds. It cries out for genuineness, for honesty in belief and practice. It has become tired of cant and assumacy. It is weary of croaking. The world moves fast. It wants to know what can be done rather than what can only be conjectured.⁵²

⁵² Felton, “Southern Woman as a Journalist,” 6-7.

In one sense, then, the new pace of the world rendered it turbulent and troubled. Society had become saturated with social disorder, and the world was at a threshold that necessitated a new solution. “In this upheaval,” Felton argued, “it is not strange” that women should assume a more public role.⁵³ They were, after all, “intimately associated with the entire human race” through the “obligations of motherhood.”⁵⁴ As she had with southern men in the nineteenth century, Felton highlighted the traditional identities that women claimed and provided a justification for them to fulfill their obligations in new ways; in so doing, Felton hoped to have found an opportunity to expand her impact and accomplish her objectives more quickly and more effectively than she had as an individual representative for women in the late nineteenth century.

Felton’s evaluation of world at the turn of the century supplied a second, seemingly contradictory, way by which she could persuade women to assume a larger public presence. Through her suggestion that the world was eager for an improvement and prepared to receive a new solution, such as the amplified public presence of women, Felton suggested that society was progressive. In that sense, the incursion of women into public life was a natural development of an existing, ongoing trajectory and not actually a social aberration at all. “In past centuries,” Felton explained, women were “kept in great seclusion.”⁵⁵ She continued: “As the opportunities for education increased in the world, as humankind forsook the nomadic state and became dwellers in regularly built houses in cities, this seclusion of women was considered less necessary.”⁵⁶ Even though the “desire or inclination to keep women confined to entirely domestic affairs” had been “one of the last of ancient customs or prejudices to give way,” the “march of civilization and human progress” was in the process of delivering a new social role for

⁵³ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

women.⁵⁷ Felton buttressed this argument with time-honored tradition and biblical precedent, noting, “Sarah, the wife of Abraham, was seen in public,” which suggested that women in public was neither a new concept nor antithetical to women’s religious convictions.⁵⁸ Thus, Felton demonstrated that in the form of long-standing progress, change could be cloaked in tradition and made more palatable.

Felton alternated between these narratives of social declension and female ascension, promoting in the former the new need for women’s traditional values and virtues, and in the latter, the naturalness of the new role for women.

To convince women that their public agitation was necessary, Felton cited the dire state of society and suggested what was at stake with inaction. Around 1902, in an address entitled “Rescue Work,” Felton expressed her concern regarding the “moral evils that are rampant in this land.”⁵⁹ “Until we find clean living, as a rule... we are simply walking over a hidden crater which may do as much general damage as Mont Pelee did in the island of Martinique,” Felton warned.⁶⁰ “Each year adds its quota of violence and lawlessness,” Rebecca explained, advising women that action was crucial, and that they “could not afford to be laggards” in their efforts to reform society.⁶¹ “It will always be the intelligent home life of the nation which will hold our ship of state to its moorings as a republic, and we can all appreciate the necessity for protecting home life and domestic interests,” Felton avowed, suggesting that inaction could destabilize the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁹ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11. This theme, that a social threshold of violence and trouble could be reached at any point, is present throughout Felton’s work. In this particular instance, although she is promoting education to all of society’s ignorant, regardless of race, Felton is suggesting that blacks have had the least access to education and training and thus, warrant social attention. Felton uses this model, which suggests clean living as an imperative, in relation to all the social reforms she seeks, not simply in relation to race.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11, 9.

entire nation, not simply retard the status of women.⁶² This notion of “maternalism,” in which a woman was to “transfer to the state the nurturing qualities associated with mother love,” helped bridge the gap between women’s traditional roles in their homes and their new positions in public society.⁶³

While the subject was “worthy of the best thought and most exalted statesmanship,” men had not yet protected domestic interests and would not do so of their own volition, Felton argued.⁶⁴ “The demand for virtue in women is far greater than for men,” Felton explained, transferring to women the responsibility of upholding social morality.⁶⁵ Women, at least those from “virtuous, honorable homes,” possessed an innate morality and were thus better suited than men to identify the social problems that warranted attention.⁶⁶ While “motherhood” needed “care and protection above every other interest,” textbooks and schoolteachers could not reform society.⁶⁷ Thus, as many issues required reforms that women could not facilitate, such as those that occurred within the formal political arena, women’s obligation was to inform men of the social needs through public agitation. By so doing, women would hold men accountable to their responsibilities as men, husbands, and legislators, to protect domestic interests.

Felton challenged her female audience in 1902, “Do not be afraid to speak for what is right, where danger lies.”⁶⁸ In another early twentieth-century address to women, Felton explained: “There can be no genuine reform until we have arrest of thought. It is difficult to get people to think at the start, but it is stagnant water that brings malaria, not the roaring, noisy,

⁶² Ibid., 9.

⁶³ Mari John Buhle and others, eds. *Women and the Making of America* (New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 479. Also, Horstmann argues in “Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women” that the GFWC supported “municipal housekeeping activities, which would soon bring them unavoidably into politics,” a transition that Felton herself would make in the 1910s (104).

⁶⁴ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁷ Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” 25.

⁶⁸ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 6.

dashing waterfall which sweeps off debris and decay.”⁶⁹ Indeed, the activism that Felton proposed women adopt was far from stagnant. Through women’s organizations and individual endeavors, women were to lobby for a higher legal age of consent for Georgia’s girls, compulsory education, the establishment of more equitable punishments for sex crime offenders of different sexes, the requirement of marriage permits, the regulation of heredity, and of course, a temperance mandate.⁷⁰

Beyond holding men accountable to women’s needs through direct entreaty, women were to contribute to the social good through philanthropy and church work.⁷¹ Finally, women were to contribute to their own well-being and prepare, “as a matter of precaution and safety,” to provide for themselves, in case it become necessary.⁷² “You will doubtless think these are Herculean tasks,” Felton allowed in 1902, “but the history of reform is along the line of heavy tasks in forbearance, in withstanding unfair criticism, and in continuous perseverance in the line of public duty.”⁷³ In another, later address, Felton again described the scale and importance of women’s public agitation. “It is a task of perplexity and of magnitude to run counter to prejudice and precedent, and stand firm for the right when we have fears within and foes without,” Felton acknowledged, nevertheless proposing that women must “put aside the smaller things,” such as their personal convenience, “for the sake of the greater.”⁷⁴ With “greater,” Felton alluded to the society she hoped to elicit through women’s public agitation, one in which women’s interests were appreciated and their needs, addressed.

⁶⁹ Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” 21.

⁷⁰ Felton, “Rescue Work”; Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” date unknown ; Felton, “Women’s Rights”; Felton, “Women in Philanthropy, Social Progress, and Religion in the Twentieth Century”; Rebecca Felton, “Duty and Obligation that Lies on Southern Women,” in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 1; Felton, “Southern Women and Farm Life.”

⁷¹ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy.”

⁷² Felton, “Duty and Obligation that Lies on Southern Women,” 4; Felton, “The Southern Woman in Journalism,” 7.

⁷³ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 12.

⁷⁴ Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” 19.

Felton understood that even if women of the early twentieth century sympathized with her objectives, they might believe that their participation was optional. In an effort to prevent such a response, Felton framed her expectations of women as expressions of their womanly obligations. “There is a pressure of obligation along this line which is seen and should be felt every day,” Felton argued.⁷⁵ In addition to the obligation that stemmed from women’s innate morality, Rebecca identified motherhood as a role that obliged women to take up public agitation. Felton did acknowledge, however, a few limits on the population whom she addressed. The women whom Felton called to action were primarily privileged, elite, white women; it was the “woman with wealth, position, and intelligence” who was able to affect the most change, Felton believed.⁷⁶ With such ability came even greater obligation. “It is your patriotic duty,” Felton argued in 1902, “to throw around another woman’s daughter the safeguard which that less fortunate child needs so much and which intelligent cooperation and patriotic organization will give her.”⁷⁷ While Felton did share her expectations of individual women, many of the addresses she delivered in the early twentieth century were to women’s organizations; thus, it is not surprising that much of Felton’s rhetoric stressed the contributions that women could make collectively.⁷⁸ “It is Christian motherhood which could penetrate the dark enveloping cloud and bring to the land the promise of refreshing showers of reformation and relief,” Felton argued in an address that appears to have been to a Women’s Christian Temperance Union meeting.⁷⁹ Regardless of the organization being addressed, her entreaty stipulated that it was the obligation of “organized motherhood,” as “intelligent, painstaking patriotic women,” to “leave this old

⁷⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁶ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 6.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10. “Your organizations have *authority* to make heard in every movement for protection of society in caring for the domestic life of women and children,” said Felton [emphasis added].

⁷⁹ Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” 21.

world better than you found it, in placing safeguards about others.”⁸⁰ Both through agitation and through their own social efforts, women’s organizations were to promote “the protection of the home and the safety of the children of the nation” and even “demand” such protection.⁸¹

Invoking the “Inspired Word,” Felton quoted the Bible, “He that provideth not for his own household is worse than an infidel.”⁸² If women were to “claim the heavenly reward,” they needed to fulfill their earthly obligations, Felton argued, as she extended the formally-defined domestic household of the nineteenth century to include neighbors and “those we see around us in the flesh.”⁸³ It was “the province of mothers and wives to inquire into everything which menaces the future welfare of her children,” explained Rebecca.⁸⁴ Describing those mothers who failed to care for the children of others, and by implication referring to those women who failed to agitate publicly, Felton proclaimed, “She is only half a mother who does not see her own child’s grief in every pain that makes another child weep.”⁸⁵ Thus, when Felton directly asked her audience, “Will you abandon your opportunity for rescue work?,” she suggested that anyone who would abandon such an “opportunity,” or obligation, was also willing to discard their womanhood, their children, and Christianity.⁸⁶

Even as Rebecca depicted public agitation as a womanly obligation, she recognized that many women feared they would lose their identities by entering—and engaging with—the traditionally male world of the public. Southern society had theretofore defined womanliness in part by contrasting it with public activities that a woman would not pursue. For instance, in relation to southern men, women were “delicate” and “refined,” traits that they preserved by

⁸⁰ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 7.

⁸¹ Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” 19, 24.

⁸² Felton, “Rescue Work,” 9; I Timothy 5:8.

⁸³ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 9.

⁸⁴ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

staying out of the public realm of men.⁸⁷ Or, while northern women pursued fame as writers and developed “audacious notoriety and unwomanly reputation,” southern women avoided such pursuits, which were “akin to being ‘fast.’”⁸⁸ As many southern women had been largely confined to their homes, they had had limited opportunity in which they could demonstrate their identities to others through visible action. Therefore, southern women affirmed their identities in large part by claims regarding what they were not and what they did not do; this relational positioning allowed women to continually reaffirm their identities without having to take any action that could potentially endanger their femininity. By *not* being promiscuous like northern women and by *not* being manly like southern men, southern women could evidence their femininity.

To assuage such fears of lost womanliness, Felton empathized with the misgivings of her audiences. By offering her approval of the way women had once defined themselves, Felton could simultaneously encourage women to participate in public agitation and present herself as an understanding role model. Southern women had been justified in disapproving of northern women such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Felton allowed; by so doing, women had demonstrated their southern loyalty, a commendable attribute.⁸⁹ Not only did Felton argue that it was acceptable for women to have remained outside the public sphere, she explicitly stated that it was preferable. By waiting until it was necessary, women demonstrated that they were not self-serving, but self-sacrificing for the sake of their virtues and their society.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy,” 7.

⁸⁸ Felton, “Southern Woman As a Journalist,” 15; Rebecca Felton, “Southern Women In Journalism,” 1900, in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 17, Folder 3. 2. Although these addresses are very similarly titled and from the same year, they are distinct addresses.

⁸⁹ Felton, “Southern Woman As a Journalist,” 15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

Additionally, Felton sought to reconcile the new public woman, which she encouraged women to become, with the old identities, by which they defined themselves. “In social progress and development, the beauty of the present day is the well-developed, active, busy, and happy girl who can understand domestic science and yet make her home bright with the graces that attend art and literature.”⁹¹ Thus, by engaging with the public world, women could better enable themselves to fulfill their roles as mothers and wives. Indeed, Felton argued, the “world calls for able, cultivated mothers, as well as educated and intelligent fathers, for a strong progeny.”⁹² Felton explained that women were defined from birth as mothers, which was an attribute they could not shed by entering the public forum.⁹³ Rather, such an identity was precisely what propelled women into their new roles. “The love for their own homes and their own children has moved them to mighty progress in helping others,” Rebecca explained.⁹⁴ Through each tactic—recognizing the old identities of southern women, and reconciling them with new identities—Felton argued that women had a femininity they could not lose. While participation in the public sphere did require sacrifice, it would not compromise southern women’s identities.

In addition to the fear of losing their womanliness, southern women feared they might lose their southernness. Women of the North had provided a model of interaction with the public sphere that appalled many southern women.⁹⁵ In one 1900 address, Felton shared “a few of the epithets heaped upon” Northern women: “short-haired viragoes,” “unsexed women politicians,” “blue-stocking Jezebels,” “immodest Bloomer women.”⁹⁶ Felton explained to women that it was not in spite of their southern distinctiveness but because of it that she saw them as potentially

⁹¹ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy,” 8.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹³ Rebecca Felton, “Women’s Rights,” approximately 1906, in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 1. 2.

⁹⁴ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy,” 13.

⁹⁵ Felton, “Southern Woman As a Journalist,” 16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

successful in the public sphere. “Our Southern women have distinct and recognizable characteristics,” including their “tones of voice and sympathetic expression,” Felton explained. She continued, “It is this characteristic, this recognized individuality that I am here to beg you to cherish and retain.”⁹⁷ By remaining “true to herself and her traditions,” a southern woman could help usher in “a better day.”⁹⁸ Women could be “intelligent, useful, and capable” in the public sphere without meddling in men’s domains, including the “rights and wrongs of war.”⁹⁹

Felton went on in her address to provide examples of famous women who had been successful in public prominence. Aspasia, the wife of Pericles, lived “500 years before Christ,” taught Sophocles oratory, and was a “miracle of grace and wisdom.”¹⁰⁰ With the example of Aspasia, Felton suggested that intelligence and femininity were not mutually exclusive characteristics. Furthermore, by citing an ancient example, Felton subtly reinforced that women in public was not a new concept. In more recent history, Felton acknowledged Queen Victoria, who began as “a plain, homely girl” and evolved into an “homage to virtue and excellence of character” without ever “[laying] aside a single womanly attribute or abandon[ing] her womanly prerogatives.”¹⁰¹ Thus, time had not diminished the ability of women to be successful in public. Furthermore, one did not have to be a prodigy or a phenomenon to contribute to the public good; rather, “clean life and virtuous example” could influence a woman’s male contemporaries and positively impact future generations.¹⁰²

Felton understood that her female audiences were not simply evaluating the content of her arguments; if they distrusted the source, Felton herself, the claims would fall on deaf ears.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁰ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy,” 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2-5.

¹⁰² Ibid., 4.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Felton had successfully presented herself as an ideal southern woman: feminine, Christian, and at least nominally adherent to traditional gender roles. As she spoke to women at the turn of the century, however, Felton had a new consideration; with a female audience, and in particular, with an audience she hoped to excite to action, Felton had to present herself as not only as palatable or acceptable, but as worthy of their emulation.¹⁰³

To do so, Felton had to reconcile her two personas. In one sense, Felton had successfully defined herself—and her arguments—within traditional bounds. In another sense, however, Felton had presented those ostensibly traditional arguments through some platforms that, as a woman, were not so traditional. Felton had delivered dozens of speeches, and many of them Felton had not only issued to assemblies of women, but to mixed-gender audiences as well. Furthermore, Felton had taken on leadership roles at the Chicago World's Fair in the early 1890s and the Cotton States and International Exhibition in Atlanta in 1895, and she had been an "Official Visitor" at the Tennessee Centennial in 1897.¹⁰⁴ And Felton's Georgia audiences certainly remembered—or had been reminded of—Rebecca's contributions to her husband's congressional campaigns in the 1870s.¹⁰⁵

To encourage women to agitate publicly, then, it was important that Felton not only present her twentieth-century self as imitable, but that she re-present her nineteenth-century self in more acceptable terms. Going back to her husband's campaigns of the 1870s, Felton stated clearly that she had not participated of her own ambitions. "I was plumped into the very vortex of the hottest political campaign ever known in Georgia," Felton explained.¹⁰⁶ She continued:

¹⁰³ In "Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women," Horstmann explains the importance of reputable leaders in women's organizations and the women's movement: "Clearly, it appeared, if respectable white Georgia women could hold offices in these organizations, other southern women could join these organizations without fear of losing their respectability" (121-2).

¹⁰⁴ Felton, "My Recollections of Large Expositions," 108, 113.

¹⁰⁵ Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁶ Felton, "Southern Woman In Journalism," 3.

“The breaking in was rough; I was swirled into the conflict with cyclonish power.”¹⁰⁷ Felton had not participated out of self-interest; rather, she had been compelled to participate by forces beyond her control. Using language that she hoped would resonate with her twentieth-century, female audience, Felton described her work on the campaign as not only justifiable, but also obligatory and honorable. “I was defending my own home and fireside and standing abreast with my own defender and loyal champion,” Felton shared.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Felton suggested, acting publicly was not at odds with women’s roles as wives; instead, protecting ones home publicly was an honorable extension of those traditional roles.

Justifying her continued public role in the 1880s, after the necessity of the campaign had subsided, required a bit more finesse from Felton. “[I] took up the pen [because I was] too fond of the exercise to resist its pleadings,” Felton admitted, referring to the newspaper that she co-owned with her husband and managed on her own.¹⁰⁹ Careful not to suggest that such endeavors were still, in the twentieth century, outside the bounds of acceptable womanhood, Felton clarified her experience with the newspaper:

I had an exalted opinion of the power of the press, in the need of public morality, public virtue, and political integrity, but when I found out that the editor of a little country paper must bear all things and suffer all things to keep *his* grip on the county advertising and please the people who control politics, I sold out! I dearly love to work for a newspaper, but I prefer somebody else to do the part of managing it.¹¹⁰

Thus, nearly two decades after her experience at the newspaper, Felton was able to reframe her intentions in a context that buttressed her turn-of-the-century agenda. By acknowledging that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Felton, “Southern Woman As Journalist,” 20.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 25.

running the newspaper, which appeared beyond the threshold of feminine acceptability, was accidental, a mistake, Felton helped dilute her strong public persona. Simultaneously, by presenting the merits of such public agitation, in the form of journalism, Felton presented a model that she hoped others would find inspiring.

In offering new information about her experiences of the 1870s and 1880s, Felton was able to call on a few decades of experience. “I have an abundance of experience to offer on this line... but my experience is about all I have to offer,” Felton explained to a group of women journalists in 1900.¹¹¹ By claiming her experience without claiming *too much* experience, Felton argued that women should trust both her familiarity with the public sphere *and* her womanhood.

At the turn of the century, Felton hoped to redefine public space as a domain for both sexes; even still, she clearly outlined how she intended to interact with the public sphere in ways that were specific to women. “It is to enter my plea for the protection of the mother from the Drink curse that I have left my home to bring a view of protection to your minds at this time,” Felton explained in an address entitled the “Duty of Mothers.”¹¹² According to Felton, the domestic sphere could serve as “home base,” both literally and figuratively. Furthermore, for the benefit of her audience, Felton carefully explained her intentions. “I’m not here to claim women are better than men,” Felton insisted; thus, even as Felton sought to redistribute power among more equitable lines, she did so without appearing to propose a *coup de manhood*.¹¹³ “A resolve to do my little best for the suffering women of our own country,” was the only intention Felton claimed, and with such non-threatening terms, she hoped it would resonate.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Felton, “Southern Woman As Journalist,” 25.

¹¹² Felton, “Duty of Mothers,” 26-27.

¹¹³ Felton, “Women in Philanthropy,” 3.

¹¹⁴ Felton, “Rescue Work,” 1.

Indeed, Felton's claims did resonate—with many of the females she addressed. In the early years of the twentieth century Georgia women became increasingly involved in many forms of public agitation. Even as Felton had helped make women more comfortable with agitating publicly *en masse*, she had not yet found a mechanism to make a redistribution of gendered power appealing to men.¹¹⁵ Women may have moved spheres, but they would soon find they could not move men, even with appeals to virtue, the moral declension of society, and the bumbling momentum of the new century. And once again, in her attempt to remain palatable, Felton had over-emphasized traditional manhood and womanhood, which would hinder her next strategy, woman suffrage, just as it had her previous tactic, persuading men.

¹¹⁵ Indeed, argues Wheeler in *New Women of the New South*, men were both suspicious and fearful of the new roles women adopted (10); this included roles similar to the “public agitator” role Felton endorsed.

CHAPTER 4

“VIRTUE AND BRAINS”: THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN

By the 1910s, Felton had devoted over twenty-five years to seeking a more affable and equitable relationship between women and society. In the nineteenth century, “society” was predominately under the dominion of men; thus, men were the primary conduits through which the social changes Felton desired could be affected. As a woman, Felton had the dual disadvantage of a tenuous public platform from which to speak and an unappealing proposition for men, so she proceeded cautiously. Feigning deference, she called on men to enact changes that would improve women’s lives and address their needs. Felton understood that men would be wary of relinquishing any additional power, to women or any other cause, as the Civil War had straitened their social power considerably. Thus, Felton began her efforts by framing the actions she desired from men as expressions of the traditional obligations of manhood; additionally, she appealed to their self-interest, attempting to convince them that they would benefit from happier, more independent wives and daughters.

When this first strategy failed, Felton shifted her emphasis to women, urging them to act *en masse* to put pressure on men to enact the changes they desired. Felton recognized that a single individual such as herself might have little social leverage; certainly, though, men would be answerable to the masses, even if the masses were female, she reasoned. Directing her rhetorical energies toward women, Felton encouraged women to adopt public agitation as a means of promoting domestic interests. In the nineteenth century, Felton had argued that women needed more attention from society, or the men in control of society; at the turn of the century,

however, Rebecca shifted her focus and explained to women that society could use a little more of *their* attention, moral and virtuous as it was. In both circumstances, Felton hoped that society, via men, would improve the quality of life for women. Even as she personally harbored hopes for gendered equity—albeit concomitant with gender difference—Felton used the Trojan horse of tradition to encourage others to participate in her vision without appearing to topple the world to which they were accustomed.

In the 1910s, Felton recognized that the problem with her efforts was male compliance, as it was men who had neglected the obligations she had prescribed in the 1800s, and men who had failed to respond to women's requests *en masse* at the turn of the century. In the early 1910s, reflecting on her earlier female public agitation strategy, Felton assessed that women had “learned enough to appeal directly to the hearts and consciences of husbands and fathers,” yet “in every case, the active voters, mainly the politicians, [had] fought these women step by step.”¹ Even as women were “eager to have better laws for the protection of the home,” their “urging, entreating, [and] praying” had not amounted to sufficient protective legislation.²

Indeed, female public agitation could claim but a few successes. Thanks to “true hearted” women who “stirred the nation from center to circumference,” “the good sense of the nation was aroused to the necessity for retiring little children from factory work,” Felton reflected.³ Furthermore, women's decades-long struggle for temperance finally resulted in prohibition for Georgia in 1908.⁴ A successful change in the law books, however, did not necessarily signify a corresponding shift in how men viewed women's interests. Poor

¹ Rebecca Felton, “Untitled: Abject Surrender,” approximately 1910-1915, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Box 16, 11.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rebecca Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 1915, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 6. 3; Rebecca Felton, “Woman Suffrage From A Southern View,” 1915, in Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 6. 3. Although same year, same archival location, and similar titles, these are distinct items.

enforcement continued to allow for “glaring and preposterous” violations of the Prohibition law, and even “as attention [had been] given to the protection of small children in the various public industries, no notice [was] taken of the discrepancy between the wages of men and women.”⁵ Thus, the moral example women tried to provide for men neither reconstructed men in the way Felton desired nor initiated any long-lasting, positive repercussions benefiting either women or their reform efforts.

The paltry number of reforms prompted by women’s agitation was not a reflection of a weak crusade. Women had “collected petitions and handed them in to unwilling legislators” during the fight for temperance, a tactic they had employed for numerous issues.⁶ In 1915, Felton herself “carried in two hundred and fifty signed petitions asking that the age of consent might be raised to at least fourteen years, but the Legislature ignored the bill and ignored the petitions and my endeavor was made futile by contemptuous indifference.”⁷ In another address the same year, Felton again referenced the petitions women offered in an attempt to raise the age of consent; “the petitions were not only never mentioned to the body but treated with silent contempt.”⁸ A better explanation for the lack of reforms, according to Felton in 1916, was that “public [male] opinion was so dull [and] obtuse.”⁹ Whether issues of women’s interest were promoted by women—or, less frequently, by men—they were not well received by the general male public. “As the matter stands today, no attention is given to bills introduced or to petitions duly signed or to newspaper articles looking towards reforms of this sort,” Felton lamented in 1915.¹⁰

⁵ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 3; Felton, “Woman Suffrage From a Southern View,” 5.

⁶ Felton, “Untitled: Abject Surrender,” 11.

⁷ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 2.

⁸ Felton, “Woman Suffrage From a Southern View,” 5.

⁹ Rebecca Felton, “The Women of Our Country,” 2.

¹⁰ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 3.

Frustratingly, many of the reforms women hoped for in 1915 closely resembled campaigns Felton endorsed at the turn of the century. “Georgia judges decide that the child belongs to its father, and our legislatures decide that the judge has full authority for such decisions as against the mother,” Felton lamented, echoing her turn-of-the-century critique, “Wife Does Not Own Her Own Children in Georgia.”¹¹ Additionally, Georgia legislators still had not instituted compulsory education, and even Prohibition, the seeming success of women’s public agitation, appeared in danger of collapsing to those “in favor of local option or to state it more emphatically [those] who are in favor of Open Saloons.”¹² Furthermore, “notorious prison conditions were not only smothered and sheltered, but actually white-washed and applauded by the Legislature,” Felton argued.¹³ Felton was troubled by the absence of important social reforms, but she found men’s failure to acknowledge their efforts as legitimate and respond accordingly both insulting and infuriating, particularly in light of her extensive and enduring campaigns.

The years Felton had spent attempting to persuade men of their obligation to treat women equitably and those of women agitating publicly for reform had been ineffective; by the 1910s, Felton had little faith in the ability—or willingness—of men to act outside of their own interests. Once again, a new strategy would be necessary for Felton to attempt a society in which men and women’s interests were treated and promoted equitably. “Time enough has been given for manhood suffrage to secure protection to women,” declared Rebecca in 1915.¹⁴ Because men had been so unresponsive, Felton decided to embrace the option of woman suffrage to enable

¹¹ Ibid.; Felton, “Wife Does Not Own Her Own Children in Georgia.”

¹² Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 3; Felton, “Woman Suffrage From a Southern View,” 3.

¹³ Felton, “Woman Suffrage From a Southern View,” 5.

¹⁴ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 4.

women to represent their own interests in society, as men had proven unreliable actors on behalf of women.¹⁵

For the woman who, in 1886, had written that women were “agreeably disfranchised,” the decision to remove men from their presumed role as providers appeared a dramatic shift from her earlier beliefs.¹⁶ As she had with all of her earlier, potentially controversial efforts, Felton carefully positioned her intentions. For years, Felton had presented issues of women’s interest as women’s needs. Women, *as women*, were entitled to protection, domestic comfort, and a number of other needs, Felton had argued. She identified the “needs” as natural rights, ordained by God, and as old as time. Thus, as an advocate for women’s needs, rather than their interests, Felton was not reordering society and its gender relations; instead, she was simply serving as an enforcer of the intended natural order of society by holding men accountable. In this role, which Felton created for herself, she could claim that she was neither upstart nor unwomanly, as she could defend her actions as selfless, not self-interested, all while improving women’s position in society.

Throughout her career, as Felton crafted her arguments regarding women’s needs and position within society, she constructed an image of men that corresponded to her objectives for women, and she explained the change as necessary. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Felton had argued that women were entitled to have happier homes, access to financial independence, and philanthropic roles in their communities. These objectives were not privileges, Felton argued; rather, they were necessities, as they could contribute to the rebuilding of southern society and protect women in any future crises. Accordingly, Felton argued that

¹⁵ While endorsing suffrage was a new part of Felton’s agenda, it was not new to the South. The first suffrage movement, Wheeler explains in *New Women of the New South*, took place in the 1890s; thus, when Felton adopted woman suffrage, she was doing so at the second, revitalized southern suffrage movement (20-22).

¹⁶ Dr. and Mrs. W. H. Felton, “Accepted with Thanks.”

men, as husbands, fathers, and legislators, needed to live up to their obligations to be protectors and providers for women's needs.

At the turn of the century, Felton wanted women to assume a more public role and agitate public opinion, in the hope that recalcitrant men might be forced to address issues of women's interest. As such a plan required a change from the primarily domestic role of women Felton had endorsed earlier, Felton positioned the change as one that men's inaction had necessitated, rather than as one that women themselves voluntarily adopted. Felton suggested that as men were naturally less virtuous than women, they had inadvertently allowed the moral declension of society. In response to this construction of men and social crisis that Felton depicted, women could claim that they were entering the public sphere not out of a self-interested desire to improve their own position but to better enable men to do their job and care for southern society. Even as women assumed more social power, they could claim that men were still the expected actors in society and that women were selflessly offering their moral guidance as an example to men for the benefit of society, an action newly necessitated by moral and social crises at the turn of the century.

In the 1910s, Felton understood woman suffrage to be the only viable route for improving women's status in society. Even so, she was not willing to sacrifice the image of self-denying elite white womanhood she had been building for twenty-five years. Indeed, Felton hoped for gendered equity, but she hoped to achieve such a society with women's distinctive qualities intact. To justify the transition of women from public agitators to political actors—with their femininity unblemished—Felton called upon her oft-used rhetorical tactic of carefully positioning her proposal for a change in women's actions as a warranted response to men and necessity.

Felton argued that women had taken—and were continuing to take—advantage of every opportunity within their power by which social reform was potentially possible:

The Federation of Women's Clubs plead for compulsory education and a raise in the age of consent. The temperance women plead for an enforcement of the Prohibition Law against saloons, locker clubs, and "Near-Beer" shops where intoxicants are freely dispensed. The Suffrage women plead for a woman's lawyer bill, equal ownership for the mother in her own children, a raise in the age of consent, compulsory education, and equal pay for women in equal work with men.¹⁷

Women had used the methods available to them, such as the ability to entreat the men of their government, yet men had hardly afforded women's questions and petitions any attention. Each of these pleadings, which had been ongoing for years, "went to the wall. Not a single question was given a final vote in the late legislature, and yet that turbulent body pranced and cavorted for fifty days," she explained.¹⁸ With each dismissive response from men, women had been "discovering their helplessness without the ballot," Felton explained.¹⁹

"Moral uplift of the Nation must be accomplished by something different and more patriotically effective than anything now in sight," Felton asserted in 1915.²⁰ She continued: "Unless virtue and intelligence are allowed to find expression at the ballot box, the Republic is doomed."²¹ With this suggestion that the fate of the Republic was in limbo, Felton stressed the continued importance of social reforms that pertained to women's interests. "Cleaner administrations, more protection to women's virtue, better laws for the protection of the home," and "the enforcement of laws against the saloon because drunkenness creates crime, poverty, and

¹⁷ Felton, "Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point," 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Felton, "Untitled: Abject Surrender," 11.

²⁰ Felton, "Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point," 5.

²¹ Ibid.

disease” were reforms to which women were still entitled.²² In all their roles, men had failed to provide for women’s needs; thus, women would pick up men’s slack and provide for their own needs—and those of society—that men had disregarded. Through their negligent treatment of women, men had created the need for woman suffrage. Felton continued to demonstrate that issues of women’s interest were women’s needs, not to remind them to fulfill their roles, but to demonstrate how they had failed to provide for women; through their unaccountability, men lost the opportunity to provide for women’s needs, and thus, had forsaken their right to suffrage as an exclusive prerogative of manhood.

As Felton argued it, women had been preparing for the ballot for years, but not by their own doing; rather, it was men’s inattentiveness that had begun the process of women “getting ready for the ballot.”²³ As women were “suffering from the curse of intemperance, in their own homes, they were simply getting educated,” albeit unknowingly, “to use the ballot,” she explained.²⁴ The reform results that women had not achieved through public agitation could likely be attained through political agitation, Felton offered. “If women had the ballot in Georgia,” she ventured, “there would be sufficient agitation to compel attention.”²⁵ At the turn of the century, when Felton had encouraged women to embrace the public forum, nothing except precedent had blocked their entry. With suffrage, however, it was not within Felton’s power to access the political sphere on her own. Thus, Felton faced the self-imposed challenge of having to convince men to provide suffrage to women while simultaneously telling men they had lost the privilege of providing for women.

²² Ibid., 6.

²³ Felton, “Untitled: Abject Surrender,” 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 3.

Felton's solution was to simultaneously approach the issue from two perspectives. First, Felton aimed to showcase the many ways she believed men had failed and were continuing to fail to provide for women and society, thus justifying that women's interest in suffrage was a reasonable response to unreasonable conditions and thus, still womanly. Secondly, Felton sought to demonstrate many reasons why women were entitled to suffrage, whether as wives and daughters or as patriotic citizens. Whereas in her earlier efforts, Felton had subtly leveraged and manipulated traditional definitions of manhood against men—such as in her early suggestion that husbands should fulfill their responsibility to care for their wives by empowering them, or in her later reminders to men of how they should demonstrate their manhood by enacting domestic reforms—Felton explicitly leveraged masculinity in her efforts for woman suffrage. Felton repeatedly argued that by failing women, men had emasculated, and continued to emasculate, themselves. Thus, rather than suggesting actions that men could take to bolster, improve, or display their masculinity, as she had earlier, an emboldened Felton suggested that they had essentially become a lost cause. Denying woman suffrage only stood to further Georgia men's downfall, and providing elite white women with suffrage would be the only means by which they could regain their former stature. In an attempt to guard against sounding too bitter or desperate, Felton confidently informed men that the women of Georgia would eventually secure the vote even without their aid; thus, women could function without men, but if men were interested in regaining their masculinity, they could only do so by acting of their own volition and providing women with suffrage—before a national solution robbed them of this final opportunity. That Felton risked her own feminine propriety with her unbridled criticism of men reflects her near exasperation after such a long campaign to improve the lot of women.

A successful woman suffrage campaign for Felton would be one that amended gender inequities without razing gender difference. Felton hoped that Georgia's men would restore their masculinity by granting women the right to vote. Furthermore, Felton hoped that Georgia women would retain their femininity, while extending their ability to wield womanly influence—and their personal interests—on society. Even as she believed qualified white men and women were equally entitled to suffrage, Felton expected men and women to use their franchise for separate purposes. Men would still be the primary actors and office-holders in society, but women would be better equipped to hold their newly re-masculinized male counterparts accountable. Felton suggested to men, just as she had in her earlier proposals, that the changes in gender relations that she proposed would be to the benefit, not the detriment, of men and society.

Felton's 1915 critique of southern manhood was intended to demonstrate the ways in which men had failed both women and the South; by making her argument, Felton hoped to deconstruct the notion that men were worthy of the exclusive privileges they enjoyed in society. Re-writing history once again, Felton began her assault on southern men with a biting critique of the various ways in which Georgia men had failed their state. "The war of the sixties could have been avoided if our leading politicians had been gifted with statesmanship and a proper regard for mothers who furnished the soldiers for a useless and destructive war," Felton argued in 1916.²⁶ Southern men were responsible for seceding, a decision that "plumped [Georgia] into a state of destruction."²⁷ Felton noted that the war had not been for "states' rights," as southern leaders had proclaimed it to be; rather, the war had been one of self-interest, one for "slave

²⁶ Rebecca Felton, "How They Do In Georgia for the Women's World," 1915 or 1916, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 6, 4.

²⁷ Rebecca Felton, "The Question Before Us," 1915, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 3, 7.

owners' rights."²⁸ After instigating the war, Georgia's leaders handled each subsequent opportunity improperly, with every decision promoting their own self-interest and not those of the state they represented.

Felton offered a scathing review of southern men's wartime actions. With the imposition of a "tyrannical conscript law," these men effectively "drenched the entire Southland with the blood of mothers' sons, many of whom never owned a slave."²⁹ As they did so, the women of the state, who had been powerless in the decisions that created the war, suffered immensely.³⁰ Even before the war reached a resolution, the war wreaked havoc on the South; that the South, under the exclusive control of men, lost the war was indeed a painful ending. Felton's focus, however, in her twentieth-century critique was not on the actual loss of the war. Instead, Felton issued her complaints regarding the way in which southern men dealt with the loss. Citing Robert E. Lee, who handled the defeat "with a resignation that was wonderful," as the lone exception, Felton spoke with disgust about the southern men who "accepted abject surrender" and then "turned both cheeks to be smitten" by the North.³¹

Even as Felton disagreed with many of the self-interested values of the Confederate leaders, her particular complaint was that the southern men who surrendered immediately abandoned all the principles they had once professed. Instead of holding fast to their values, southern men "fell on their knees" to surrender and "weakly yielded" to the terms established by

²⁸ Rebecca Felton, "Why Women Should Have the Ballot," 1915, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 4. 11.

²⁹ Felton, "The Question Before Us," 7.

³⁰ Felton, "Untitled: Abject Surrender," 6. In *New Women of the New South*, Wheeler argues that "surrender of principle in anticipation of defeat was not an acceptable alternative to these children of the Confederacy who had grown up amidst tales of the heroic sacrifices of their ancestors (5). In her argument in the 1910s, Felton attempted to wield the same argument to get men to surrender to woman suffrage by demonstrating what their pride had cost the South.

³¹ Rebecca Latimer Felton, "Life and Character of Robert E. Lee: An Address Delivered at Ashburn, Georgia on April 26, 1915, Upon the Invitation of the United Daughters of the Confederacy," in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also Addresses Before Georgia's Legislature, Women's Clubs, Women's Organizations and other Noted Occasions* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 239; Felton, "Untitled: Abject Surrender," 4.

the North.”³² Without an attempt to avoid emancipation or secure a compensated emancipation, the leaders of the South accepted emancipation without contest, an act which “swept billions [of dollars] of property” off of the line sheets of the South.³³ Thus, these men had demonstrated that they lacked both the conviction to act on behalf of their states and the fortitude to uphold their own principles, ignoble as they were. Not only had men allowed war when they should not have, they failed to win it, *and* they did not even lose with their dignity intact.

In a decision that added insult to the many injuries of the Civil War, southern leaders further betrayed their principles when they stood by and did nothing to prevent the advent of black citizenship. Confederate men “surrendered not only the contention of the bloody civil war, but declared themselves willing to give to the colored race all the rights and privileges that our forefathers died to save.”³⁴ Politicians’ “craving to vote swallowed up their foresight and prudence and loyalty,” Felton argued, implying the betrayal of southern men to the Confederate dead, the values of the Confederacy, and the wives and children whom they were supposed to represent.³⁵ Furthermore, these leaders were an embarrassment to the founding fathers of the nation, Felton explained:

Our politicians said we will give Africans all we claim as to citizenship if our voting privilege may be restored to us. Patrick Henry said “Give me Liberty or Give me Death,” but our Southern politicians said “Restore to us the ballot and we will call our former slaves our equals in the rights of citizenship.” A hundred years seems to have made an awful retrograde in our liberty-loving men!³⁶

³² Felton, “Untitled: Abject Surrender,” 4.

³³ Felton, “Why Women Should Have the Ballot,” 11.

³⁴ Felton, “Untitled: Abject Surrender,” 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Southern men had defaulted on their obligations to their state, their constituents, their principles, and their heritage. Rebecca blamed southern men for initiating the war by seceding, the self-interest they maintained, and the ensuing wartime suffering. Their failures could be measured in the body counts of those who died in vain, the number of widows and orphans left after the war, and the dollars that evaporated with uncompensated emancipation. Reflecting on the war southern leaders made, Felton asserted: “I say it was not worth the costly sacrifice.”³⁷

Southern men’s failings had created a tumultuous South. The war, its devastation, and the problems left in its wake had consumed nearly all of Felton’s adult life. For twenty-five of these fifty years, Felton had actively petitioned the men of the South to rectify the problems they had created. By 1915, Felton was ready for women to have more power—through the ballot—to help heal the South and improve the troubles war had created for women. As Felton lobbied for woman suffrage, she found that men’s self-interest had not waned, and that their pride had only grown; not only were men unwilling to restore the South, they would not allow women to do so either. “We seem to be playing with our opportunities when sane and sensible women are jeered and sneered at because they have decided that they could help in this business of life-saving and character-saving and happiness-saving if given a chance,” Felton contended.³⁸ That Felton had been charting the same course for over thirty years—and witnessed such occurrences for eighty—only heightened her exasperation.

The dishonorable, unimpressive way in which she believed southern leaders handled the war provided Felton with enough failure to wield against men half a century beyond the war’s close. Once men established this precedent of failure on such an immense scale, every additional failing lowered them further in Felton’s eyes. Even the passive failings of inaction

³⁷ Felton, “Why Women Should Have the Ballot,” 13.

³⁸ Felton, “Untitled: Abject Surrender,” 10.

could be noted as offenses in the wake of southern men's epic failure with the Civil War. Felton did cite other, earlier missteps of southern men, such as denying women the ability to "own her own wages" until 1897, their long history of "wife beating," and their "faithlessness" in marriage.³⁹ Most of Felton's complaints regarding the shortcomings of southern men, however, regarded the flaws they had exhibited during the war: pride, self-interest, and an unwillingness to repair—or let anyone else repair—the damage they caused. In particular, Felton harked on how these character flaws influenced the woman suffrage movement.

Our legislators are "holding idle hands and forbidding that wives and mothers should even protest against such injustice," Felton declared in 1916, referencing the "vice conditions" of Georgia.⁴⁰ In a 1915 argument for woman suffrage, Felton had highlighted that it was "arrogance of those who have been elected to public office" that was "the curse of the Republic." "After they get the seat warm, they proceed to prevent other people from having a voice in government," Felton explained.⁴¹ By "other people," Felton meant educated white women. Felton believed "that slavery was a curse to the South" and that "in the providence of God," "every human being [should have] a chance for liberty," but she did not believe that blacks had proven fit for suffrage.⁴² Felton's hope was for the South to abolish the Fifteenth Amendment and "disfranchise Africans," as she believed that black southerners had not been prepared for the ballot, and that they had been abused by campaigning white southerners willing to exchange "intoxicants" for a vote.⁴³

³⁹ Felton, "Why I Am A Suffragist?" (14 May 1915), in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 248-250.

⁴⁰ Felton, "How They Do In Georgia for the Woman's World," 4.

⁴¹ Felton, "Why Women Should Have the Ballot," 4.

⁴² Felton, "Why I Am A Suffragist?," 254.

⁴³ Felton, "Why Women Should Have the Ballot," 16; Felton, "Untitled: Abject Surrender," 5.

Southern legislators not only prized their ability to bribe black voters, but they also leveraged racial fears against poor white southerners, according to Felton. “Our southern politicians are frantically intent on holding to old secession traditions; ... [they] want to keep prejudices alive and continuously active for selfish political ends,” she argued in 1915 argument for woman suffrage.⁴⁴ Elite white men in power could secure a Democratic vote from a poor white southerner by suggesting that without that vote, the “dread of negro domination” loomed large.⁴⁵ These “old-time dogmas” had “kept one political party in power for a half century,” Felton explained, suggesting both the self-interest of those in office and their disrespect for their positions and constituents.⁴⁶

While southern politicians claimed that they were opposed to woman suffrage because they did not want to give the ballot to black women, Felton argued that their real fear was the “remedial legislation” they anticipated from white women voters.⁴⁷ With enforced Prohibition or other “remedial legislation,” Georgia’s legislators would lose additional power in the form of their leverage with the “liquor men” and other interest groups in the state. With “prejudices of interest,” rather than “prejudices of ignorance,” Felton understood the male leaders of Georgia to have compromised the honor of their offices by willfully disregarding their roles as voters, legislators, and leaders.⁴⁸

Whether in their failures as family men, such as by beating their wives, or in their political failings, by promoting their own interests over those of their constituents, the men of Georgia had failed to live up to their masculine obligations, Felton argued. If southern men wanted to reclaim the “chivalric instinct that differentiates the coarse brutal male from the

⁴⁴ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁴⁸ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View-Point,” 2.

gentlemen of our nation,” they could do so by acting on “good sense and common honesty” to grant women the franchise.⁴⁹ Indeed, Felton argued that woman suffrage was a “right” and not a “favor,” and thus the action was required and not benevolent, but as the ballot had to be supplied by males, Felton suggested that in so doing, men would and restore their manhood by fulfilling their obligations.⁵⁰ The form of chivalry to which southern men had become too accustomed was “less sincere”; “Honeyed phrases are pleasant to listen to, but the sensible women of our country would prefer more substantial gifts,” Felton explained to any men who were confused as to what women wanted.⁵¹

Felton varied between two lines of reasoning as to why women were entitled to the vote. In some arguments, she played up men’s obligations and women’s entitlements that were based on gendered difference. In her suggestion that men could act chivalrously by granting women the vote, Felton suggested that they would be acknowledging that women were different than themselves, and thus, worthy of suffrage. This line of reasoning built upon the masculine obligations Felton had described in the 1880s and 90s, as well as on her presentation of feminine virtue at the turn of the century. “To discredit the mother who goes down into the valley of the shadow to give immortal life to a being is a criminal offense against gratitude, decency, and filial duty,” Felton argued, tying women’s entitlement to their gender and men’s obligation to theirs.⁵² “A moment’s real consideration of what ever living human being owes to his or her mother” would remind men that they had been “seriously and emphatically unfair and unjust” to their mothers thus far.⁵³

⁴⁹ Felton, “Why I Am A Suffragist?” 251.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 252.

⁵² Felton, “Why Women Should Have the Ballot,” 1.

⁵³ Felton, “The Women of Our Country,” 3.

Furthermore, these mothers had “been worn threadbare” in their “endeavor to secure better laws and better protection for themselves and their offspring.”⁵⁴ As their efforts had been futile, Felton proposed that men allow women to “assist in public housekeeping,” a suggestion that demonstrated her attempt to bridge men’s perceptions of women’s traditional roles with the vote.⁵⁵ As voters, women could contribute to the social well-being by overhauling “vice conditions” and cleaning up the social evils that all “sane and sensible men and women” recognized as troublesome.⁵⁶ “Woman is still the custodian of the house, as perforce, she must be, because of the high and holy estate of motherhood,” Felton allowed, tempering the more radical argument for suffrage with society’s traditional understanding of women’s place; this suggestion offered the reassurance that women would not vacate their place—or their gendered responsibilities—by gaining the franchise.⁵⁷

In lobbying for woman suffrage, Felton understood she would be wise to buttress her arguments of gendered difference, which she had unsuccessfully made for many years, with a new, potentially more compelling line of attack. “I claim that [women] were born into all the rights that are the property of their brothers, born of the same parents and raised in the same home and educated in the same way,” Felton issued.⁵⁸ Just as property was passed to children, “regardless of sex,” the “essential and inherent right” of voting should be passed to children, “regardless of sex.”⁵⁹ Without the vote, women were left with the “right to own property” but with no “right to say how, when, or by whom that property [could] be taxed.”⁶⁰ Felton hoped

⁵⁴ Felton, “Why Women Should Have the Ballot,” 17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁶ Felton, “Woman Suffrage: A Southern View Point,” 2.

⁵⁷ Felton, “The Women of Our Country,” 3.

⁵⁸ Felton, “Why I Am A Suffragist?” 251.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

that with “due consideration” the men of Georgia could recognize—and rectify—such a disparity.⁶¹

In 1915, Rebecca addressed the Georgia Legislature. “We are not asking that you endorse woman suffrage,” Felton explained. She continued:

We come to you as citizens of Georgia and of the United States, with a request, a petition if you please, asking that the question may be so placed before the voters of Georgia, that these voters may discuss and decide upon the question. Every citizen has the right of petition and as our representatives, we are at liberty to ask and request this of you.⁶²

By focusing on the common denominator of citizenship between the elite white men in power and the women whom Felton aimed to have enfranchised, Felton presented her argument in terms that she expected would make it harder for men to deny women. Appealing to the men as legislators, Felton highlighted their responsibilities not only to women, as citizens, but to their voting male constituents as well.

If they grant the ballot to women you will have relieved yourself of an unwanted burden on your shoulders. If they do not grant it, then you have not been hurt or hindered, and will maintain the respect of those who ask you to relieve yourselves of this responsibility by giving the opportunity to your constituents at home. That you can refuse to do so is a question that your constituents will settle with you, later on.⁶³

Felton reminded the legislators that not only did their “respect” hinge upon how they handled the question of woman suffrage, but their very positions did, as well.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Felton, “The Question Before Us,” 1.

⁶³ Ibid., 2.

Felton frequently relied on a combination of her two arguments regarding women's entitlements as legal citizens and as virtuous women. If men did not respond as husbands or sons, they might respond as voters and legislators. In either case, men would be fulfilling their obligations and restoring their masculinity. Felton relied upon her "virtue and brains and patriotism" to leverage southern manhood, by demonstrating how men had failed women earlier, providing them an opportunity to rectify their mistakes, and justifying why women were qualified to vote.⁶⁴ Significantly, Felton wielded another version of manhood as a weapon in her battle to enfranchise elite white women. Drawing on common stereotypes of black men as alternately infantile or barbaric, she presented elite white women's right for suffrage in direct contrast to the problematic vote of the black male.⁶⁵ Black men had "no preparation for this ballot privilege" when they received it, whereas white women were, in the 1910s, "preparing to be intelligent voters."⁶⁶ Furthermore, black men had been enfranchised before they made any effort or developed any patriotism, Felton explained.⁶⁷ Suffrage women were certainly exerting effort, and even without effort, they possessed "enough inbred patriotism" to justify the vote.⁶⁸ Felton explained that she contrasted the disfranchised elite white woman with the enfranchised black men to demonstrate her "supreme disgust for our would-be wise men who gravely tell us that women do not know how to vote and should not be entrusted with the ballot."⁶⁹ By enfranchising women, men had a chance to compensate for their earlier failings. If men refused

⁶⁴ Felton, "Woman Suffrage: A Southern View Point," 5. Emphasis added. In *New Women of the New South*, Marjorie Wheeler argues that women were indeed "seeking major revisions in [both] rights and privileges" (xiii).

⁶⁵ For further information on stereotypes of black men, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White On Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), especially Chapter 10, "Popular Types." See also, David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), especially Chapter 3, "Black Types."

⁶⁶ Felton, "Untitled: Abject Surrender," 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

to grant women suffrage, Felton claimed they would “debase [woman’s] interests and her responsibilities below the Africans, who have had suffrage in this state for more than forty years.”⁷⁰ With the latter option, men would decline the opportunity to regain their masculinity, and they would also dilute their identification with the white race.

In 1915, the woman suffrage movement in Georgia attained a small victory, a hearing with the state Committee on Constitutional Amendments. The hearing was intended to determine whether a referendum would be included during the following election cycle. Three suffrage advocates would promote their platform, and two anti-suffragists would share theirs. At the hearing, however, Felton discovered how “shrewdly the chairman of the Committee and the same two anti-suffragist women had arranged the details of the hearing.”⁷¹ Felton and the other suffragists were only allowed ten minutes apiece, while the “antis” got thirty-five minutes each. Furthermore, while the chairman silenced the applause that the audience proffered after Felton’s speech, he made an expression to the audience after the speech of an anti-suffragist which Felton interpreted as saying “the lid is off, cheer as much as like!”⁷² The remaining members of the committee showed little interest in the argument of either side and little respect for the hearing itself. One member napped, and another, “like a schoolboy, asked to be excused,” Felton recounted.⁷³ As “parting words,” Felton offered the following closing to her address at the hearing:

We thought it proper to ask you to give to Georgia women what has been given in a dozen states and which a dozen more are preparing to give, within a year—but if you choose to be churlish, then we will wait until a constitutional majority

⁷⁰ Felton, “Why Women Should Have the Ballot,” 14.

⁷¹ Felton, “How They Do In Georgia For the Woman’s World,” 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

will force you to submit, as you submitted to the Fifteenth Amendment at the close of the war.⁷⁴

Felton maintained that women would achieve the vote with or without the men of Georgia, but the window of opportunity for men to do so without losing their dignity was quickly passing.

In the 1910s, as Felton adopted the woman suffrage platform, she increasingly used more assertive language in her arguments. Indeed, Felton had long spoken with “firm conviction,” but it was during her campaign for women’s votes that Felton acknowledged wholeheartedly that her lifetime of work had been more than tangentially related to political affairs. “I propose to give you a Southern view of the Woman Suffrage question as I see it after a lifetime of residence in the South and with considerable experience in political circles.”⁷⁵ Claiming a lifetime in Georgia was not a new argument for Felton, though the lifetime she claimed did become increasingly impressive as she reached her eighties in 1915. Acknowledging her familiarity with “political circles,” however, was a dramatic departure from Felton’s earlier efforts to mark her intentions and activities as explicitly non-political.

For years, Felton had played to traditional understandings of femininity in an effort to increase her legitimacy with both men and women. Even as Felton was ready to shed the persona with which she claimed she could not speak as wisely as a man and that women had a better perspective on society because they were not invested in politics, the men of Georgia were not ready for her to do so.⁷⁶ Frustratingly, many of the arguments that men leveraged against woman suffrage were ones Felton had spent years reinforcing. In a 1915 article in which Felton

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁵ Felton, “Woman Suffrage from a Southern View,” 3.

⁷⁶ In *New Women of the New South*, Marjorie Wheeler argues that the South was “the region of the United States most devoted to preserving the traditional role of women,” and that “the South was distinctive, indeed notorious, in the annals of the woman suffrage movement as the region that afforded the movement the greatest resistance and the least success” (xiii, 4).

defined why she was a suffragist, Felton included a section regarding common objections to woman suffrage. Felton did not specify if the objections were offered by men, women, or both; regardless of the gender of the issuer, the complaints resembled many that Felton had made in the previous three decades.

“It is said that women are represented by their husbands at the ballot box. This is not true,” Felton argued.⁷⁷ Felton does not make clear here whether she found fault with the objection because men were supposed to represent their wives and failed or because men were not supposed to represent their wives at the ballot box. Either way, Felton had spent a lifetime trying to hold men accountable to their wives, including in their roles as voters, and the ideal had she promoted had not transpired. In the nineteenth century, Felton had argued that men were to demonstrate their masculinity by representing the interests of their wives. During her campaign for female public agitation, Felton had argued that women were demonstrating their virtue publicly primarily to remind men of their obligation to represent their wives. Furthermore, Felton’s arguments had been very public, whether as speeches at graduations and lecture halls or as editorials in state and local newspapers, so many Georgians were familiar with her viewpoints, old and new. Thus, even if Felton had given up on husbands representing their wives at the ballot box, it is not surprising that many in her state still clung to the political culture she had helped entrench.

Others objected that women were “incompetent and too silly.”⁷⁸ While Felton had often mentioned her own ignorance as a rhetorical tactic, she had also sincerely suggested that without education, even capable women would remain ignorant. Felton’s intention had been to convince society that women were deserving of the same opportunities that were available to men. For

⁷⁷ Felton, “Why I Am A Suffragist?” 252.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

many, it would have been hard to distinguish that Felton did not mean that women were naturally less intelligent. Even Felton helped to blur this line, in an attempt to amplify women's virtue. "Oh! fine gentlemen, your brains may be larger, and your opportunities greater, [and] your rights to preeminence may be unquestioned," began Felton in an argument that women, such as Queen Victoria, were naturally more virtuous than men.⁷⁹ Though she may have successfully argued that Queen Victoria demonstrated "conservatism" and "clean living," Felton also laid the groundwork, albeit unwittingly, for many later objections to woman suffrage. Felton did not acknowledge the arguments used against woman suffrage as ones that she had helped to forge. Certainly, though, she had been an important voice in a political culture that carefully reserved the vote in particular as an exclusive privilege of manhood.

Felton's earlier rhetorical tactics created additional obstacles for her advocacy of woman suffrage, such as the way in which she carefully shielded many details of her own life. Many aspects of Felton's personal life could have provided a model for the household in which one could maintain their femininity and domesticity while undertaking tasks that were not traditionally associated with women. Felton had ironed her husband's shirts and she had helped him draft Congressional bills.⁸⁰ Yet the general public had only heard Felton talk about "three fresh shirts a day," which were "ready when he rushed in."⁸¹ Other activities, such as running the newspaper, were endeavors that Felton may have mentioned to the public, though she had done so with disclaimer. By acknowledging that she would have been better to leave the managing of the newspaper to a man, Felton had backpedaled the potential example she could have provided to demonstrate that non-traditional activity for a woman could effectively be done,

⁷⁹ Felton, "Women in Philanthropy," 4.

⁸⁰ Isma Dooley, "Interesting Incidents in the Life of Mrs. William H. Felton," in *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, by Rebecca Latimer Felton, 120; Felton, *Romantic Story*, 30.

⁸¹ Dooley, "Interesting Incidents," 120.

without losing one's femininity.⁸² As she had been so preoccupied with maintaining a legitimate decorum throughout her life, it was difficult for Felton to resurrect the details of her past and put them towards a new persona. Years of claiming disinterest, distrust, and abstinence from politics rendered her new attempts to claim political experience fall on deaf ears.

Woman suffrage faced other obstacles in Georgia, including many that were outside of the reach of Felton's extensive rhetorical career. Felton batted objections that women "shirk[ed] jury duty."⁸³ Others objected that women did not perform military duty; in an argument consistent with her earlier arguments, Felton argued that as "the woman provides the material out of which soldiers are made and devotes sixteen years of hard toil towards their raising," they were performing ample military duty.⁸⁴ Another objection was that "women can marry men younger than themselves." While Felton did not explicate why that objection was used against woman suffrage, her response offers a telling barometer of her understanding of gender difference. "As the woman is always to be chosen and not the chooser, the objection is invalid," Felton countered.⁸⁵ In politics, women deserved to be choosers, but in their personal relationships, women were content to be chosen.

With a host of objections to dismiss, including ones that she found irrelevant—but that in fact relied on precisely the kinds of gender distinctions she had so carefully maintained—such as that "a man cannot say 'cuss words'... in the presence of a lady," Felton found woman suffrage hard to peddle in Georgia.⁸⁶ While in 1915 and 1916 Felton had focused on establishing the groundwork for the movement, she became increasingly exasperated with male inaction as the movement wore on. While masculine insipidity had frustrated Felton for years, it felt sharper

⁸² Felton, "Southern Woman As a Journalist," 25.

⁸³ Felton, "Why I Am A Suffragist?" 250.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

during the woman suffrage movement, as suffragists were directly approaching men with a specific proposition and not getting a response at all. By 1918, however, Georgia's men were offering responses, in both words and actions, and Felton was not pleased with their choices. As men's responses shifted from indifference and dismissal to insolence and outright resistance, Felton issued increasingly brazen criticisms.

On January 10, 1918, the United States House of Representatives voted on—and passed—an amendment for woman suffrage.⁸⁷ They did so, without the endorsement of “the Congressmen of the Southern States, [who] united in a drastic endeavor to defeat” the amendment, Felton wrote in an angry editorial to the *New York Tribune*.⁸⁸ “It passes comprehension,” Felton continued, “that southern politicians cannot discern the signs of the times.”⁸⁹ In this letter to a national audience, Felton noted that the representation in states with woman suffrage would be doubly increased, intimating that men were foolish to prioritize any other interest than one such as increased representation, which seemed so profitable for the state.⁹⁰ More provocative, however, was Felton's next assertion:

It is as plain as the nose on one's face that voting women will not be willing to sit still and allow some sixty or seventy Southern Congress men to hold power in the National Congress... when they use their promotion and authority to slap in the face the wives, mothers, and daughters of the South, who ask for liberty to go to the polls and so far as possible contribute to the protection of their own lives and property and the protection of those who are dependent and are to come after them to be benefitted or injured according to prevailing conditions.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Rebecca Felton, “Southern Congressmen—Opposing Equal Suffrage,” 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Even as she claimed women were eager to hold these men accountable with the vote, Felton identified a number of other obligations on which she believed southern congressmen had defaulted by voting against the amendment.

At the previous Democratic National Convention, the Party had endorsed woman suffrage by a nine-tenths majority. According to Felton, “the southern delegates winked at each other behind the pillars of the Convention Hall.”⁹² Despite their nominal support of the amendment at the convention, these southern delegates “kept a profound secret” about their true interests until the amendment came to a vote.⁹³ Incensed, Felton opined:

It is simply astounding to know that they were not only willing to enslave their own Southern Women, after having given the ballot to negro men—fifty years ago—but their insincerity and (if I may call it a plain name) double-dealing at St. Louis was monumental because they repudiated their party pledges.⁹⁴

Men, argued Felton, had promoted self-interest and personal prejudice over “their party, their president, and their political obligation, all in an effort to “keep the whip hand over the wives and mothers of the South!”⁹⁵ These men would regret their actions, Felton argued, once Georgia women got the ballot. “Their kind will be on their knees to the fair ones, begging to be remembered at the polls,” Felton avowed.⁹⁶

In another editorial regarding the congressmen of her own state who had voted against the amendment, whom she dubbed “The Georgia Eleven,” Felton sarcastically offered the

⁹² Ibid., 2.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 3. Wheeler offers a similar interpretation in *New Women of the New South*: “It is clear that the hold of traditional ideas about the relations between the sexes on southerners was so great, and their commitment to preserving what the majority of Southern politicians regarded as ‘a superior civilization’ was so strong, that Southern politicians felt they must defy their former hero Wilson and national Democratic leaders and resist the federal amendment until the bitter end” (36).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

“consolation” that with their “courageous act” they had done “more to make Georgia people favor votes for women than any production” she could remember.⁹⁷ Retiring her sarcasm, Felton moved on to another line of attack. These congressmen from Georgia had been critical of a senator in their state, Hardwick for opposing the draft law, which the Democratic Party supported. After their vote against woman suffrage, Felton contended, the “Georgia Eleven” would find their “opposition [to Hardwick] considerably emasculated by their own refusal to obey the mandate of their National Democratic platform.”⁹⁸ In more explicit terms that she had used yet, Felton linked the manhood of southern men to their obligations, and subsequently, their failures to uphold such obligations with their emasculation.

In early 1919, in an address to the General Assembly of Georgia, Felton shifted her tone to one steeped in reason, rather than passion.⁹⁹ “I ask you to listen for a few moments to my petition, which I offer for myself and thousands of good women in the State,” Felton began.¹⁰⁰ Felton reminded men that many states had “confer[red] the symbol of citizenship upon their womenkind” and that “wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters [were] the most reliable and loyal assistants in every good word and work that American red-blooded men [could] ever have.”¹⁰¹ The “old ways of dealing with the rights of women are not to be considered by us right now,” Felton argued, after reminding men that it until recently Georgia men had been allowed to beat their wives.¹⁰² The new way of dealing with women’s rights, Felton argued, should be to

⁹⁷ Rebecca Felton, “Marking Progress,” an editorial written to the *Macon Telegraph* in 1918, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 4. 1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁹ Felton, “To the General Assembly of Georgia,” 1919, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Box 20, Folder 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

acknowledge that the “dear women” of Georgia were “the equals, at least” of the women in equal suffrage states.¹⁰³

That same year, after a calm—though not indifferent—petition had not worked, Felton again addressed the Georgia Senate.¹⁰⁴ This time, however, Felton showed little restraint. “If there had been any sort of statesmanship, the South would never have precipitated a four-years bloody war,” Felton argued.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, Felton offered insult to any of her contemporaries who thought men “the only qualified persons to make laws.” “It is remarkable to see how closely some of these self-assured voters follow in the steps of their forefathers who beat their wives and took away property,” Felton noted.¹⁰⁶ Women, in 1919 Georgia, Felton argued, were “in bondage to cruel masters, more than were the children of Israel in the time of the Pharaohs.”¹⁰⁷ Felton asked that men remember such conditions before they “fasten upon the necks of Georgia women the yoke of bondage which a great majority of the States have lifted from the necks of women who are so unfortunate as to have been mated with animals in human shape.”¹⁰⁸ By denying women the vote, men were placing “an unwarranted reflection on the patriotism and public spirit of Georgia women.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, Felton appealed to the General Assembly that they “increase the electorate by the virtue and intelligence of the women of Georgia.”¹¹⁰ “Aforetime Confederates,” by which Felton referenced the Georgia Eleven, “opened war against the women of the United States.”¹¹¹ As things stood in 1919, Felton argued,

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Rebecca Felton, “To the Georgia Senate—Assembled in Atlanta,” 1919, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Box 16.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

“henceforward, the state of Georgia will be known abroad and at home... as the most uncompromising woman-haters in the known world.”¹¹²

Felton concluded that the vote would come, with or without the vote of Georgia; when that day arrives, Felton argued, “the white men of Georgia will be forced to pay decent respect to their mothers who brought them into existence.”¹¹³ Mirroring the consequences of the Civil War, Felton explained the consequences of woman suffrage arriving without the prior ratification by Georgia: “Georgia will either go out of the Union, or be ruled by military authority, or get down on its knees and accept woman suffrage as the supreme law of this Republic, and they will be doing the latter thing in a shame faced way because they brought it on themselves.” Whereas Felton had once hesitated to shame men unapologetically, by the final years of the 1910s, Felton was infuriated, and more importantly, she understood that she had less to lose in regard to southern men.

For all of Felton’s entreaties and tactics, the Georgia Legislature decided to *refuse* the amendment, not simply abstain from ratifying the woman suffrage amendment. In a letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Felton wrote: “When three-fourths of these United States ratify the Suffrage Federal Amendment and poor old Georgia has to ‘take it all back’ and give the ballot to the women of the state, these dictators and Doctors should be invited to move over to Tokio Japan as a better place to get assistance in ‘slavery for women!’”¹¹⁴ Addressing the Georgia senators soon after the refusal, Felton remarked on the “ferocity of the opposition” the legislature had shown. “You have thus become a law unto yourself and you need a good deal of

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Rebecca Felton, “Some Reasons Why the General Assembly Failed to Ratify,” letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, August 12, 1919, in Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Manuscript Collection 81, Microfilm Box 16.

courage and to thus cut yourself off and secede from the only political party you acknowledge allegiance to. These are the facts, beyond dispute,” an angry Rebecca Felton concluded.¹¹⁵

After devoting the better part of a decade to the woman suffrage campaign, the women of Georgia, had failed to convince the men of the legislature to act on either women’s entitlement—either as citizens, wives, or mothers—or men’s obligation—as voters, legislators, and sons. Whether by appealing to reason, chiding, or arguing that men had to redeem their manhood, Felton did not further the cause of woman suffrage in Georgia. After a failed campaign to secure suffrage *from the men of Georgia*, a largely ineffective effort with female public agitation, and few reforms secured through her attempts to persuade men of their obligation, what did Felton’s senatorial appointment—only three years later—signify? After a nearly fifty-year campaign to reshape the gendered terrain of Georgia, what was the impact of Felton’s contributions? And lastly, how did Felton secure the legacy that has predominated in which she appeared an unqualified success?

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Felton—and millions of other women of the United States—gained the franchise, a tool for civic accountability that could potentially be employed to direct legislation and more effectively address gender inequities. Furthermore, an appointment to the United States Senate demonstrated that Felton had a viable public presence in 1922, nearly forty years after she first delivered a public speech. Each of these concrete resolutions, however, represented the culmination of many factors that were outside Felton’s purview. The Amendment had been ratified without the support of the Georgia men whom Felton had lobbied, and as the senatorial appointment conveyed more titular recognition than actual influence, it recognized Felton’s presence rather than her voice.

That Felton’s efforts did not particularly contribute to the decision-making processes that delivered these results does not suggest that her career was for naught or unsuccessful; rather, it demonstrates that measuring Felton’s success solely by the actions of men provides an incomplete picture of her impact.

Indeed, Felton’s career suffered many apparent failures with respect to her intentions for men’s action. In the late-nineteenth century, Felton had strived to have southern men grant power to women in a variety of ways. Using rhetoric of tradition and obligation, Felton had attempted to persuade men to grant their wives a measure of financial independence by adhering to her outlined agenda, “The Wife’s Farm.”¹ Furthermore, men were to represent the needs of their wives and daughters in the political arena, by enacting prohibition legislation, for example,

¹ Felton, “Farmers’ Wives and Their Needs.”

and Felton expected men to encourage the advancement of elite white women, whether through education or other avenues. On all accounts, men failed to respond agreeably to Felton's claims.

Recognizing that her strategy was insufficient, Felton moved on to another tactic, one in which she encouraged women, *en masse*, to influence public opinion and make men answerable to women's needs. Even with an entire brigade of agitators, rather than Felton alone attempting to hold men accountable, Felton's objectives for reforming gender relations between elite white men and women failed. Not even the "success" of Prohibition legislation could really count as an effective change, as lax enforcement demonstrated men's lackluster commitment to the change.

Finally, Felton committed to holding men accountable from a closer proximity, by moving women into the political arena, where, with the vote, they could more effectively procure legislation that reflected their needs and interests. Once again, however, redress of gender inequities required the actions of men, and the men of Georgia failed to deliver what Felton desired.

Unfortunately for Felton, each of these cases of resistance by men reflected a "success" of another kind for her. In an effort to make herself appear acceptably feminine and her reforms palatable, Felton overemphasized traditional gender roles, ones that had histories of promoting gender inequities. Indeed, Felton did hope that society would retain a large degree of gender difference. As Felton envisioned her ideal South, she pictured one in which the region thrived, elite white men and women contributed to society's well-being in unique ways, and society equally respected and provided for the distinct interests and needs of each sex. To actuate her vision, Felton cast her requests of men and women in familiar, traditional terms so that they would appear nonthreatening; likewise, Felton painted her objective as an improved and only

slightly changed traditional society, hoping to compel others to help realize her vision. Felton's rhetorical invocation of tradition, however, did more to promote tradition than it did to promote her desired changes. Effectively, if unintentionally, Felton "succeeded" in reaffirming for men—and many women—that gender differences were real and significant. As she presented elite white women as selfless and self-denying, Felton essentially rendered women without selves, at least in regard to the political arena. Thus, even as her rhetoric produced unintended—and undesired—results, Felton's prominent position and extensive rhetoric did affect society, even if only to reinforce its inaction.

Indeed, the public prominence that Felton achieved was remarkable. Many women who worked for women's rights in the same years as Felton did so in ways that were so radical and nontraditional that they ultimately became martyrs for their causes, having either a bold but brief career or a longer career from a more marginal position on the outskirts of society. For fifty years, Felton delivered addresses, even ones that promoted radical changes, to large, respectable—and even conservative—southern audiences. Furthermore, Felton was routinely applauded for her efforts, both by audiences who enjoyed her delivery and by those who appreciated her intentions. As a talented orator, a respectable woman, and a devotee of tradition, Felton was able to remain in public prominence for decades.

As an acknowledgment of *these* personal characteristics rather than her reform agendas themselves, Governor Hardwick offered Felton a senatorial appointment in 1922. In so doing, Hardwick bestowed more than a title to Felton; additionally, Hardwick provided Felton a platform from which she could rewrite the past, rather than try to enact changes for the future as she had for the entirety of her career thus far. The legitimacy of the Senate seat allowed Felton the opportunity—and the authority—to tell her story and the story of Georgia's women.

In 1930, Felton published a serial narrative of the history of Georgia's women in *The Atlanta Georgian-American*. This series, which was published at its conclusion as *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*, began with a foreword by a writer at the newspaper, which began thus: "Mrs. Rebecca Latimer Felton, the first woman to sit in the United States Senate...."² It was this identity, that of senator, which both ensured Felton would be remembered in history and enabled her to write the very history in which she would be remembered.

"My memory goes back nearly a century," Felton began.³ "To have lived 94 years, and to be blessed with the capacity to remember them and talk of them is not a usual thing."⁴ Indeed, it was not usual, though what was even more unusual was that she had a large audience to listen to her reminiscences and enjoyed the rhetorical finesse to frame them as she pleased.

After the Civil War, Felton claimed, came "the beginning of their [women's] concerted effort to improve their lot, to lay the foundations for better homes and better communities in the future."⁵ Unabashedly, Felton explained to her readers, "our narrative will lead us to their accomplishments," though she pointedly did not acknowledge that she would be leaving out women's failings and crafting her own legacy along the way.⁶

As promised, Felton delivered a progressive narrative of the history of Georgia's women, and not one of a subtle incline. Felton wrote:

It is doubtful whether there has been anything more remarkable than the changes that have affected women. Their place in the community life, their work, their customs, their whole point of view, have been turned upside down within my memory. They have emerged from a subdued background to a place in the sun.⁷

² Jones, Carter Brooke, "Foreword," in *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*.

³ Felton, *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*, 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

This narrative, “replete with devotion, heroism, self-sacrifice and patient work for the upbuilding of a great civilization,” ended with success, Felton claimed, which she expected would inspire “those [women] of the new generation,” those for whom she was writing.⁸ “In those conservative days” of the antebellum era, Felton began, “strange seeds were being sown in the minds of women.”⁹

In the section of her book on the Civil War era, Felton capitalized on the opportunity to share her personal experiences, and in particular, ones that demonstrated her strength and foresight. “I had felt for years that our economic machinery was becoming unwieldy, that the institution of slavery, aside from its rightness or wrongness, was increasingly difficult to manage,” Felton wrote, explaining that she knew the Civil War was impending before it could begin. “But, I was only a woman, and nobody asked me for an opinion,” she concluded. Not only did Rebecca know that the war would begin, but she also “doubted it from the first” that the “South would triumph,” even as her husband and others expected it would. With this foresight, Felton “persuaded Dr. Felton” to move the family to a refugee farm, despite his misgivings.¹⁰ Felton continued this theme, in which she suggested that she had been aware of things that men had not noticed, or that she had acknowledged things before men had, throughout her book. In Felton’s earlier writings, before she had the benefit of knowing that women were ultimately granted the vote and that she eventually obtained a Senate seat, Felton had written more cautiously and had been more hesitant to portray herself in such assertive terms. In 1930, however, Felton was able to present her more forward-thinking actions as pioneering, rather than casting them as traditional expressions of femininity.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18, 21.

In noting her own contributions to the advancement of women, Felton argued that many of her actions had been “subjected to plenty of ridicule” for being outside the expected bounds of femininity.¹¹ As she wrote of the criticisms she received, Felton abandoned the instinct that had long marked her career, the one in which she guarded against criticisms by strategically presenting herself as uncontroversial. “I was called a ‘petticoat reformer,’” Felton wrote. “Such was the lot of a woman who dared to enter public affairs in the 80s.”¹² By 1930, Felton was willing to identify her actions as daring, for daring, when coupled with her late-life “successes” of suffrage and a seat in the Senate, became heroism. “At such a crisis,” Felton wrote, referring to the general troubles of society in the late nineteenth century, “it is a waste of time to address people who think as you do. To be effective, you must reach the foe.”¹³ Indeed, Felton had reached “the foe,” the body of men who disagreed with women advancing, but “reaching the foe” had not made her “effective.” A “romantic story of Georgia’s women,” however, had no room for such details of failure.

Reminiscing on her turn-of-the-century campaign for women’s public agitation, Felton identified the challenges she faced. “How many taunts and slanders, how many cover insinuations, were thrust at me, eternity alone can discover!” Felton wrote.¹⁴ In spite of the challenges she faced, Felton succeeded according to her account in *The Romantic Story*. “The women of the state were aroused at last, and they rallied to the support of us who went out on the firing line, and more and more took their places beside us.”¹⁵ Whereas at the turn of the century, Felton had characterized herself as similar to the masses she encouraged, by the end of her life she could distance herself and her objectives as distinct from—and more enlightened than—

¹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵ Ibid.

those of the women who provided the masses for her agitation strategy. Without noting any of the failures of women's public agitation, Felton noted that when the "[Prohibition] law of 1907 was enacted" in Georgia, it "ushered in a new movement for statewide prohibition that spread all over the country."¹⁶ Without directly crediting herself, Felton linked her own "daring" efforts to the activities that ultimately set an example for the remainder of the nation.

Overlooking the other campaigns for which women agitated that ended in failure, Felton moved on to the issue of suffrage.

Although Felton devoted half of a sentence to an admission that women were never able to "persuade the Legislature of this state to enfranchise women," she devoted an entire chapter to the perseverance women demonstrated with their enduring campaign for suffrage.¹⁷ After "a slow process of evolution," women succeeded, and Felton argued, "today our women face the most hopeful era in the history of women."¹⁸ In "a summing up," Felton concluded her progressive narrative with the assertion that "Georgia's women [had] moved steadily toward a greater destiny" and would continue to "do their part [in society]."¹⁹

Within a few weeks of the book's publication, Rebecca Latimer Felton died at the age of ninety-four on January 24, 1930, having lived a life that was remarkable in its own right and having rewritten her story to construct and preserve the legacy by which she hoped to be remembered. In restoring the personal failures that Felton omitted from her narrative, the tremendous hurdles for a woman navigating the political culture of the South become clearer. It is in light of—and not in spite of—the bounds, limits, and even, failings of Rebecca Latimer Felton's career that the scope and gravity of her influence can be seen.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 46, 47.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES

Dooly, Isma. "Interesting Incidents in the Life of Mrs. William H. Felton." In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 115-122.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer. "Address Made in Atlanta At State Convention, After Prohibition Had Been In Force Two Years and Was Then Defeated." In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 289-294.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer. *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer. "Life and Character of Robert E. Lee: An Address Delivered at Ashburn, Georgia on April 26, 1915, Upon the Invitation of the United Daughters of the Confederacy." In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 231-239.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer. "My Recollections of Large Expositions." In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 107-115.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer. "The Problems that Interest Motherhood (Read Before the Georgia Sociological Society, Atlanta)." In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 279-284.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer, as told to Carter Brooke Jones. *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*. Atlanta: *The Atlanta Georgian and Sunday American*, 1930.

Felton, Rebecca Latimer. "Why I Am A Suffragist?" In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 246-260.

Jones, Carter Brooke. "Foreword." In *The Romantic Story of Georgia's Women*. Atlanta: *The Atlanta Georgian and Sunday American*, 1930. 3.

King, A.C. to Rebecca Latimer Felton. 12 March 1902. In *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth: Also, Addresses Before Georgia Legislature, Woman's Clubs, Women's Organizations, and other Noted Occasions*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. 213.

NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

Atlanta Constitution.

Atlanta Herald.

Cartersville Courant.

Macon Telegraph.

New York Times.

New York Tribute.

Savannah Morning News.

SECONDARY LITERATURE

Berry, Stephen W., II. *All That Makes A Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Boswell, Angela and Judith N. McArthur. "Introduction." In *Women Shaping the South: Creating and Confronting Change*, edited by Angela Boswell and Judith N. McArthur. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006.

Brands, H.W.A., and others, eds. *American Stories: A History of the United States*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2009.

Buhle, Mari John, and others, eds. *Women and the Making of America*. New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.

Campbell, Jacqueline Glass. *When Sherman Marched North From the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Volume I: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- _____. *Man Cannot Speak For Her: Volume II: Key Texts of the Early Feminists*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Cashin, Joan, ed. *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Censer, Jane Turner. *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).
- Chirhart, Ann Short and Betty Wood. "Introduction." In *Georgia Women, Vol. I*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- Clark, Gregory and S. Michael Halloran. "Introduction: Transformations of Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America." In *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric*, edited by Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran, 1-26. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.
- Clinton, Catherine. *Tara Revisited: Women, War, and the Plantation Legend*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1994.
- Clinton, Catherine, and Nina Silber, eds. *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Cox, Karen L. *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003.
- Culpepper, Marilyn Mayer. *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991.
- DuBois, Ellen Carol, and Lynn Dumenil, eds. *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2005.
- Edwards, Laura F. *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin, Thavolia Glymph, and George C. Rable. "A Woman's War: Southern Women in the Civil War." In *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, edited by Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice, 1-28. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War." In *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, edited by Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, 171-199. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

- _____. *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1996.
- Gilmore, Glenda. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Green, Elna C. *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Hess, Mary A. "A Call to Honor: Rebecca Latimer Felton and White Supremacy." M.A. Thesis Michigan State University, 1999.
- Horstmann, Stacey Michele. "Political Apprenticeship of Southern Women: The Political History of White Women's Organizations in Georgia, 1880-1920." Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2000.
- Janney, Caroline E. *Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Johnson, Nan. "The Popularization of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric: Elocution and the Private Learner." In *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric*, edited by Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran, 139-157. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.
- Knight, Lucian Lamar. "Miscellaneous Anecdotes and Witticisms," in *Reminiscences of Famous Georgians: Embracing Episodes and Incidents in the Lives of the Great Men of the State*, 521-530. Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Company, 1907.
- Lebsock, Suzanne. "Foreword." In *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, edited by Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice, ix-xii. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Marriott, David. *On Black Men*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- McCurry, Stephanie. *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- _____. "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina." *The Journal of American History* 78 (Mar., 1992): 1245-1264.
- Mellichamp, Josephine. *Senators from Georgia*. Huntsville, Alabama: Strode Publishers, 1976.

- Miller, Zell. "Rebecca Ann Latimer Felton," in *Great Georgians*, 62-66. Franklin Springs, Georgia: Advocate Press, 1983.
- Montgomery, Rebecca S. *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.
- O'Connor, Lillian. *Pioneer Women Orators: Rhetoric in the Ante-Bellum Reform Movement*. New York: Vantage Press, 1952.
- Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven Yale University Press, 1992.
- Rable, George C. *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.
- Ryan, Mary P. *Women In Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Schuyler, Lorraine Gates. *The Weight of their Votes: Southern Women and Political Leverage in the 1920s*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Scott, Anne Firor. *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Shelby, Annette. "The Southern Lady Becomes an Advocate." In *Oratory in the New South*, edited by Waldo W. Braden, 204-236. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979.
- Smith, Mary Jane. "Constructing Womanhood in Public: Progressive White Women in a New South." Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2002.
- Staman, A. Louise. *Loosening Corsets: The Heroic Life of Georgia's Feisty Mrs. Felton, First Woman Senator of the United States*. Macon, Georgia: Tiger Iron Press, 2006.
- Talmadge, John E. "Rebecca Latimer Felton," in *Georgians in Profile: Historical Essays in Honor of Ellis Merton Coulter*, edited by Horace Montgomery, 277-302. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958.
- _____. *Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960.
- Tonkovich, Nicole. "Rhetorical Power in the Victorian Parlor: *Godey's Lady Book* and the Gendering of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric." In *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric*, edited by Gregory

- Clark and S. Michael Halloran, 158-183. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.
- Varon, Elizabeth. *We Mean To Be Counted*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Wheeler, Marjorie Spruill. "Divided Legacy: The Civil War, Tradition, and 'The Woman Question,' 1870-1920." In *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, edited by Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice, 165-191. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- _____. *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Whites, LeeAnn. "Love, Hate, Rape, Lynching: Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Gender Politics of Racial Violence." In *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction and the Making of the New South*, 177-192. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- _____. "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Problem of Protection in the New South." In *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction and the Making of the New South*, 150-165. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- _____. "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife's Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform." In *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South*, 167-176. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- _____. "The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender." In *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, edited by Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber. 3-21. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- _____. "The De Graffenried Controversy: Class, Race, and Gender in the New South." In *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of a New South*, 127-150. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Whites, LeeAnn, and Alecia P. Long, eds. *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and The American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009.
- Whites, LeeAnn. "Stand By Your Man." In *Women of the American South: A Multicultural Reader*. Ed. Christie Farnham. New York: New York University Press, 1997. 133-149.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. *Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.