

The Woman Patriot

Dedicated to the Defense of Womanhood, Motherhood, The Family and the State
AGAINST Suffragism, Feminism and Socialism

After the Nineteenth: Mary Kilbreth, *The Woman Patriot*, and the Legacy of Female Anti-Suffrage

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Abbreviations

DAR	Daughters of the American Revolution
GFWC	General Federation of Women's Clubs
ICW	International Council of Women
LWV	League of Women Voters
MAOFESW	Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women
MID	Military Intelligence Division
MPIL	Massachusetts Public Interests League
NAWSA	National American Woman Suffrage Association
NAOWS	National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage
NCW	National Council of Women
NYSAOWS	New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WJCC	Women's Joint Congressional Committee
WPPC	Woman Patriot Publishing Company

Introduction

In 1933, while hosting a hearing on regulating interstate commerce, the House of Representatives' Committee on Labor was visited by a curious woman. Tall, distinguished, with pure white hair, Mary Guthrie Kilbreth presented herself to the Committee to make a statement opposing the proposed regulation. The committee was confused by her presence. The Chairman, tight-lipped, balding William Connery of Massachusetts, tried to divine why she was there by asking about the group of women she represented: "What is your organization, a corporation?" "Yes; the Woman Patriot Corporation," Mary Kilbreth answered:

The CHAIRMAN: Is your organization responsible for the effort that was made to keep Doctor Einstein from entering this country?

Miss KILBRETH: Yes.....while in the United States he was a member of three affiliates of the Communist party. Do you wish to see our charges?

The CHAIRMAN: No; I do not care to see the charges. However, we should like to know the background of your organization.

Miss KILBRETH: I have stated several times that we are for law enforcement; for the Constitution and against paternalism and socialism.

Mr. KELLER: Not for prohibition?

Miss KILBRETH: We took no part in the Eighteenth amendment struggle. We were not working in legislation then. We are an outgrowth of the antisuffrage movement.

Miss Kilbreth was never able to give her statement against the proposed labor reform. Chairman Connery continued to ask questions about the Woman Patriots before dismissing her entirely. The Committee, annoyed and perhaps a bit frustrated with the waste of time, moved swiftly on, tersely thanking her for the "interesting statement."¹

¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Hearings Before the Committee on Labor House of Representatives Seventy-Second Congress Second Session on H.R. 14105, 27 January 1933* pp. 195-197.

At a glance, Kilbreth's testimony seems relatively harmless and quite amusing. Who would oppose the entry of Albert Einstein into the United States? What kind of woman would be part of an "anti-suffrage" movement, opposing her own vote? What was Mary Kilbreth doing there, at 10:00 a.m. on a Friday, trying to testify against labor reform when she had never held a job in her entire life?² Even Einstein reacted to Kilbreth's accusations against him with humor: "Never before has any attempt of mine at an approach to the beautiful sex met with such an energetic rebuff....Wouldn't it be funny if they wouldn't let me in? Why, the whole world would laugh at America."³

Yet, Mary Kilbreth, President of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) and later the Woman Patriot Publishing Company (WPPC), has a story to tell if we give her the room to speak it. Kilbreth was an anti-suffragette, or "anti," part of the female anti-suffrage movement that was organized at the end of the nineteenth century to oppose the women's vote. At its height, female anti-suffragism spanned twenty-five state associations organized under NAOWS and published an influential anti-suffrage magazine known as *The Woman Patriot*.⁴ Kilbreth became President in 1919, shortly after the federal amendment legalizing women's suffrage passed Congress.⁵ She would help transition female anti-suffrage

² Considering Kilbreth's age, wealth, family background, social circle, and conservative ideology, it is highly unlikely that she was ever employed, and there is nothing in her archival record to suggest she once was. "Mary G. Kilbreth Statistics Card," Springfield Cemetery Archives, No. 144212 (1957); The Social Register Association, *Social Register, New York, 1901* (New York City: The Social Register Association, 1901), 241; Mary Jane Seymour, *Lineage Book, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution* (Pennsylvania: Harrisburg, 1898), 299-300.

³ "Names make news," *TIME*, December 12 1932, 48.

⁴ Schrieber Ronnee, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18. As specified in the paragraph above, I will be discussing *female* anti-suffragism in the following pages. For more details on *male* anti-suffragists and their collaboration with female antis, see Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 58-92. Jablonsky also discusses the influence of male antis in Jablonsky, *Home, Heaven, and the Mother Party*, 65-81. However, his treatment of them and their involvement in NAOWS is less convincing to me than Marshall's.

⁵ "I Have Not Surrendered My Convictions," *The Woman Patriot*, September 27 1919, 1-2.

into a broader form of conservative activism, using *The Woman Patriot* to do so. Her story and the story of the WPPC illuminate the legacy of anti-suffrage and the larger history of conservative womanhood in America.

Female anti-suffragettes have long been ignored by suffrage history. Part of this is due to their initial characterization in scholarly works. The first women to depict antis in history were the suffragettes themselves. Completing “early and prolific” histories, suffragettes de-emphasized the role of female opposition, most notably in the multi-volume series, *The History of Woman Suffrage*. Authored by luminaries of the early women’s rights movement, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, *The History of Woman Suffrage* never pictured the antis as having posed an actual threat to the suffrage cause. Suffragettes preferred instead to center male “corporate interests” and politicians as the real enemies to women’s freedom.⁶

As historians outside the suffrage movement began to produce works on suffrage, many took their cues from the sources which suffragettes left behind. Female anti-suffragists found themselves depicted as inconsequential; their voices were ignored in favor of representing male opposition to suffrage.⁷ As historian Louise Stevenson has argued, early works on suffrage, like

⁶ Julia Bush, *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1. In *The History of Woman Suffrage*, suffragettes offer the following explanation for the birth of the anti-suffrage movement: “Women who opposed the movement became alarmed and undertook to organize in opposition, thereby exposing their weakness. Their organization was largely confined to a small group of eastern States and developed no strength west of the Allegheny mountains. Its leaders were for the most part connected with corporate interests and did not believe in universal suffrage for men. There is no evidence that they exercised any considerable influence in Congress or in any State where a vote was taken on granting the franchise to women.” National American Woman Suffrage Association, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, ed. Ida Husted Harper (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Company, 1922), xix.

⁷ The emphasis of male antis over female antis in the historical record cannot solely be blamed on the suffrage movement. Especially during the early years of anti-suffrage, female antis recruited male politicians, scholars and religious authorities to speak and write on their behalf. This could give the impression that male antis were more involved in their movement than is accurate. Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 80-92; 185-187.

Andrew Sinclair's *The Emancipation of American Women*, minimized the role of female opposition, attributing the power of anti-suffragism to "the liquor interests, the industrialists, the Catholic church and the urban immigrant vote."⁸ Even when anti-suffragettes were given greater attention, as in Eleanor Flexnor's *Century of Struggle*, they were still characterized as ignorant women, who functioned as a front for the male opposition.⁹ Consequently, for much of the twentieth century, most historical depictions of anti-suffrage women tended to be without agency, critical thinking or independent identity.¹⁰

Towards the end of the century, this depiction of female anti-suffrage began to change. Along with revised histories of suffrage came works like those by Jeanne Howard, Jane Camhi, Thomas Jablonsky and Susan Marshall, which focused solely on the anti-suffragettes.¹¹ This new scholarship explored the identities of antis, using their organization's own records, rather than texts like *The History of Woman Suffrage*, to delve further into the movement.¹² Broader works, like those by Jablonsky and Marshall, collected data on the family backgrounds of anti-suffrage leaders to construct an image of anti-suffragettes that represented who they actually were. In Jablonsky's *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, the wealthy families of anti-suffragettes became proof that antis had great influence as women of high social standing, rather than proof

⁸ This critique was made by Stevenson in her work: Louise L. Stevenson, "Women Anti-Suffragists in the 1915 Massachusetts Campaign," *The New England Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1979): 80–93; 80.

⁹ Eleanor Flexnor, *Century of Struggle: the Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1975); Bush, *Women Against the Vote*, 8-9.

¹⁰ For other critiques on this era of history's portrayal of antis, see Stevenson, "Women Anti-Suffragists," 80 and Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 17.

¹¹ Bush, *Women Against the Vote*, 8-9. While James Kenneally's work on anti-suffrage was produced in 1968, most of the pioneering work done on antis began in the 1980s. James J. Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts 'Referendum' of 1895," *The Historian* 30, no. 4 (1968): 617–33; Jeanne Howard, "Our Own Worst Enemies: Women Opposed to Woman Suffrage," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 9 (1982): 463-474; Jane Jerome Camhi, "Women against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920," *Scholarship in Women's History* 4 (Brooklyn, N.Y: Carlson Pub, 1994); Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Carlson Pub, 1994); Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*.

¹² Camhi, "Women against Women, "; Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*.

of their inconsequence as ignorant Park Avenue ladies.¹³ Utilizing her training as a sociologist, Marshall weaved together an enormous amount of data in *Splintered Sisterhood* to illustrate how the social background of antis influenced their political beliefs. Her survey of anti-suffrage rhetoric demonstrated that anti-suffrage women constructed and revised their own arguments for opposing the vote, rather than relying on those created by men.¹⁴

In addition to broader histories, specific works, like Susan Goodier's impressive book on New York anti-suffragettes, cultivated an appreciation for the regional nature of anti-suffrage. In *No Votes For Women*, Goodier argues that the success of the suffrage movement in New York influenced the antis there to adopt more innovative and dynamic tactics to oppose them.¹⁵ In comparison, Catherine Mambretti's study on Illinois and Louise Stevenson's work on Massachusetts reveal more conservative methods antis had for opposing suffrage, like parlor meetings and "silent speeches."¹⁶ Massachusetts has received much scholarly attention as the state which birthed the anti-suffrage movement. One of the first works to discuss the origin of anti-suffrage, James Kenneally's "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts 'Referendum' of 1895," details the creation of the influential Massachusetts Association Opposing the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW) in response to suffrage activity.¹⁷ Kenneally also demonstrates that the Man Suffrage Association, a male anti-suffragist organization, was

¹³ For more on Jablonsky's discussion of wealth and the anti-suffragette, see Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 51-63.

¹⁴ For more on the growth and evolution of anti-suffrage rhetoric, see Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 93-140.

¹⁵ Susan Goodier, "Using Enfranchisement to Fight Woman Suffrage, 1917-1932," in *No Votes for Women: The New York State Anti-Suffrage Movement* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2013), 10.

¹⁶ Illinois antis did not even keep a list of members, possibly because it would have been too vulgar and public to do so. For more on their conservative methods, see Catherine Cole Mambretti, "The Battle against the Ballot: Illinois Woman Antisuffragists," *Chicago History* (Chicago, United States: Chicago History Museum, Fall 1980), 169; Stevenson, "Women Anti-Suffragists," 82.

¹⁷ Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts 'Referendum' of 1895," 620-622.

founded at the request of MAOFESW, debunking suffragist assertions that female antis were directed by their male counterparts.¹⁸ Other scholars, like Marshall and Jablonsky, have used Massachusetts records from MAOFESW in their broader works on anti-suffrage history.¹⁹

The new literature on anti-suffragism has brought the anti from the shadowy corners of suffrage and brilliantly fleshed her out by giving her a voice, assigning her an identity and unpacking her motivations. Rather than ignorantly following the orders of men, scholars now credit anti-suffragettes with crafting most of the organized response against suffrage. The rhetoric of antis has been the most examined part of their movement and has given antis back their voice, which was once so influential.²⁰ The reinvestiture of antis with agency and identity is what makes the story of Mary Kilbreth even possible. That being said, there is still work to be done, especially on the legacy of anti-suffrage.

Most narratives of the anti-suffrage movement begin with the first anti-suffrage petition in 1871 and end with the Nineteenth amendment's ratification in 1920. Mary Kilbreth arose as a leader in the anti-suffrage movement in 1919, timing that makes her easily dismissible in recent scholarship. Many historians either ignore Kilbreth or use her extremist rhetoric to symbolize the decline of the anti-suffrage movement.²¹ Goodier, for example, argues that "prominent and respected women and men" left NAOWS after the Nineteenth amendment passed Congress, leaving behind "almost hysterical" Kilbreth and the WPPC. While many scholars, including Goodier, acknowledge the WPPC as a successor to NAOWS, the activities of *The Woman Patriot* throughout the decade 1919-1929 are usually considered irrelevant to the larger history

¹⁸ Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage," 622-623.

¹⁹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 318; Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 166.

²⁰ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 93.

²¹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 208-222; Howard, "Our Own Worst Enemies," 472-473.

of anti-suffrage.²² Some even consider these activities as damaging. Jablonsky credits Kilbreth with “stigmatizing the entire anti-suffrage movement”:

Rather than being accepted as earnest, if ultimately unsuccessful, coalition of women opposed to one of many political changes in an age of reform, the remonstrant cause came to be seen as a fanatical cabal of eighteenth-century anti-democrats. The damage done historically to the anti-suffrage image has lingered for years.²³

In this thesis, I argue that Mary Kilbreth does not tarnish the legacy of anti-suffrage but rather illuminates it. It is through her actions and the actions of the women who remained within the movement that we are able to see the long-term effect of the ideas and arguments of anti-suffrage. In order to demonstrate what these effects were, I will track the evolution of NAOWS as it transformed from a defeated national association in 1919 into a powerful conservative publishing company by the end of 1929. Chapter 1 of my thesis will provide a general overview of the more traditional narrative of anti-suffrage from 1871 to 1919, examining who anti-suffragettes were, what organizations they formed and why they opposed the vote. I will explore how the social identities of antis as mostly white, wealthy and socially elite women impacted the beliefs they held against suffrage and progressive reform in America. I will also provide a short biography of Kilbreth. The chapter will close right at 1919, with the passage of the Nineteenth amendment and the official defeat of the anti-suffrage movement.

Beginning with this defeat, my second chapter will describe the transformation of NAOWS into the WPPC. As antis fled NAOWS and the failing anti-suffrage movement, Kilbreth and her fellow board members preserved the one aspect of the organization which was still influential: its publication, *The Woman Patriot*. The transformation of NAOWS into the WPPC took place during the panic induced by the Bolshevik Revolution known as the Red

²² Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 141.

²³ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 112.

Scare. I will describe how Kilbreth took advantage of the Red Scare to broaden the ideology of the anti-suffrage movement into a more general movement of conservative women, most clearly demonstrated in her essay “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign.”

After solidifying into the WPPC, the antis experienced a period of obscurity as the ebb and flow of American politics temporarily left them behind. By taking advantage of the rising tide of conservatism, which occurred in America around 1924, Kilbreth and the WPPC were able to regain some of their lost influence. My third and final chapter will track this transition from political obscurity to political relevancy by examining the WPPC’s fight against the Sheppard-Towner Act, a maternity reform bill, during its initial passage in 1921 and its defeat in 1926. I will also examine the WPPC’s partnership with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) as an example of how the Woman Patriots cultivated a network of alliances with fellow conservative organizations. Working with these allies, Kilbreth and the WPPC did not just defeat the Sheppard-Towner Act; they stymied the progress of progressive reform and dealt a powerful blow to the world of female-led reform. The impact of the WPPC’s rhetoric, as seen in Kilbreth’s 1926 petition, demonstrates how *The Woman Patriot* had become the mouthpiece of female conservatism, a powerful testament to the legacy and impact of anti-suffrage.

Most scholars who have read and examined the rhetoric of anti-suffragettes remark on how similar it is to the arguments made by modern conservative movements.²⁴ There is something important and valuable about the story of anti-suffrage women that can shed light on the relationship between women and conservatism today. The impulse to oppose progressive change, the fear of socialism and the rejection of feminism displayed by anti-suffragettes was not defeated when women’s suffrage became part of our constitution. Rather, the force by which

²⁴ Howard, “Our Own Worst Enemies,” 472-473; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 223-235; Jablonsky, *Home, Heaven and the Mother Party*, 116-117; Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 171-173.

Kilbreth and the Woman Patriot Publishing Company reestablished themselves after suffrage demonstrates the opposite. The story of the anti will never be complete if we ignore Mary Kilbreth and her Woman Patriots, as outrageous as their beliefs might be. In these following pages, it is their story which I will endeavor to tell.

Chapter 1: The Anti-Suffragette

My dear Dr. Johnson...I have been spending a very hectic month here trying to get my house into something like proper condition for a very fussy tenant after three years of neglect. Certainly politics have wrought havoc with me and my personal affairs. The moment Mr. Coolidge "takes hold" I shall escape, I hope from political work.²⁵

In 1922, Mary Kilbreth wrote her friend, anti-suffragist Rossiter Johnson, complaining about the renovations she was having to make for a tenant in her Southampton home. In her letter, Kilbreth voiced a desire to leave politics and retire from the busy life of activism she had led up until this point. She explained the current crisis facing the anti-suffrage movement, mainly financial, lamenting that "all our rich people have dropped out in NY." Her writing reflects her "hectic month": disorganized with a sense of panic running through it. Even Kilbreth herself recognizes that the letter itself is "incoherent." The impression the reader is left with is of an exhausted, defeated woman ready to make her "escape."²⁶

If we take Kilbreth's letter at face value, then it confirms the standard periodization of anti-suffrage history, which ends between the years of 1919 and 1922. After the passage of the Nineteenth amendment, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) was in significant debt, facing the rampant desertion of previously loyal members. The movement collapsed in on itself as state after state closed their branches and shuttered their headquarters. This period of disintegration seems like a logical place to end the story of anti-suffrage. As this letter demonstrates, even one of its most dedicated leaders, Mary Kilbreth, was expressing a wish to retire at this time. What else could there be to focus on if one continued past this point?

²⁵ Mary Kilbreth to Rossiter Johnson, June 11, 1922, Folder 9, Box 4, The Rossiter and Helen Kendrick Johnson Papers, The New York Public Library.

²⁶ Mary Kilbreth to Rossiter Johnson, June 11, 1922, Folder 9, Box 4, The Rossiter and Helen Kendrick Johnson Papers, The New York Public Library.

Kilbreth did not, in fact, retire from politics after 1922, defying any expectations that anti-suffrage history might simply have faded away. Pushing past the shock of defeat, she instead pulled together the remaining leadership of NAOWS into the newly independent Woman Patriot Publishing Company (WPPC). Even within her 1922 letter, deeper reading reveals a sense of dedication to and fascination with politics, clues that she was still invested in the world of conservative politics. For all her complaining of how much time her “hobby” ate up, Kilbreth spends most of her letter discussing the recent passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act, a social welfare bill, and the ongoing attempts by conservative activists to challenge it. “Massachusetts is in fighting mood,” she exclaims, and “Mr. Alexander Lincoln...is as keen as a terrier after a rat hole to get with the Supreme Court.”²⁷ What appears at first as a symbol of concession is rather the low point in the transition Mary Kilbreth and the remaining anti-suffragettes made from their previous movement into one more broadly focused on conservative activism.

Before we can examine this transition, however, it is important first to understand the more standard narrative of anti-suffrage history, whose periodization does end around 1922. This chapter provides a general overview of the anti-suffrage movement, including who anti-suffragettes were and why they opposed the vote. Knowing the basic themes, identities and tropes of anti-suffrage helps us understand why the WPPC represents a continuation of, rather than a break with, this history. While it might be tempting to end the story of the antis with their defeat and “escape” from politics, as it has often been presented, Mary Kilbreth’s story demonstrates that the historical reality was not so accommodating.

Who were the antis? An Exploration of Gendered Class Interests

²⁷ Mary Kilbreth to Rossiter Johnson, June 11, 1922, Folder 9, Box 4, The Rossiter and Helen Kendrick Johnson Papers, The New York Public Library.

Who were the anti-suffragettes? It is surprisingly difficult to answer this question for two main reasons. Firstly, when antis were included in historical records it was usually because of their “social prominence.” Since the historical record focuses on the wealthiest women from the highest society, our sense of the elite composition of anti-suffragettes can easily be skewed. Secondly, anti-suffragettes were self-aware. They knew how they presented themselves and were “extremely sensitive” to the idea that they were unrepresentative of the average American woman.²⁸ As a result, many antis maintained that they were more representative of the broader public than they perhaps were. When Katherine Balch of the Massachusetts Association argued that “an examination of our enrollment reveals among members not only a large group of homemakers, but also authors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, librarians, newspaper-writers...cooks, housemaids, nurses...,”²⁹ she was likely presenting antis as more experienced and diverse than was accurate.

There are a few key studies that have collected and examined data on anti-suffragettes, providing a more balanced picture of their social identities. In her study on antis, historian Louise Stevenson used marriage as a way to determine wealth and social position. She examined the 457 members of the Massachusetts Association Opposing the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women’s (MAOFESW) Standing and Executive Committees. Of the 79% who were married, Stevenson found that 153 of their husbands were influential, elite men listed in the *Who’s Who in New England*. An additional 36% were “merchants, manufacturers, financiers, corporate executives, and Harvard-educated lawyers,” indicating membership into the highest of social classes. Allowing for unmarried women, Stevenson argued that approximately 40% of active

²⁸ Camhi, “Women against Women,” 235.

²⁹ Katherine Balch, “Who the Massachusetts Anti-Suffragists Are,” in *Anti-Suffrage Essays by Massachusetts Women* (Boston: The Forum Publications of Boston, 1916), 22, as quoted in Camhi, “Women against Women,” 235.

Massachusetts antis belonged to the upper-class.³⁰

In Thomas Jablonsky's study on antis, he found a notable number of unmarried women who were also likely born into the upper classes. He notes that while some unmarried women undoubtedly supported themselves through employment, a large number came from families who apparently had no financial issues supporting their unwed, activist daughters.³¹ Sociologist Susan Marshall corroborates both Stevenson's and Jablonsky's findings and further argues that antis nationwide were part of "a particularly homogenous group of elite women," bound by ties of kinship and class. This "homogenous group" was not so much defined by its wealth as by the heritage of its members.³²

Many anti-suffragettes were not just wealthy but part of a very particular segment of American society that Jablonsky calls "old stock America." "Old stock America" refers to families, generally Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, who had deep roots in the country, many proudly tracing their lineages to before the Revolution.³³ Right before the turn of the twentieth century, hereditary-based societies became increasingly popular for elite Americans. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the Colonial Dames were founded in 1890, the Daughters of 1812 in 1892, and the Society of Mayflower Descendants in 1897, to name a few. Most hereditary societies restricted their memberships, one of the most common examples

³⁰ Stevenson, "Women Anti-Suffragists in the 1915 Massachusetts Campaign," 89-90.; Jeanne Howard has explained in her work why MAOFESW is representative of the anti-suffrage movement as a whole: "for many years it served as an unofficial national association, distributing materials, organizing chapters and cataloging arguments against women's suffrage." Therefore, looking at the leadership of the Massachusetts Association lends insight into the leadership of anti-suffrage itself, Howard, "Our Own Worst Enemies," 464.

³¹ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party*, 55-56. Even those antis who supported themselves with careers were more likely to engage traditional, feminine occupations, like the writing of novels. Goodier refers to this group of women as the "gentle correspondent" type. Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 32.

³² Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 51-52.

³³ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 53.

being the DAR, who limited their membership to women descended from veterans of the Revolutionary War. Hereditary organizations helped articulate an organized sense of American aristocracy, and notably, many antis were Daughters or Dames.³⁴ As daughters of families with deep ancestral roots, many anti-suffragettes certainly felt that they knew what was best for their country—and many were not exposed to environments which would have challenged these beliefs.

A large portion of the women leading the suffrage movement, like Carrie Chapman Catt, were also members of wealthy, prestigious families, but their social experiences differed in a few significant areas from that of their anti-suffrage sisters. Suffragettes were more likely to have attained greater education and to hold careers in comparison to antis. Antis, meanwhile, were more likely to belong to clustered, insulated communities of elites like the Boston Brahmins of Massachusetts.³⁵ In Richard Jensen's nationwide study of pro-suffrage women, he argues that there was a correlation between support for suffrage and the degree to which women had experienced "participation in public affairs." Suffragists were more likely to have experienced the world outside their social bubbles by going to college and taking a job.³⁶ Therefore, they were more likely to have had experiences which taught them the power of political representation, while helping them feel less tethered to traditional constructs of gender.

Age further isolated the antis. Most anti-suffragettes were middle-aged women born before, during or just after the Civil War. According to Jablonsky's study, when NAOWS was

³⁴ There are records of at least 14 states in which DAR members hosted anti-suffrage drives, Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 49.

³⁵ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 28.

³⁶ Richard Jensen, "Family, Career and Reform: Woman Leaders of The Progressive Era," in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 271-272; Stevenson, "Woman Anti-Suffragists," 90.

founded in 1911, the average anti-suffragette was 52 years old.³⁷ Subsequently, most antis had grown up during the Gilded Age and, as a result of their membership in the upper classes, were insulated from the rapidly changing world around them. They were not as exposed to the cultural changes occurring to the role of women in American society as younger generations of women would have been. The idea of the “New Woman” “representing the most advanced ideas of the present progressive movement of womankind,” would not only have been foreign, but very likely offensive to them.³⁸

Finally, while antis knew that they vastly under-represented the average American, they took no concrete steps to diversify. There were a few isolated attempts to organize working-class and minority women, but these efforts never amounted to significant change within the movement.³⁹ Even when given the opportunities to broaden their demographic, antis sought to remain true to their own racist, classist conceptions of what kinds of women should lead and what kinds should follow. The Massachusetts Association, for example, never integrated with the Back Bay Pilgrims, a black women’s anti-suffrage organization, despite invitations from the Pilgrims’ membership to do so.⁴⁰ As a result of this lack of diversity, the average anti-suffragette leader was white, married, Protestant, wealthy, of limited education, unemployed, socially elite,

³⁷ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 54.

³⁸ *New York World*, August 18, 1895, in *American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha H. Patterson (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 48.

³⁹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 174.

⁴⁰ Camhi, “Women against Women,” 236-237. Very little is known about the Back Bay Pilgrims, who might have been known as the Back Bay Pilgrim Colored Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association. For more information see “Colored Women Organize Association and Will be Represented at State House Tomorrow,” *Boston Globe*, February 26, 1913 and “Opposes Votes for Women,” *Boston Globe*, February 28, 1913. Black anti-suffragettes were very rare and most scholars do not recognize their existence. This is potentially a very interesting chapter of anti-suffrage history and is worth more scholarly attention than a small mention in this thesis or other, larger works.

and in her 50s.⁴¹ These privileged social identities not only tell us that the anti-suffrage movement was elitist, but they also provide important clues as to why antis opposed the vote in the first place.

Scholars have offered a variety of hypotheses on how social identities influenced anti-suffrage, and later more broadly anti-radical, beliefs. To my mind, the most convincing approach is Susan Marshall's, centered on gendered class interests.⁴² As discussed earlier, many antis grew up in families with meticulously documented pedigrees, joined heritage societies like the DAR, and were raised with a strong sense of trusteeship over America. They had faith in the social hierarchy and viewed any disruption to the traditional web of economic, gender and political relations that held the country together as potentially ruinous.⁴³ As upper-class women contributed to "the maintenance of group hegemony," Marshall argues that their participation in anti-suffrage can be read as an interest in preserving the social order they had been raised within. In other words, they were protecting their own privilege.⁴⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century, antis were already at work preserving the social order outside of their anti-suffrage activities. Women's clubs were transitioning from social gatherings into larger, reform-minded organizations as upper-class women, including anti-suffragettes, became "deeply involved in social welfare projects" as a kind of "municipal housekeeping."⁴⁵ They joined organizations like the Red Cross, hospital committees, local

⁴¹ These social identities did not change as the anti-suffrage movement moved into the 1920s. Rather than become more diverse, without the NAOWS membership the WPPC became even more exclusive. See the following chapter on the WPPC's transition out of NAOWS for more details.

⁴² For examples of other approaches, see Howard, "Our Own Worst Enemies," 463, Nielsen's chapter: "Women Attacking Women: Gender and Subversion," *Un-American Womanhood*, 50-72; and Richard Jensen's study: "Family, Career and Reform: Woman Leaders of The Progressive Era," 271-272.

⁴³ Howard, "Our Own Worst Enemies," 473.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 34-35.

⁴⁵ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 59-61.; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 39.

charity clubs, settlement houses, nurseries and more.⁴⁶ Marshall explains their membership in these organizations as connected to their class interests as women, rather than a desire to transform womanhood. As unofficial members of the female American aristocracy, many upper-class women saw participation in these organizations as part of their upper-class duty to care for those less fortunate—what anti-suffragette Annie Nathan Meyer called “a strong sense of *noblesse oblige*.”⁴⁷ Antis felt that it was part of their social role to solve the ills which modern urbanization and industrialization had incurred through private charity, not politics. They sought social stabilization, rather than social revolution, and this mentality undergirded much of their anti-suffrage, and later anti-radical, beliefs.⁴⁸

In her work *Un-American Womanhood*, historian Kim Nielson disagrees with Marshall’s narrow focus. Nielsen prefers to expand the motivations of antis and other conservative women beyond the boundaries of gender and socio-economic identity. Instead, she argues that it was because women felt that the nation was in immediate danger that they organized against progressive causes: “female antiradicals fought radicalism because they believed it threatened all the social and economic relationships on which they--and society--depended.”⁴⁹ However, I would argue that these women were inclined to view the nation in immediate danger because of their class and gender. Anti-suffragettes were privileged as women because of the class system.

⁴⁶ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 59-61.

⁴⁷ Meyer states in her autobiography that “the Nathan family possessed this distinguishing trait to a high degree. *Noblesse oblige* is certainly not a bad slogan to live by.” For the full quotation, see Annie Nathan Meyer, *It’s Been Fun: An Autobiography by Annie Nathan Meyer* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1951), 11.

⁴⁸ Goodier quotes the *Anti-Suffragist* who described antis as a “preventive philanthropist[s].” Anti-suffrage philanthropy can be interpreted as “preventive” in the sense that, in order to preserve the social order against lower class unrest, improvements did need to be made in the working-class condition of life. However, most antis argued that these improvements should be dependent on private investment, rather than public expenditure, and be incremental, rather than systemic. Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 4.

⁴⁹ Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 51. See Nielson’s chapter “Women Attacking Women: Gender and Subversion,” *Un-American Womanhood*, 50-72 for more.

They could sit on the boards of hospitals, influence prestigious sites of American history through preservation committees, write letters directly to Congressmen and the President, and run female reform-minded organizations because of their well-connected, wealthy families.⁵⁰ They had power at a time when many women did not. When antis argued that any woman could go directly to the politicians with requests rather than vote, they very clearly meant any “elite” woman.⁵¹ A rural farm wife in Kansas could not visit the White House to discuss falling wheat prices with President Coolidge.

Gendered class interests aid in our understanding of why antis opposed suffrage and other reform initiatives put forth by the women’s rights movement, even if looking backwards it might seem incomprehensible. Many antis interpreted the actions of progressive women as a clear and present danger to their own place in society, and by extension, to American democracy itself. In their eyes, feminism, socialism, and suffrage were termites whose expansion would eat away at the very foundations of the pedestals they stood upon. They did not view the vote as conferring them power but as potentially denying them the preferential treatment they received as the supposed gentler sex.⁵² Opposition to social change filled the pages of *The Woman Patriot*, and Mary Kilbreth was very vocal in her opposition to most, if not all, progressive activities.

Throughout anti-suffrage history, even after the movement’s official end, family, wealth, gender

⁵⁰ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 28.

⁵¹ The Illinois anti-suffragettes published a pamphlet in which they argued that “it is the testimonial of many excellent women workers in philanthropic enterprises...that when legal aid is necessary in carrying out their plans for the well being of the poor and unfortunate, if they go to the legislatures *as women*, not as politicians...they have no difficulty in gaining their ends.” This message of political power without the vote is clearly directed towards upper-class women pursuing philanthropic work and not the lower-class women who they sought to help, Illinois Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women, “Why the Home Makers do not want to vote,” Ann Lewis Women’s Suffrage Collection, 1909, 1.

⁵² Male anti-suffragists were quick to validate this fear, with many arguing that their chivalrous treatment of women was conditional upon women’s continued ability to fulfill the role that society had defined for them. For more details, see Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 122-123.

and anti-radicalism would continue to be entwined.

A General Overview of Anti-Suffrage History

Having established who the anti-suffragettes were, we now turn to how their story is normally told. The traditional narrative of female anti-suffrage begins in the latter half of the 19th century with the *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* petition. In response to the introduction of a federal amendment for women's suffrage in 1869, Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, Eleanor Boyle Ewing Sherman and a handful of other elite women created the first anti-suffrage organization, the Anti-Sixteenth Amendment Society. The Society published a request in the *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* for signatures from women opposing the vote. They presented the petition to Congress in February 1871 with over 5,000 signatures in total.⁵³ While the Society disbanded soon after, *Godey's* petition marks the beginning of what Marshall calls "the early phase of quiet protest." In this early phase, anti-suffrage organization was reactionary and sporadic with antis mobilizing in response to suffrage "emergencies."⁵⁴

Massachusetts was one of the most important regions of anti-suffrage during this early phase. Massachusetts antis not only organized earliest but helped spread the anti-suffrage movement across the country. In 1882, thirteen elite women led by Mrs. Nancy Wyer Manning Houghton, wife of the founder of the Houghton-Mifflin Company, created an informal committee to oppose recent suffrage activities.⁵⁵ In response to the 1895 referendum on women's suffrage, this "embryonic" committee became the basis for the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW).⁵⁶ With \$900 in their treasury and a committee made up of "leading" women, MAOFESW embarked on an impressive

⁵³ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 20.

⁵⁴ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 183-184.

⁵⁵ Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts 'Referendum' of 1895," 620.

⁵⁶ Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage," 621.

membership drive, gaining over 1,500 members in under a year. They would be “instrumental” in establishing other anti-suffrage associations and sending speakers, pamphlets, staffers and money across America.⁵⁷

During this phase of anti-suffrage history, antis operated within strict, nineteenth century gender norms that prevented them from publicly protesting against the vote. When MAOFESW first organized, they sought to characterize their movement as “educational” in order to avoid any political connotations that might break social taboos or undermine their own arguments against the vote. They did this by carefully balancing proper feminine demureness with advocacy, a balance which is exemplified by the spaces they created. Historian Thomas Jablonsky’s description of anti-suffrage storefronts in Boston brilliantly captures the “quiet protest” at the heart of this era of anti-suffrage activism:⁵⁸

They decorated the windows by putting a black trellis entwined with red roses, the anti-suffrage emblem, within the perimeter of the window glass. In the center of the trellis, the women pasted placards that they hoped would be ‘silent speeches’ to passersby. Because the women ‘Antis’ would not speak on the streets, the placards became their surrogates—the agencies through which they campaigned without leaving the extensions of their homes, the anti-suffrage shops. If passersby entered, the women pleaded their cause directly, still conforming to womanly behavior by educating voters from within women’s conventional sphere.

Writing was another important method antis utilized to create rhetoric and reach an audience without compromising their womanhood. Throughout anti-suffrage history, including into the period following the adoption of the Nineteenth amendment, publications were the main method of advocacy for female anti-suffragettes. Anti-suffrage magazines were a portal through which antis could communicate with other women within the privacy of their own homes or

⁵⁷ Kenneally has argued that the contest over the referendum “unleashed” the forces of anti-suffrage not only within Massachusetts, but throughout the rest of the nation. He defines 1895 as one of the key years in anti-suffrage history. For more details, see Kenneally, “Woman Suffrage,” 617-622.

⁵⁸ Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party*, 81-82.

address the male electorate directly. The “specialty” of female anti-suffrage was in the “production and distribution of literature,” and many anti-suffrage organizations had specific committees to handle the production of pamphlets, petitions and other “educational” material.⁵⁹ In 1890, Massachusetts antis had created the first anti-suffrage magazine, *The Remonstrance*, even before their own formal organization was founded. Other anti-suffrage publications would follow, like New York’s *Anti-Suffragist* and the National Association’s *The Woman’s Protest*.⁶⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, the anti-suffrage movement was still quite piecemeal with associations being formed on a state-by-state basis, normally in response to suffrage activity. This would change as the New York antis took the lead. Founded in 1895 at roughly the same time as MAOFESW, the New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NYSAOWS) helped organize the country for anti-suffrage in a similar fashion to the Massachusetts Association. When it came to their style of anti-suffrage, however, NYSAOWS differed greatly. New York antis were more aggressive and proactive in their approach to opposing women's suffrage, emulating suffragist tactics, all of which made other major associations like Massachusetts uncomfortable.⁶¹ Throughout the 1910s, the place of women within the public sphere had changed radically, and suffragists had capitalized on these societal shifts by publicizing their movement using modern inventions like automobiles and advertising. New York antis followed suit, pushing against the old-fashioned restrictions in an attempt to stay relevant.⁶² As the more adventurous and innovative anti-suffrage organization, NYSAOWS

⁵⁹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 186.

⁶⁰ Kenneally, “Woman Suffrage,” 620-622; Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 46; 64. This long tradition of anti-suffrage publications would carry into the second decade of the 20th century. Most would eventually merge into *The Woman Patriot* and continue to serve their purpose as a tool of communication for the conservative woman. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 208.

⁶¹ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 10.

⁶² For more examples of this boundary-pushing behavior see Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 58. One notable anecdote is the trip antis took to Albany in 1911. Roughly 100 antis rode a special train from New

helped shift anti-suffrage from the era of quiet protest into a more aggressive phase of advocacy.⁶³

By 1909, the battle for and against the vote had grown increasingly intense. In a letter from the time period, suffragist Anna Howard Shaw comments that “We have never had such a suffrage boom in our lives. It is either suffrage or anti-suffrage meetings continually, until I should think the people would get sick and tired of them.”⁶⁴ The following year, suffragists presented a petition signed by over 400,000 women to Congress demanding a federal amendment for the women’s vote. In response, New York antis took the lead in creating the first national anti-suffrage organization.⁶⁵ In 1911, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) was officially founded in the home of NYSAOWS President Josephine Jewell Dodge, who abdicated her role to become its president. NAOWS would share its headquarters with NYSAOWS and operate out of New York City for most of its organizational life.⁶⁶ With the founding of NAOWS, the newly united antis coordinated their plans to oppose the federal amendment and women's suffrage across America, entering a new era of anti-suffragism.⁶⁷

York City to Albany for a joint assembly and senate judiciary committee hearing on women's suffrage, and were hosted by the antis of Albany. Women from Buffalo, Rochester, Schenectady and other nearby joined with the New York City contingent, leaving the private sanctity of their homes to campaign against the vote.

⁶³ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 44, Thomas Jablonsky, “Duty, Nature, and Stability: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1894-1920” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1978), 68. Massachusetts antis recognized that they needed to be more proactive in their opposition to suffrage after receiving several letters from NYSAOWS on the topic. In the records from one of their Executive Committee meetings, they commented that “antisuffrage work is not sufficiently aggressive and enterprising” and attempted to make some changes, although these were more gestures than a concrete shift in style and tactics. Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, Executive Committee meeting, April 12, 1907, October 11, 1907, June 19, 1908, November 20, 1908, December 3, 1909 and February 4, 1910, as quoted in Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 189.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Mineke Bosch and Annemarie Kloosterman, *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 102, as quoted in Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 57-58.

⁶⁵ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 189.

⁶⁶ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 64.

⁶⁷ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 190.

The organization of NAOWS came at just the right moment to give antis an advantage in reversing the tide of suffragism out West.⁶⁸ Armed with petitions, staffers, speakers, and funds, NAOWS stretched their forces outwards from their powerful Eastern state associations. They had their first major victory in undoing the progress suffragists had made in Michigan, leading to the defeat of women's suffrage in the state's 1913 referendum. Over the following year, seven states had women's suffrage on their ballots, and only the two thinly populated Western states of Nevada and Montana passed it.⁶⁹ The newly established national magazine, *The Woman's Protest*, chronicled these successes, while sharing tactics, responding to suffragist activities and acting as the major mouthpiece for the movement. Annual NAOWS conventions allowed the development of interpersonal networks by antis across the nation, and for the first time in anti-suffrage history the movement had a cohesive identity. The combination of better organization, new tactics and an infusion of energy coalesced into what would be the high-water mark of anti-suffrage: the 1915 referendum battles.⁷⁰

In 1915, four eastern states held referendums on the women's vote, leading to what would become an all-out contest between antis and their suffragette opponents. The referendums took place in states which had been the bastions of anti-suffragism, including New York and Massachusetts. Antis mass-advertised and stamped their slogans on everything from pencils to pennants. Slide shows were created to counteract suffrage films as were various theatrical productions like tableaux and even a children's afternoon program. Government officials from President Wilson to New York state senators were contacted in an effort to rally support.⁷¹ The decisive victories which resulted led to a huge upswing of confidence and represented the best of

⁶⁸ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 190.

⁶⁹ *The New York Times*, 5 November 1914, 1.

⁷⁰ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 190-191.

⁷¹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 193.

anti-suffrage as a more modernized, influential movement. Antis made plans soon after to head out West and continue their victory streak by undoing the progress of women's suffrage there. Unfortunately for the movement, these plans were never carried through.⁷²

NAOWS had spent a monumental amount of money contesting the 1915 referendums, draining the treasury and forcing the National Association to tithe their state associations. Monetary concerns lead to tension between the National and state associations, as seen in the infighting which took place over the organization's 1916 presidential election.⁷³ This infighting was coupled with news from Washington in 1917 that the federal amendment was making progress in Congress. In an effort to combat the progress of suffrage in D.C., NAOWS moved its headquarters there, and President Dodge stepped down to make way for Alice Hay Wadsworth. Things continued to worsen when, during the election of 1917, New York passed women's suffrage, to the shock of New York antis.⁷⁴ More moderate activists began to leave the movement, and the general tone of anti-suffrage rhetoric took on a more extreme, anti-radical edge. *The Woman's Protest* changed its name to *The Woman Patriot* and merged with the *Anti-Suffragist* under a new sub-header: "for home and national defense AGAINST woman suffrage, feminism and socialism."⁷⁵

It was during this period of disorganization and demoralization that America entered the Great War. War fundamentally altered the anti-suffrage movement. Susan Goodier argues that during this time suffragists kicked their campaign into high gear, publicizing their activities on behalf of the war effort and claiming ground as patriotic women which logically would have

⁷² Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 196.

⁷³ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 200-201.

⁷⁴ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 202-204; "Mrs. James W. Wadsworth, Jr.," *The Woman's Protest*, July-August 1917, 1.

⁷⁵ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 206. "Liberty Bonds or German Bondage," *The Woman Patriot*, April 27 1918, 1.

belonged to the antis. Antis, meanwhile, put all their energies into supporting war preparedness and relief efforts, while asking suffragettes for a truce that they never received.⁷⁶ After the war closed, Congress swiftly passed the Nineteenth amendment making women's suffrage a constitutional right. It was ratified by eleven states in under a month—including Michigan and Massachusetts. In response, President Wadsworth recommended that anti-suffrage disband and let ratification take its course. Her statements were tantamount to treason for die-hard antis and threw the National Association into chaos. Wadsworth was removed from the presidency, ostensibly due to ill-health, and NAOWS moved its headquarters back to New York. A new committee was appointed to oversee *The Woman Patriot*, and Mary Kilbreth became the President of NAOWS and a floundering movement.⁷⁷

Mary Guthrie Kilbreth: A Short Biography

Mary Kilbreth was born in Englewood, New Jersey, to Mary Culberston and John William Kilbreth in 1869.⁷⁸ Her father was a director of the Ohio Live Stock Insurance Company and trustee of the Ohio Life Insurance Company, following the Panic of 1857.⁷⁹ There is unfortunately very little information about her mother other than her ancestry as a member of the socially prominent Culbertson family. Kilbreth had two young brothers: James, who died in childhood, and John William Jr., who graduated Harvard in 1898 and served as an artillery officer during WWI.⁸⁰ The family spent much of their time traveling between New York City

⁷⁶ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 95. Julia Bush, *Women Against the Vote*, 264.

⁷⁷ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 208.

⁷⁸ "Mary G. Kilbreth Statistics Card," Springfield Cemetery Archives, No. 144212 (1957).

⁷⁹ Mortimer Spiegelman, "The Failure of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company, 1857," *Ohio State Archeological and Historical Quarterly* 57, 3 (1948), 247-265.

⁸⁰ "Mary G. Kilbreth Statistics Card," Springfield Cemetery Archives, No. 144212 (1957); Albert Nelson Marquis, *Who's Who in America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Men and Women of the United States* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Company, 1920-21), 1593.

and “the wealthy summer colony” of Southampton, Long Island. When Kilbreth was older, she would also spend a lot of time sharing an apartment with John William Jr. in D.C., in order to be closer to the political heart of the nation.⁸¹

Needless to say, Kilbreth’s family background was one of wealth and privilege. She was related on both sides to families with deep roots in the country, most notably the Culbertson and the Guthries. She is listed as a 7th generation Culbertson in the family’s self-published genealogy book, whose title card reads proudly:

The Genealogy of the Culbertson and Culberson Families, Who came to America before the year 1800, and several families that have come over since then; containing biographical sketches of some of the more prominent members.⁸²

Kilbreth is also listed in a Lineage Book published by the DAR about their members.⁸³ It is surprising that her DAR membership has not been mentioned in previous scholarly works that mention the Woman Patriots. Considering that the relationship between the DAR and the WPPC would later become very important in furthering the WPPC’s influence and reach, this seems to be a confusing omission. Regardless, membership into the DAR is a clear sign of Kilbreth’s privileged position in society.

Other biographical details evidence this as well: Kilbreth never married, and there is no evidence that she ever worked, suggesting that her family was wealthy enough to take care of a single daughter. Unfortunately, there is no record of her education, but I believe it is safe to

⁸¹ Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 74.

⁸² Lewis R. Culbertson, *Genealogy of the Culbertson and Culberson Families* (Zanesville: The Courier Company, 1923), 266-267.

⁸³ Kilbreth is listed as the descendent of Captain John Guthrie, who was wounded at Trenton and “suffered the hardships of Valley Forge,” and Captain John Brandon, who commanded a company in New Jersey and was wounded at the battle of Monmouth. Her membership number was 6886, Mary Jane Seymour, *Lineage Book, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution* (Pennsylvania: Harrisburg, 1898), 299-300.

assume that she was not college educated. Details of her burial also suggest that she and her family were Protestants.⁸⁴ She was 50 when she became president of NAOWS. In short, Kilbreth is a classic example of an average anti-suffrage leader as an older, wealthy, well-connected woman. Her social identities make it very likely that her anti-suffrage, and later anti-radical, beliefs were a function of her privileged upbringing and membership in elite American society.⁸⁵

Kilbreth became actively involved in the anti-suffrage movement in 1913.⁸⁶ Little is known about her early years in the anti-suffrage movement, or why she joined in the first place. However, the class and kinship networks she was part of meant that there was nothing unusual about her involvement.⁸⁷ She got her start through the New York State Association, serving as chairwoman for their congressional committee in 1916.⁸⁸ Her rise to power within the anti-suffrage movement came at its darkest hour. From 1917-1919, Kilbreth rapidly transitioned from one leadership position to another, as she filled the power vacuums left by other antis who began

⁸⁴ The Social Register of 1901 for New York City lists the college education of those it includes, including women. Kilbreth is not listed as having achieved one and as she would have been 32 at the time the Register was published, the window for her college education had most likely passed, The Social Register Association, *Social Register, New York, 1901* (New York City: The Social Register Association, 1901), 241; Kilbreth and her family members were cremated, which would not have been permitted for Catholics. She was also vehemently anti-Semitic, and there is no evidence of Jewish ancestry in her family line. Considering her background and ascendancy to the highest leadership position in the anti-suffrage movement, I believe it is a logical assumption to make that she was Protestant, "Mary G. Kilbreth Statistics Card," Springfield Cemetery Archives, No. 144212 (1957).

⁸⁵ Kilbreth was not in the same social strata as earlier presidents of NAOWS like Josephine Jewell Dodge, whose father was a minister to Russia, and Alice Hay Wadsworth, whose father was famous ambassador John Hay. These differences, however, should not be interpreted as evidence that Kilbreth was more extreme in her rhetoric because she was somehow less "refined" or privileged. Kilbreth was still very much within the upper-class and it is much more likely that her extreme conservatism was a result of her membership to that class, rather than any sort of wealth disparity. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 49.

⁸⁶ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 119.

⁸⁷ An example of these kinship networks can be found in Kilbreth's entry in the DAR's lineage book. Four other membership numbers are listed as her relatives, all members of the Guthrie clan. The inclusion of these numbers demonstrates the kinship ties which bounded elites together through heritage organizations. As Marshall explains, antis would utilize these kinship networks strategically as a recruitment tactic, bringing sympathetic women into their fold, Seymour, *Lineage Book*, 299-300; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 46.

⁸⁸ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 119.

to desert the movement. She served as temporary president for NYSAOWS from 1917-1918, then as president for the Women's Voter's Party, the organization which followed NYSAOWS after New York passed women's suffrage, in 1918. She finally became president of NAOWS in 1919.⁸⁹

Women's suffrage became a constitutional right on August 18, 1920. It is here that most narratives of anti-suffrage history reach their close. Some scholars might describe the final dramatic contest between suffragettes and antis in the Hermitage Hotel in Tennessee. Some might even reference the later activities of Mary Kilbreth or the WPPC as an observation of how extreme the movement had become and how far it had drifted from the initial "quiet phase" of protest.⁹⁰ As influential and valuable as these narratives are, by ending the periodization here, the entire legacy of the anti-suffrage movement and its larger impact on twentieth century politics is ignored. As the following chapter will illustrate, anti-suffrage did not die when the Nineteenth amendment passed. At the bare minimum, as Mary Kilbreth demonstrates, it had quite the healthy reincarnation.

⁸⁹ Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 119-120; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 208. It is possible that Kilbreth's aggressive and conspiracy-minded rhetoric was influenced by New York's style of anti-suffrage. More information on Kilbreth's background in NYSAOWS than I have access to would be needed, unfortunately, to determine whether or not this could be the case. Regardless of how her rhetoric developed, Kilbreth would be outspoken, committed and ruthless in her conservative advocacy throughout her life.

⁹⁰ For example, see Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party*, 112; Howard, "Our Own Worst Enemies, 472-473; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 182-222.

Chapter 2: The New Anti-Feminist Campaign

Suffragists and anti-suffragists have always agreed upon one point—that the importance of the issue is not in the ballot itself but in what follows woman suffrage.

—Mary Kilbreth⁹¹

On October 9, 1920, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) announced that it was moving its headquarters from New York City to Washington, DC. Tennessee had ratified the Nineteenth amendment and women's suffrage became a constitutional right. Despite their loss, NAOWS assured its members that it would “not disband under any circumstances.”⁹² Nevertheless, by the end of the following year it had quietly burned away, leaving Mary Kilbreth and the Woman Patriot Publishing Company (WPPC) to crawl out of its ashes. The WPPC was run by key leaders of the antis, who fought for continued relevance in a post-suffrage world. They broadened the anti-suffrage movement into one centered on antifeminism and antiradicalism, as Kilbreth’s article, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” demonstrates. Her rhetoric and the activism of the WPPC did not break with anti-suffrage, but rather was built upon anti-suffrage ideals of womanhood and nation.

It is tempting to focus on Kilbreth’s words as conservative hysteria, or to characterize WPPC as a sad shadow of anti-suffrage. Indeed, it would be narratively satisfying to end the story of woman’s suffrage with the anti-suffrage movement fizzling after defeat, while a few crazed women grasp at delusions. Yet, both Mary Kilbreth and her publishing company had a significant influence over the female conservative activism which emerged following women’s suffrage. Their arguments against immigration and welfare, their attacks on female politicians

⁹¹ Mary G. Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” *The Woman Patriot*, July 1921, 2.

⁹² “National Association Moves to Washington,” *The Woman Patriot*, October 1920, 2.

and professionals, and their pamphlets against feminism and socialism shaped a generation of conservative women and provided an ideological foundation for generations to come. The WPPC represents continuance in anti-suffrage history; Woman Patriots were not the bastard child of anti-suffrage, but rather its legitimate offspring with a powerful inheritance.

The Fall of NAOWS and the Rise of the WPPC

With the ratification of the Nineteenth amendment in August and the upcoming Presidential election in November, NAOWS was in shambles. As the new president, Mary Kilbreth had embarked on a last-ditch effort to oppose ratification by hastily organizing the South and sending anti-suffrage delegations to speak at various state legislatures. These strategies had all ended in costly failure.⁹³ Rapid leadership changes afflicted most branches, and poor sales of literature, few meetings, and inactive local branches all signaled the organizational collapse of the movement.⁹⁴ NAOWS supported the American Constitutional League's efforts to contest the Nineteenth amendment in court through *Fairchild v Colby*. However that case, along with *Lester v Garnett*, would be decided in favor of women's suffrage in 1922.⁹⁵ In the meantime, antis abandoned NAOWS in droves.⁹⁶

⁹³ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 214-216.

⁹⁴ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 206; 217.

⁹⁵ "Separate Ballot Boxes for Women!" *The Woman Patriot*, October 1920, 1.

⁹⁶ *Fairchild v. Hughes*, 258 U.S. 126 (1922); Mr. Charles Fairchild brought the case against the amendment to court as President of the American Constitutional League (ACL). Of note is that his wife, Elizabeth Nelson Fairchild, was one of the Vice-Presidents of NAOWS at the time. Both NAOWS and the ACL had a close working relationship, as the overlap of husband-and-wife membership demonstrates, "National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage," Carton 2, Folder 17, Executive Committee meeting minutes 1901-1920, Loose papers 1894-1920, Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women Records 1894-1920, Massachusetts Historical Society; *Lester v Garnett*, 258 U.S. 130 (1922).

First to leave were the more recently recruited Southern women, who Kilbreth attacked as “quitters in the Amendment fight—leaving the North to pay all the bills and Maryland and New York to fight the legal battles.”⁹⁷ Maryland, along with its fellow twenty-seven state chapters would shutter soon too. While there was never an outright declaration of failure from NAOWS, for all intents and purposes moving the headquarters to DC signaled its end. State associations dissolved or were transformed into conservative women’s organizations. The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NYSAOWS) had already shifted into the Women Voters’ Anti-Suffrage Party in 1918, and now NAOWS and the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW) would follow, shifting into the WPPC and the Massachusetts Public Interest League (MPIL), respectively.

While the WPPC emerged from NAOWS, it was not the equivalent of the National Association in structure, membership or reach. In 1924, while testifying in front of a Congressional hearing, Kilbreth was asked to describe what organization she represented. She answered that the WPPC was “not an organization” but rather “a group of women who are publishing a paper in which we are trying to uphold certain constitutional principles in legislatures and courts.”⁹⁸ Indeed, a key difference between NAOWS and the WPPC was its lack of a membership structure. The WPPC’s reach was also much more limited than NAOWS’s had once been. The National Association claimed 700,000 members before its decline, compared to

⁹⁷ Mary G. Kilbreth to Rossiter Johnson, 29 March 1921, Box 4, Rossiter Johnson Collection, New York Public Library, as quoted in Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 218.

⁹⁸ US Congress, House of Representatives, *Relief for Women and Children of Germany*, 29 January and 5, 6, and 13 February 1924, pp. 140; It is notable that when Kilbreth testified against the creation of the Department of Education in 1928, she gave the same description of the WPPC almost word for word. This indicates that the WPPC never went through any major organizational change or a change in its mission in the years after NAOWS. For more details see US Congress, House of Representatives, *Hearing Before the Committee on Education*, April 15, 26, 27, 18 and May 2, 1928, pp. 472-473.

the 2,500 subscribers Kilbreth claimed to have in 1924.⁹⁹ While this figure probably increased as the decade continued, it would never match the independent reach of NAOWS.¹⁰⁰ The WPPC's strength, rather, would come from the dissemination of its ideas through larger organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), or newspapers like *The New York Times*.¹⁰¹ However, its structure did remain similar to NAOWS in two important ways: leadership and funding.

In the same Congressional hearing of 1924, Kilbreth was asked if the WPPC “was under the same control,” as it had been during the anti-suffrage movement. Kilbreth answered, “not absolutely the same women, but the same group of women,” highlighting both the women who abandoned the anti-suffrage movement after their defeat, and those who stayed. Susan Goodier argues in *No Votes for Women* that the wealthy, respectful and moderate women left anti-suffrage after the amendment passed. She paints those who remained in the movement as hysterical, ultra-conservative women who lacked the political and editorial skills to keep the National Association's base.¹⁰² While many, like founding President Josephine Jewell Dodge, did leave the movement, it cannot be ignored that the WPPC's board of directors were, in fact, very wealthy and socially privileged.¹⁰³ To argue they were of a different social class, or were somehow less dignified in relation to their more moderate, less politically engaged sisters, is to ignore clear evidence to the contrary.

The five women on the WPPC board of directors represented anti-suffragettes of the

⁹⁹ Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, Executive Committee, 9 April 1920, 3 September 1920, 3 October 1920, 15 October 1920, as quoted in Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 217; US Congress, *Relief for Women and Children*, pp. 141.

¹⁰⁰ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviks*, 75.

¹⁰¹ See the following chapter for more on the relationship between the WPPC and the DAR.

¹⁰² Goodier, *No Votes for Women*, 119-141.

¹⁰³ *New York Times*, 1 July 1917, p. 5.

highest social and organizational pedigree. Mary Robinson, Katherine Balch and Harriet Frothingham all hailed from the wealthy, tight-knit social class of Massachusetts sometimes nicknamed the Boston Brahmins.¹⁰⁴ Mary Robison was married to a Harvard botany professor, Katherine Balch was wife to a businessman, and Harriet Frothingham's husband was a Boston lawyer. All three had joined MAOFESW and risen to heights within not only the anti-suffrage movement, but parallel women's conservative organizations. Mary Robinson was President of MPIL, Katherine Balch was an officer of the Sentinels of the Republic, and Harriet Frothingham was part of the Advisory Council for the Key Men of America. Kilbreth's privileged background has already been discussed, and the final board member, Cornelia Andrews Gibbs, hailed from Maryland and was the widow of food-packaging tycoon Rufus M. Gibbs. She also served as a member of the DAR, and led the Federation of Democratic Women and the Women's Constitutional League, another anti-suffrage-turned-conservative organization.¹⁰⁵ When Kilbreth read out their names at another Congressional hearing in 1928, Representative John Douglass of the 10th district in Massachusetts remarked, "I know of those ladies by repute. They are of high standing."¹⁰⁶

In addition, the same people and organizations who had funded the NAOWS funded the WPPC. The cost to run the WPPC exceeded subscription revenues from the *Woman Patriot* by

¹⁰⁴For a further definition of the Boston Brahmin class and their social signifiers, see Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 29-32.

¹⁰⁵ Dear Sir, October 26 1922, Folder 3, Massachusetts Public Interests Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society; "Robinson, Benjamin Lincoln," Albert Nelson Marquis. *A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Men and Women of the United States* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Company, 1926-27), 1630; "Frothingham, Randolph" and "Balch John," *Boston City Directory*, 1925, Massachusetts Historical Society; Cornelia Andrew Gibbs file; Rufus Macqueen file, Dielman-Hayward files, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, as cited in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 243.

¹⁰⁶ US Congress, *Hearing Before the Committee on Education*, pp. 473.

an average of \$6,000 a month.¹⁰⁷ To make up for the gap, the WPPC took additional donations from subscribers and support from anti-suffrage-turned-conservative organizations, most significantly, the MPIL. The MPIL's leadership and membership contained many of the same women who had been part of MAOFESW, like Mary Robinson herself.¹⁰⁸ As they had for the National Association, the Massachusetts antis once again raised funds for the WPPC.¹⁰⁹ While the lack of a membership structure for the WPPC makes it difficult to determine if its subscribers drew from the same base as NAOWS did, the continuation of funding is a clear signifier. Leadership and funding both suggest that the WPPC was not a new organization nor a small publishing company separate from the legacy of NAOWS. Instead, after the passage of the Nineteenth amendment, NAOWS evolved, shedding its membership structure, into the simpler WPPC.

There appears never to have been a clean end to the National Association. On September 22, 1921, NAOWS hosted its last national convention, in which it expressed its "determination to prevent if possible the evil results of the entire Feminist-Socialist program" represented by "the number of Feminist-Socialist measures now demanded by the Suffrage Lobby."¹¹⁰ The National Association would indeed see the fight carried out against the twin evil of feminism and socialism, but it would be a fight which the WPPC would lead. As it became clearer to antis that woman's suffrage was here to stay, NAOWS dissolved. No longer fighting a battle over the Nineteenth amendment, the antis who stayed and their re-founded organizations would wage war against progressive legislation and the specter of socialism.

¹⁰⁷ See for more details: Kilbreth, Mary G., 1919-1922, Box 4, Rossiter Johnson Collection, New York Public Library, as cited in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 244.

¹⁰⁸ Dear Sir, October 26 1922, Folder 3, Massachusetts Public Interests Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, as cited in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 243.

¹⁰⁹ "A Bazaar for 'The Woman Patriots,'" *The Woman Patriot*, September 15, 1921, 2.

¹¹⁰ "National Anti-Suffrage Meeting," *The Woman Patriot*, October 1921, 2.

The Red Scare of 1919-1920 and the Overman Committee

In order to understand the transformation of the anti-suffrage movement, it is important to understand the new context they operated within after the close of World War I. The post-war world in which America found itself was a far cry from the pre-war Progressive Era it had left. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War shook the Western world, and reshaped the framework through which Americans viewed progressive reform and domestic unrest. Following 1919, a significant number of Americans believed that their nation was in immediate danger. This danger manifested as an “imminent Bolshevik takeover” not through military effort, but infiltration.¹¹¹ Clubs, unions, political parties, reform organizations, institutions of education, etc., were all believed to be at risk of communist corruption from the inside out. This invisible foe meant that Americans could not lower their guard and relax after the armistice. Rather, in the aftermath of the Great War, what historians have come to call “the Red Scare” took hold as Americans looked at industrial strikes and saw revolution, or at welfare reform and saw the beginnings of a proto-communist state.¹¹²

The domestic unrest America experienced during and after the war did not help to calm nerves rattled by revolution. In the single month of March 1919, there were 175 strikes. In April there were 248, in May 388, in June 303, in July 360, in August 373, and by the end of 1919, 1

¹¹¹ Nielson, *Un-American womanhood*, 14.

¹¹² Nielson, *Un-American womanhood*, 13-16.

out of every 5 American workers had gone on strike at least once.¹¹³ From April to June, a series of bombings occurred throughout the country. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's house was struck when a bomb exploded early with such force that it blew the porch, façade, and the bomber to pieces.¹¹⁴ Palmer declared it "another attempt on the part of radical elements to rule the country."¹¹⁵ When race riots broke out in major American cities, including Washington D.C. and Chicago, the *New York Times* blamed the Bolsheviks: "the Bolshevik agitation has been extended among the negroes, especially those in the South, and...is now bearing its natural and inevitable fruit."¹¹⁶

Government reactions to the growing anti-Bolshevism failed to alleviate the nation's fears. Congressional committees, federal intelligence agencies, and the War Department all warned of socialist infiltrations and spread misinformation.¹¹⁷ Led by Lee Overman, the Overman Committee gave voice to lurid, misinformed stories of "sexual terror" in the Russian Revolution.¹¹⁸ Beginning as an investigation of German propaganda, the committee transformed during the Red Scare into a post-war hearing on the horrors of Bolshevism.¹¹⁹ Many who testified gave detailed accounts of the sexual victimization. As a witness of the Revolution,

¹¹³ Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 111; The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. (n.d.) *Our Labor History Timeline*, AFL-CLIO. <https://aflcio.org/about-us/history>; The Seattle general strike was especially important in leading Americans to feel that they were in imminent danger of revolution. As Murray explains, it was after the strike that "for the first time, public attention was focused sharply and solely on the issue of domestic radicalism to the virtual exclusion of all other factors." This focus resulted in fear. For more details see Murray, *Red Scare*, 67-68.

¹¹⁴ *Kansas City Times*, 3 June 1919, 1.

¹¹⁵ *Literary Digest*, 14 June 1919, p. LXI as quoted in Murray, *Red Scare*, 79.

¹¹⁶ *New York Times*, 18 July 1919, p. 10. The *Times* goes on to warn that "the worst enemies of the negro race are those who may have incited them to stir up a dormant feeling which cannot result in anything but injury to them," recasting black American's agitation as manifestation of Bolshevik corruption, rather than a legitimate expression of outrage.

¹¹⁷ Nielson, *Un-American Womanhood*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviks*, 29.

¹¹⁹ *New York Times*, 5 February 1919, p. 1.

Roger E. Simmons declared that he had seen women of “frail physique” and “gentle breeding” forced into hard labor and, even worse, testified to the sweeping “nationalization of women” by Bolsheviks.¹²⁰

While the Red Scare itself would begin to fizzle out by 1920, the Overman Committee and the myths it gave rise to had lasting power. Stories of the victimization of women and children fueled conservative outrage and anti-suffrage activism. One such enduring myth was the so-called Bureau of Free Love. During his testimony, Simmons read a supposedly official Soviet decree proclaiming women exempt “from private ownership” and instead “the property of the whole nation.” The decree outlined the creation of a “Bureau of Free Love,” a supposed Bolshevik agency which oversaw the sharing of the “best species of all the beautiful women” among the working class, who had previously been reserved for the bourgeoisie. While complete misinformation, the Bureau of Free Love served as the manifestation of fears that Bolshevism threatened not only America’s government, but its heart and soul. As Simmons declared: “God and morality are unknown to the Bolsheviki, and everything that makes life decent and worth living is in jeopardy if this thing is permitted to go ahead.”¹²¹

While anti-suffrage always had an anti-radical side to its rhetoric, anti-socialist fearmongering gained new saliency and effectiveness following the Bolshevik Revolution. The politics and experience of the Red Scare gave the anti-suffragists a new angle to attack Progressive reform and the legislative goals of suffragettes. Historian Kim Nielson goes so far as to label female conservative activism during the period after 1919 as “Red Scare antifeminism,” assigning a specific term to the phenomena of conservatives attacking the radical implications of

¹²⁰ *New York Times*, 18 February 1919, as quoted in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 19; Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 29-32.

¹²¹ *New York Times*, 18 February 1919, as quoted in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 19; Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 29-32.

feminism in a post-war world. She argues that many of the women who would become Red Scare antifeminists gained their political experience in the anti-suffrage movement.¹²² Indeed, through the new angle of anti-radicalism, anti-suffragettes were able to articulate the same themes as they had during the fight against the vote: sanctity of the family, proper American womanhood, and protection of the American democracy. Only this time what was at stake in their minds was not women's suffrage, but rather America itself.

The New Anti-Feminist Campaign

One of the clearest ways to understand how exactly the WPPC folded anti-feminism and anti-radicalism into their post-war conservative activism is through Kilbreth's own words. In July of 1920, Kilbreth laid out what she believed should be the future goals of the anti-suffrage movement in a piece titled "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign." In this essay, themes from the heyday of the anti-suffrage movement under NAOWS are plainly visible, intermixed with new, relevant attacks on Bolshevism. Examining it reveals how the WPPC took the legacy of anti-suffragism and updated it, arguing that a conservative women's movement was not only still relevant, but urgently needed.

Kilbreth structures much of her argument throughout "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign" as an allegory of home invasion:

It is best to meet an enemy before he crosses your boundary line. The best way to have defeated Feminism would have been to have prevented woman suffrage. But a nation worthy the name does not surrender to an enemy simply because it has been invaded. Neither do Anti-Feminists worthy the name submit to the Sex

¹²² The full definition of "Red Scare antifeminism" according to Neilson is an "ideology that embraced antiradicalism and antistatism as well as gender, sexual, and family conservatism," Nielson, *Un-American womanhood*, 1.

Revolution simply because suffrage forces have succeeded in crossing a boundary line.¹²³

Through the broadening and redefining of anti-suffrage, Kilbreth makes a case for its continued survival. She redefines suffragists as feminists, and anti-suffragists as anti-feminists, arguing that the vote was never the real focus of the battle against the Nineteenth, but rather “what follows woman suffrage.” According to Kilbreth, the anti-suffrage campaign was always one that sought to prevent feminists from winning “a weapon” through which they could achieve the “political, social and economic independence of women,” a fate which Kilbreth equates with the destruction of the American family.¹²⁴ Now that they have failed, anti-suffragists “have broadened their campaign to guard all roads that lead to the Sex Revolution.” Kilbreth assures the reader that “logical anti-feminists know that it is the last battle, not the first that is decisive.”¹²⁵ The home invasion allegory allows Kilbreth to see hope where others would see defeat, and invest the anti-suffrage movement with a new sense of purpose.

According to Kilbreth, this new purpose centers on the battle against feminism as a socialist and radical force—an idea inherited from the anti-suffrage movement. Anti-suffrage had a tradition of attacking suffragettes as political radicals, a common method that conservative movements have often used to challenge progressivism.¹²⁶ In the South, antis had threatened white Southerners with black enfranchisement. As one pamphlet from 1920 shouts: “EVEN IF EVERY WHITE WOMAN WENT TO THE POLLS (and she will not), the NEGRO VOTE WOULD BE DOUBLED OR MORE THAN DOUBLED” by woman suffrage.¹²⁷ Citing recent

¹²³ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

¹²⁴ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

¹²⁵ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 3.

¹²⁶ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 102.

¹²⁷ Southern Women’s League for the Rejection of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, “The Truth About the Negro Problem,” 1920.

racial riots, antis had argued that the women's vote would either help black politicians replace white ones, or "there would be RACE WAR...where everybody at present time is contented, happy, and satisfied."¹²⁸

In addition to racial arguments, one of the most enduring anti-radical trends in antis' rhetoric was the linking of feminism and socialism, as the book *Socialism, Feminism and Suffragism: The Terrible Triplets*, demonstrates. Written by anti-suffragist V. Hubbard during the 1915 campaign, the subtitle explains that all three movements are "connected by the same umbilical cord and fed from the same nursing bottle." In other words, according to anti-suffragists, they are intrinsically connected.¹²⁹ A pamphlet written by the Illinois Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women warns that "the propaganda of Woman Suffrage is part and parcel of the world-wide movement for the overthrow of the present civilized order of society."¹³⁰ In 1915, a Nebraska Association pamphlet warned of "the Red behind the Yellow Socialism in the Wake of Suffrage:"

Behind that giddy body of yellow suffragists came the compact mass of red-clad socialists. Just so in our whole nation today. Socialists are behind Woman Suffrage and, if they should succeed in getting it...so will the Socialist Republic and the Co-operative Commonwealth burst forth close in the wake of Woman

¹²⁸ Anti-suffrage's tactic of racial fear mongering was not limited to the South. Broader arguments based in state's rights appealed to racial prejudice across the country, for example in anti-suffragist George Lockwood's pamphlet: "In each State the question of those who should vote for either State or Federal officers is purely a question of State policy and not at all national. How would California and other Pacific Coast States like to have Chinese or Japanese voters imposed on them by the gulf or Atlantic States?" George R. Lockwood, "Woman Suffrage: A Menace to the South," 1917, Josephine A. Pearson Papers, 1860-1943, Tennessee State Library and Archive, 2.

¹²⁹ B.V. Hubbard, *Socialism, Feminism, and Suffragism: The Terrible Triplets* (Chicago: The American Publishing Company, 1915).

¹³⁰ Illinois Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women, "To the Voters of the Middle West, 1909, 2. On the following page, the Illinois Association explains that "it is no wonder therefore that Socialists and Suffragists alike strive sedulously to ignore the vital fact, that if the race is to continue, the great majority of women must always be mothers." Antis argued that feminism, suffrage and socialism all challenged not only the institution of American motherhood, but feminine nature itself. This "revolt against nature" rhetoric is explored further below.

Suffrage. Do you realize what this would mean? Do you appreciate what Socialism stands for?¹³¹

Therefore, Kilbreth's linking of feminism with socialism in "A New Anti-Feminist Campaign," was nothing new, but rather a continuation of the myriad anti-socialist arguments made during the anti-suffrage movement. What was new was the political context. As detailed above, the arrival of the Bolshevik Revolution and the testimonies of the Overman Committee, along with overall postwar unrest in America, lent accusations labeling feminists as socialist a good deal more potency. Rather than simple fearmongering, the genuine terror of revolution in America meant that when an organization was tarred as socialist, many women reconsidered their membership. The impact of these arguments would be wide and reaching as the WPPC grew in influence throughout the 1920s. As Kirsten Delegard argues in her work, the WPPC's linking of feminism and socialism would lead many women to drop membership with even the most mainstream of women's organizations. One woman from South Dakota explained that: "I want to continue in PTA work but I cannot see my way clear to work for things un-American."¹³²

After suffrage, several key organizations formed hoping to fulfill the suffragette dream of using the women's vote for the social and moral improvement of America. The National Woman Suffrage Association re-founded themselves as the League of Women Voters, a non-partisan group to encourage female political participation. Organizations like the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Consumers' League, and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, which had led female progressivism since the beginning of the twentieth century,

¹³¹ M.G., "The Red Behind the Yellow Socialism in the Wake of Suffrage" (Omaha: The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, 1915), 1.

¹³² A. N. Hoy, Huran South Dakota to National PTA, Washington, D.C., December 12, 1926, folder 248: Congress of Mothers and Correspondence, 1926, box 9, Tilton Papers, as quoted in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 11.

joined to create the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC) in November of 1920.¹³³ The WJCC coordinated federal lobbying efforts in DC, and was both celebrated and condemned as the "most powerful lobby in Washington."¹³⁴ They were joined in Washington by the Children's Bureau, a federal agency which had served as the official voice of female professionals before the vote.¹³⁵

In Kilbreth's writing, these respected and established organizations for female activism are recast as hubs of insidious socialism. Kilbreth explains how the "Secret Lobby"—her word for the WJCC—is a tool which the suffragettes-*cum*-feminists "now use to establish vast Feminist Bureaucracies:"

These, in turn, can be used as in the Russian Propaganda System, as channels of Revolution. Already publications of the Federal Children's Bureau have been used to spread the most extreme Socialist doctrines.... If they once obtain control of a Government-financed Propaganda System; operated by themselves, they can spread their revolutionary doctrines, through official agents on the federal payroll, in every school and every home, and poison the Nation at its source.¹³⁶

Kilbreth paints a terrifying picture of national corruption. The purpose of American womanhood, as argued by many suffragists and anti-suffragists alike, was to raise their children with the political and moral virtue needed to become good, republican citizens.¹³⁷ According to Kilbreth, the WJCC worked *against* this goal through government agencies like the Children's Bureau, by disseminating socialist doctrines. These doctrines, or "poison," would pervert American children's political education, "the source" of the nation's republic. Feminist propaganda would

¹³³ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 34

¹³⁴ Charles A. Selden, "The Most Powerful Lobby in Washington," *The Ladies Home Journal*, April 1922, 5.

¹³⁵ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 57.

¹³⁶ Kilbreth, "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign," 2.

¹³⁷ See Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: intellect and ideology in revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) for details on the ideology of republican motherhood and the perceived purpose of the female citizen in America following the Revolution.

become “the solvent of all representative Government.”¹³⁸ Kilbreth twists progressive reform into something insidious and destabilizing. Such language would be mirrored in the pages of the *Woman Patriot*, and prove extremely effective in fighting the progressive reform over the course of the following decade.

In addition to her anti-socialist arguments, Kilbreth also taps into classic arguments against suffrage in use by the movement since the very beginning. Throughout the battle against the vote, antis attacked suffragettes for fighting against feminine nature ordained for them by science and God. Their arguments centered on the idea that gender differentiation was inevitable and unchangeable. Early anti-suffrage writings focused more on the religious aspects of gender, citing the “eternal laws of God” and “the Divine will.”¹³⁹ While religious arguments for gender roles never fully vanished, they were replaced for the most part by “scientific” ones as the century progressed. Social Darwinism was the most common scientific argument, based on ideas promoted by notable psychologist and scientific racist Herbert Spencer. Using evolutionary theory, Social Darwinism argued that specialization in society based on race and gender was a marker of civilized progress and not the result of systemic oppression. Antis argued that “civilization depends upon, and advances through, division of labor,” and that suffrage would lead to the impairment of women’s “present ability to do other work for which she is specially

¹³⁸ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

¹³⁹ New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, “Brooklyn Auxiliary of the New York State Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women,” n.p., 189-?, 6; Julia F. Waterman, “Suffrage Ideals,” *The Woman’s Protest*, August 1912, 5. The full quotation from the *Woman’s Protest* reads: “Nature has to some extent designated the sphere of usefulness for all mankind as moral agents of the Divine will, whether by struggle or endurance, whether by creation or conservation.” The article continues, explaining that “in both man and woman the limitation of capacity is clearly indicated, and within these defined limitations must lie all possibilities of development for either sex.” For further examples of religious arguments made against suffrage see *The New York Times*, 28 June 1915, 9; For examples of religious arguments made against feminism after the passage of the Nineteenth amendment see *The Cambridge Chronicle*, 13 March 1920, p. 13.

fitted.”¹⁴⁰ According to anti-suffrage ideology, gender differentiation was an evolutionary fact, proving scientifically that a society was more advanced when gender roles were kept separate.¹⁴¹

Therefore, when Kilbreth argues in “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign” that antis seek to defend “the old institution-of-marriage ideal of the Family as the unit of society” from “the Feminist revolt against nature,” she implicitly references previously made arguments against suffrage.¹⁴² According to Kilbreth, feminists are seeking to destroy the gendered roles which ground marriage and the family. By rejecting the proper place of women within the home, they “revolt” against both their divine and secular nature. Additionally, Kilbreth’s assertion that antis seek to defend the family signals her own conservatism in opposition to feminists’ progressivism. Defense of the traditional family unit was and continues to be a central pillar of conservative thought.¹⁴³ By casting the WPPC and anti-suffragettes as defenders of the family, Kilbreth links them with the larger conservative context of the 1920s.¹⁴⁴

Immediately following her attack on feminism as “a revolt against nature,” Kilbreth quotes suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt. By placing Catt’s quotation after her attack on feminism, especially after her use of the word “revolt,” Kilbreth ensures that Catt’s words are

¹⁴⁰ “The Woman Suffrage Question,” *The Remonstrance*, July 1912, 8; *The Woman Patriot* quoted Thomas Jefferson in declaring that “Civilized men do not subject women to labor above their force and sex.” “Scrubwomen—A Disgrace to Civilization,” *The Woman Patriot*, November 1918, 7. *The Remonstrance* explained suffrage as the devolution of society: “the woman suffrage movement is a revolution, not an evolution—a backward, not a forward movement.” “Need of Conserving Womanhood,” *The Remonstrance*, April 1913, 3.

¹⁴¹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 120; Marshall writes that: “For antisuffragists, concern about the future of the family and concern about the nation’s political well-being were inseparable.” This close connection between the sanctity of the family unit and the health of the nation meant that attacks on suffragettes for threatening the family had a double meaning: they put at risk not only the well-being of the home, but of America itself, Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 131. For more on this connection between family and the health of the nation, see the following chapter.

¹⁴² Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

¹⁴³ Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13-15.

¹⁴⁴ For more information on the WPPC’s link with conservatism during this decade, see the following chapter.

twisted in the eyes of the reader to resemble those of a revolutionary, rather than an advocate of women's rights:

Mrs Catt explicitly stated in the *Woman's Journal*: 'What is Feminism? A world-wide revolt against all artificial barriers which laws and customs interpose between women and human freedom.'¹⁴⁵

Kilbreth follows this quotation closely with the description of the feminist agenda as a "Sex Revolution," an obvious reference to the Russian Revolution. The reader is, therefore, convinced by Catt's own words that she is a revolutionary, and that the feminist movement seeks a revolt against social norms so devastating that it would be the equivalent of a communist takeover.

Kilbreth's "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign" leaves its readers with a sense of purpose and a redefined anti-suffrage movement. Feminists and their organizations are characterized as Trojan horses, sneaking Russian propaganda into American society while helping to bring about a nationwide Revolution. The new goal of the anti-suffragists becomes opposing these women at every conceivable juncture to prevent this disastrous "Sex Revolution." It is a considerably broader goal than the previous aim of anti-suffrage and allows Kilbreth to argue that the anti-suffrage, now the anti-feminist, movement is still relevant, even if women have the vote. Kilbreth ends her piece with the firm proclamation: "regardless of what the future may hold, anti-suffragists will carry on 'to the last quarter of an hour.'" The message is clear: suffragists have won the battle, but anti-suffragists, under "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign," will win the war.¹⁴⁶

The language Kilbreth uses in "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign" is undoubtedly extreme. She suggests that feminists are conspiring with socialists to poison the youth of America and to infiltrate the government. She calls reputable women's organizations and federal

¹⁴⁵ Kilbreth, "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign," 2.

¹⁴⁶ Kilbreth, "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign," 3.

bureaus “channels of Revolution.”¹⁴⁷ All in all, her words seem like those of an embittered, and easily dismissed, woman. Yet, in 1927, Kilbreth met the President of the DAR and reported that the woman had left the encounter “entirely our friend...anxious to actively help.”¹⁴⁸ The DAR was, at the time, one of the largest and most respected women’s club organizations. From that moment on, they became “a powerful messenger” for the WPPC and stood with the Woman Patriots in their campaigns against progressive legislation.¹⁴⁹ Clearly, something had changed. While this chapter has examined what the WPPC was and what it stood for, the next will examine how the WPPC moved from the margins to the mainstream in a new era of female conservative activism.

¹⁴⁷ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

¹⁴⁸ Katherine T. Balch to Alexander Lincoln, December 20, 1926, Folder 9; Mary Kilbreth to Balch, January 22, 1927, Folder 10, Box 2, Alexander Lincoln Papers as quoted in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 115.

¹⁴⁹ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 115.

Chapter 3: From the Marginal to the Mainstream

Men are saying perhaps, 'Thank God, this everlasting woman's fight is over!' But women, if I know them, are saying, 'Now at last we can begin.'

-Crystal Eastman¹⁵⁰

One would expect, and indeed many suffragettes predicted, that the arrival of women's suffrage would usher in a new era of progressivism. In 1920, *The Woman Citizen*, the National American Woman Suffrage Association's publication (NAWSA), declared that "the final triumph of suffrage means opportunity for more work and added responsibility... We have long been ready for it."¹⁵¹ Many suffragists anticipated the formation of a single, united bloc of women that would lead the nation into halcyon days of inventive social legislation. When NAWSA reformed as the League of Women Voters in 1919, Carrie Chapman Catt asked women to be the ones to "swell America's army of voters" and "put conscience and thought into the scales with party politics."¹⁵² The message was clear: by purifying the corrupt, antagonistic world of party politics, an inherently male world, women would remake America.

In fact, the opposite resulted. Not only did the political culture of America remain relatively unchanged, but legislative initiatives long championed by women's suffrage were met with defeat. No woman's bloc, ready to purify politics, emerged from the Nineteenth amendment. Instead, established and well-respected women's organizations like the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were met with vicious attacks for being un-American. Female reform leaders like Jane Addams and Julia Lathrop had their loyalty

¹⁵⁰ Crystal Eastman, "Now We Can Begin," *Archives of Women's Political Communication* (1920).

¹⁵¹ "Suffrage Is Certified By Gov. Roberts," *The Woman Citizen*, August 28 1920, 5.

¹⁵² "Suffrage Is Certified By Gov. Roberts," *The Woman Citizen*, August 28 1920, 5.

questioned and their names dragged through the mud.¹⁵³ The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) abandoned their reform agenda and began attacking the organizations they had once supported. By the end of the decade, the coalition of female organizations that had supported suffrage and progressivism faced desertion and dissolution.¹⁵⁴

Many scholars have tried to explain this phenomenon by labeling the period after the Nineteenth amendment as the failure of women's suffrage.¹⁵⁵ They point to suffrage's in-fighting and inability to unite as proof that their movement failed to reorganize around concrete goals once the vote had been achieved. However, I would argue that the defeats suffered by progressive women during this time period are better explained as part of the long-term effect of anti-suffrage than as the failure of suffrage. Calling women's suffrage a failure places all the focus on the suffrage movement, once again ignoring the conservative women who opposed them. While antis and their organizations would start the decade on the margins of politics, and as specters of a dead cause, their movement into mainstream politics by the end of the 1920s evidences something else entirely—that anti-suffrage not only re-founded itself in organizations like the Woman Patriots, but that these organizations would go on to help confound progressive reform throughout the entire decade.

Kilbreth and the Woman Patriot Publishing Company (WPPC) began the 1920s by fighting unsuccessfully against the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, a social welfare bill which

¹⁵³ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik*, 74-75.

¹⁵⁴ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik*, 182.

¹⁵⁵ For more details see Kristi Anderson's *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-19. Anderson lists a variety of sources from this time period which discuss suffrage as a failure, including Charles Edward Russell, "Is Woman Suffrage a Failure?" and "Woman Suffrage Declared a Failure," in *Literary Digest* from 1924. She also highlights scholars who advanced the argument that women gained little from the vote, including William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969) and William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

provided voluntary education to expectant mothers. After their defeat, they joined a network of conservative organizations and began coordinating campaigns against a variety of progressive initiatives. As the political world began to shift towards conservatism, the WPPC jumped at the chance to gain prominence as a more well-respected and credible publication. Discussions with the DAR lead the organization to ally itself with the WPPC. The War Department's disapproval with the women's pacifist movement opened an opportunity for the WPPC to receive indirect government approval. Newly formed conservative organizations like the Sentinels of the Republic offered valuable support. Armed with new allies, they went on an attack which would prove devastating to female progressivism.

While the first major campaign the WPPC and their allies staged was against the Child Labor Amendment, this chapter will focus on the fight against the renewal for the Sheppard-Towner Act. The WPPC's initial defeat against the Sheppard-Towner Act came in 1921, when they were still recovering from the passage of the Nineteenth amendment. By the time Sheppard-Towner came up for renewal in 1926, the WPPC's political influence had been entirely transformed. The comparison between the first fight against Sheppard-Towner and the next showcases how, when many predicted the 1920s to be the decade of women, they miscalculated who exactly these women would be. In reality, when Crystal Eastman exclaimed, "Now at last we can begin!" it was the Woman Patriots who answered, "yes we can."

"Babies have a right to live": The First Battle for the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921

After publishing "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign," Kilbreth and the WPPC moved forward to make good on their declaration "that the Feminist Revolution 'shall not pass.'" Roughly a year after the publication of Kilbreth's manifesto, Kilbreth and the WPPC went to

battle against the very acts they had warned their readers about, the ones which would “spread their revolutionary doctrines, through official agents on the federal payroll.”¹⁵⁶ One of the bills they quickly identified as an immediate risk to the safety of American democracy was the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921.

The Sheppard-Towner Act was a legislative initiative which sought to combat the appalling child and mother mortality rates in the United States. The idea for the bill had come out of an investigation launched by the Children’s Bureau on the causes of infant and maternal deaths. The investigation had not only shown a strong correlation between poverty and mortality rates, but it highlighted how high American mortality rates were in comparison to other nations like New Zealand.¹⁵⁷ In their Eighth Annual Report, the Bureau even included graphic “thermometers” to visually demonstrate how poor America’s mortality rates were.¹⁵⁸ The Bureau found that 80 percent of America’s pregnant mothers received no training in how to care for themselves or their babies during and after pregnancy, and in 1918, a bill was introduced to rectify the situation.¹⁵⁹ In 1920, it was reintroduced by Senator Morris Sheppard and

¹⁵⁶ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

¹⁵⁷ The Bureau found that for families earning less than \$450 per year, one baby died out of six, for \$650-\$850 it was one in ten, for \$1,250, one in sixteen. This is compared to the infant mortality rate in New Zealand, which had an overall rate of one in twenty-one. Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s,” *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 4 (1969), 776–86: 776-777.

¹⁵⁸ *The Eighth Annual Report of the Chief, Children’s Bureau to the Secretary of Labor* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1920), 9-10; charts as described in Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 497.

¹⁵⁹ Concerned mothers often wrote to the Children’s Bureau for advice. Mrs. C. Carroll voiced her worries in 1921, writing: “Are there any spacial things that i should eat? If so, what? And what kind of exercices should i take? And how often?...I will be a very young mother as i am only 17 years old...[W]ill you please tell me why i always think that weather I or the baby will die after this birth.” [sic] The Bureau responded calmly, advising her “to consult a physician as early in the pregnancy as possible” and that “if you are perfectly well and strong there is no reason at all to think that either you or the baby will not live.” Such panicked letters give insight into the kind of mothers that the Children’s Bureau was trying to reach through the Sheppard-Towner Act. For every mother that did write them, many did not. As quoted in Kristin Barker, “Birthing and Bureaucratic Women: Needs Talk and the Definitional Legacy of the Sheppard-Towner Act,” *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003), 333–55: 333.

Congressmen Horace Towner as the Sheppard-Towner Act, but made no real progress until after the ratification of the Nineteenth amendment.¹⁶⁰

While opponents would try to characterize the act as an unprecedented expression of bureaucratic authority, Sheppard-Towner was actually “pitifully small” in retrospect.¹⁶¹ It called for nationwide health programming directed by the Children’s Bureau to educate expectant mothers and appropriated a small allotment of \$1,480,000 from the federal budget for 1921-1922 and \$1,240,000 for the next 5 years.¹⁶² The funds themselves were managed by the Children’s Bureau, and the overall cost of administration could not surpass \$50,000. States and individuals were both allowed to reject the aid.¹⁶³ In comparison, Great Britain was spending \$3.8 million and had half the maternal death rate of the United States.¹⁶⁴ Despite the paucity of the appropriation compared to programs in other Western nations, opponents still attacked the bill as too expensive.¹⁶⁵

However, at the time of its initial passage, support for the act was too strong for it to be defeated by budget hawks. Sheppard-Towner received glowing endorsements, especially from well-respected women’s organizations and publications. Publications which reached a wide female audience like *Good Housekeeping* and *The Ladies Home Journal* championed the act.¹⁶⁶ The *Child-Welfare Magazine* argued that “babies have a right to live,” and that “the country needs every life.” Their message hit all the more strongly within the context of the losses

¹⁶⁰ The act was introduced initially by the first woman to ever serve in Congress, Janette Rankin. Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s,” 777-778.

¹⁶¹ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920’s*, 158-159.

¹⁶² Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 497.

¹⁶³ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 158-159.

¹⁶⁴ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 175.

¹⁶⁵ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 3. In “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” Kilbreth attacks the “Maternity” Bill, her phrase for Sheppard-Towner, for having a budget of \$1,000,000.

¹⁶⁶ Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 502.

incurred by the recent war.¹⁶⁷ The Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC), set up in November of 1920, made the passage of Sheppard-Towner their main project, lobbying vigorously for its passage.¹⁶⁸ During the Congressional hearing on the bill in 1921, Senator Sheppard went on record to list those women's organizations which had officially endorsed the bill:

Notably the General Federation of Women's Clubs, National Congress of Mothers and Parent Teachers' Associations, Women's National Democratic Committee, Women's National Republican Committee, League of Women Voters, Association of Collegiate Alumnae, National Women's Temperance Union, Council of Jewish Women, National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association, Continental Congress of the Daughters of the American Revolution, National Association of Deans of Women, National Women's Association of Commerce, National Consumers' League, National Organization for Public Health Nursing, National Child Welfare Association of Commerce, National Consumers' League, National Organization for Public Health Nursing, National Child Welfare Association, National Council of Women, Service Star Legion, American Child Hygiene Association, Woman's Foundation for Health, National Women's Trade Union League, Life Extension Institute of New York, and the Superintendent's Department of the National Education Association.

He finished his statement by remarking: "that both of the great political parties are favorable to the measure, and the President of the United States specifically commended it in his first message to Congress. It is a nonpartisan measure, and represents the demands of nearly all the women's associations of America."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ "President's Desk," *Child-Welfare Magazine*, May 1920, 261-262.

¹⁶⁸ Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 502.

¹⁶⁹ US Congress, Senate, *Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, 25 April 1921, pp. 6. The General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) was not a single organization like many of those listed; instead, it represented thousands of women's organizations across the country. For example, by 1955 the GFWC would have 800,000 dues paying members and claimed ten million members overall from affiliation with American and international organizations. Their reach throughout America was extensive, making their approval of the Sheppard-Towner Act significant. Paige Meltzer, "'The Pulse and Conscience of America': The General Federation and Women's Citizenship, 1945-1960," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30, no. 3 (2009), 52-76: 52.

It goes without saying, then, that when Mary Kilbreth and her Woman Patriots stepped forward to oppose the act they were in a very clear minority. Nonetheless, they still campaigned energetically against it. The Woman Patriots would be “the principal advocates” of a theory that labeled the Sheppard-Towner Act as a communist plot put forth by “the Feminist Bloc,” once again conflating feminism and suffrage with communism and radicalism.¹⁷⁰ In the very same Congressional hearing in which Senator Sheppard listed the women’s organizations in favor of the act, Mary Kilbreth testified against it. The entire testimonial is surprisingly confrontational, including a tense standoff between her and the Chairman of the Committee, Senator Kenyon:¹⁷¹

Mrs. KILBRETH. I have asked several women down in my part of the country, at Hampton, Long Island, if they would welcome these political investigators to be sent out, and their answer was that they did not want these people to come snooping around their homes.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you know that there are 250,000 babies of this country lost every year because the mothers do not understand the—

Mrs. KILBRETH (interrupting). And I suppose that they would be helped by these nontechnical officers? But I do not want to discuss the technical part of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. But that is the socialism that you are talking about.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 779.

¹⁷¹ Beginning with the polite demureness that characterized much of anti-suffragettes’ public speaking, Kilbreth apologizes for her appearance. She explains that had she known about the hearing sooner, she would have “had very good speakers representing some very large organizations who would have come and made statements before your committee.” Unfortunately, she “was given such short notice” that she, “very inexperienced in the matter of public speaking,” would have to make the statement. This frustratingly gives insight into how often Kilbreth and her fellow antis declined speaking opportunities in favor of hired experts, making their voices all the more concealed within the historical record. That being said, Kilbreth would discard her initial feminine and apologetic demeanor once Senator Kenyon began to question her further. US Congress, Senate, *Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, 25 April 1921, pp. 7.

¹⁷² US Congress, Senate, *Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, 25 April 1921, pp. 7-13, 11.

The crux of Kilbreth's argument was that, because those who would go and advise mothers were "nontechnical officers," they would be susceptible to outside forces—mainly those of socialism. She starts her statement by explaining how one of the backers of the bill, Miss Todd, supports the birth control movement. She then connects birth control to free love, explaining that the movement's goal was to ensure "that free love would be made safe." Then, relying on false rumors generated by the Overman Committee about a Russian Bureau of Free Love, she ties free love to socialism. In this convoluted fashion, she links socialism to free love, then free love to the birth control movement, then the birth control movement to Miss Todd, and finally, Miss Todd to being one of thousands supporting the bill. The conclusion is that because Miss Todd supports Sheppard-Towner, the bill is socialist. It is understandable why senators may have been exasperated with her testimonial.

Yet, while in 1921, using one woman to discredit an entire legislative initiative may seem extreme, and even laughable in this context, Kilbreth and the WPPC would use this tactic with greater success later on in the decade. In fact, many of the phrases Kilbreth used in her testimonial anticipate themes which the Woman Patriots and other conservative organizations would use to successfully defeat progressive initiatives several years in the future. These include "free love," "socialism," "paternalism," and "propaganda" or "propaganda system."¹⁷³ What is clear from this testimonial is how consistent Kilbreth remained throughout the decade in her attacks on progressive causes. Why was it that in this instance her arguments did not connect

¹⁷³ US Congress, Senate, *Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, 25 April 1921, pp. 7-13. For examples of these themes in other WPPC material see: "Free Love Bureau Set up by 'Reds,'" *The Woman Patriot*, January 4 1919, 6., "Rights of Women to Choose Husbands No Longer Exists under Feminism in Russia," *The Woman Patriot*, January 11 1919, 1., "The Menace of Allied Socialism and Feminism," *The Woman Patriot*, October 9 1920, 5., "'Birth Control' Propaganda," *The Woman Patriot*, May 15 1925, 4., and "Loyal Women Protest against Propaganda Movies," *The Woman Patriot*, June 1 1922, 3.

with the politicians in Washington and the larger public, when they would later in the decade?

While the WPPC had survived the passage of the Nineteenth amendment, they were very much on the margins of the political establishment from 1921 to around 1923 or 1924. I do not mean to imply that they were politically inactive. A search for Sheppard-Towner in the magazine's archives reveals 255 relevant articles detailing the WPPC's opposition. Mary Kilbreth would even write to President Harding, and lead a delegation of anti-suffragettes to the White House in 1921 to speak to him personally about the act.¹⁷⁴ The distinction of being on the margins of politics, rather than within the mainstream, was that while Kilbreth and the Woman Patriots remained consistently outspoken in opposing the act, few were listening. Proof of this can be found in their finances. The WPPC was funded by subscriptions and donations to their magazine. In short, they relied on readership to operate their company. During the period of 1922-1923, the WPPC was so low on funds that they entered into discussions with the Sentinels of the Republic about a friendly takeover.¹⁷⁵ While the Sentinels did not end up buying the WPPC, the magazine still struggled, with production being lowered to a bimonthly rather than a weekly schedule in 1922.¹⁷⁶ They simply did not have enough women reading their publication and donating to their organization to sustain weekly publications.

¹⁷⁴ *New York Times*, 2 June 1921, p. 19. In this article, *The New York Times* refers to Mary Kilbreth as President of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, not of *The Woman Patriot*, evidencing the continued overlap and overflow between the two organizations during this time period.

¹⁷⁵ A conservative organization committed to defending America from "Federal paternalism and other forms of communism," the Sentinels views aligned with the WPPC's rhetoric. However, Kilbreth balked at the idea, explaining that "being men in active politics," the leaders of the Sentinels would "undoubtable make us stop some of our attacks and become innocuous. Its hard just as we are establishing ourselves!" as quoted in Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 55.

¹⁷⁶ David R. Spencer, "The Woman Patriot," in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues*, eds. Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996). 437-446: 446.

For a short time at least, the political era had left them behind. There had been an initial shift towards conservatism at the beginning of the decade. In 1919, President Wilson suffered a debilitating stroke, which left him almost completely disabled through the Red Scare period of 1919-1920.¹⁷⁷ The lack of a clear leader, coupled with the tumult of the Red Scare, the chaotic transition to a postwar country, and the collapse of Wilson's internationalism after the defeat of the League of Nations in Congress derailed progressive initiatives. Disillusioned, the voters who did turn up to the polls in November of 1920 voted overwhelmingly for Republican candidate Warren Harding, who won by 60.3% of the vote.¹⁷⁸ However, the equilibrium the country regained under the administration of Harding, and then Coolidge, allowed the Progressive Era to briefly regain its footing. The "return to normalcy" called for by Harding's campaign, for a small period, meant just that.

David Goldberg refers to the period, 1923-1924, as the "Indian Summer of Progressivism." Largely due to agricultural unrest and the passage of the Nineteenth amendment, reformists were able to succeed in passing various initiatives through Congress which otherwise would have met with defeat. Stanley Lemons explains the influence of the Nineteenth amendment in his work, *The Woman Citizen*, arguing that "the principal force moving Congress"

¹⁷⁷ As Goldberg argues, "in effect, the country did not have a functioning president for the last year and a half of Wilson's term." Without his guidance, cabinet members like A. Mitchell Palmer were given unprecedented free reign. This is evident in the way Palmer acted during the Red Scare, heightening panic which was already consuming America over fears of a Bolshevik revolution. For more details, see David Joseph Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*, The American Moment (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 43.

¹⁷⁸ Mark S. Joy, "Warren G. Harding: 'Not Nostrums, but Normalcy,'" in *The 1920s (1920-1929)*, ed. Michael Shally-Jenson (Amenia: Grey House Publishing, 2014), 3. Only 49% eligible voted in the 1920 election. Goldberg's treatment of women voters is dismissive: "wives generally cast their ballots along the same lines as their husbands." Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 48; 53. Paul Kleppner gives a more empathetic explanation, highlighting Republican hegemony at the time as creating "weaker political stimuli" to vote, which had a greater effect on women, as "their costs of participation were higher—they had to overcome standing and internalized norms that defined their sex roles as apolitical." Paul Kleppner, "Were Women to Blame? Female Suffrage and Voter Turnout," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12 (Spring 1982), 621-643; 643.

to pass the Sheppard-Towner Act “was fear of being punished at the polls.” The women’s vote was “an unknown quantity,” and the suffrage movement had promised a unified women’s bloc which would be “issue-oriented” not “party-oriented.”¹⁷⁹ Congressmen worried that women would vote as a bloc on issues without party loyalty, costing them their positions in Congress.

The WJCC used this fear to mobilize support for the act and other legislative initiatives. Their campaign was extensive and relentless, as the *Journal of the American Medical Association* said: “Members of Congress of years’ experience say that the lobby in favor of the bill was the most powerful and persistent that had ever invaded Washington.”¹⁸⁰ When President Harding attempted to cut the appropriation for the act from \$1,240,000 to \$800,000, suffragette Harriet Taylor Upton threatened that cutting the allotment could have a “negative political effect among women.” Harding backed down.¹⁸¹

In truth, as Lemons argues, “actual sentiment among congressmen probably opposed the bill.”¹⁸² As Senator Kenyon explained:

If the members could have voted on that measure secretly in their cloakrooms it would have been killed as emphatically as it was passed in the open under the pressure of the Joint Congressional Committee of Women.¹⁸³

However, senators were not allowed the use of their cloakrooms, and out on the public Congressional floor Sheppard-Towner passed with flying colors. The bill received an

¹⁷⁹J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920’s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 157.

¹⁸⁰*Journal of the American Medical Association*, February 11 1922, 434, as quoted in Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 779. In Dorothy Kirchwey Brown’s article on the Sheppard-Towner Act, she writes that “letters and resolutions by the thousand were poured in upon Congress,” and quotes the secretary of a Senator who said: “I think every woman in my state has written to the Senator,” “The Sheppard-Towner Bill Lobby,” *The Woman Citizen*, January 22 1921, 7.

¹⁸¹Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 159.

¹⁸²Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 157.

¹⁸³Quoted by Charles A. Senden in “The Most Powerful Lobby in Washington,” *The Ladies Home Journal*, April 1922, 95.

endorsement by President Harding and passed the Senate and the House, 63 to 7 and 279 to 39 respectively.¹⁸⁴ The following year the suit brought against the Nineteenth amendment by anti-suffragettes, *Leser v. Garnett*, met with defeat. NAOWS disappeared completely, and the WPPC faced bankruptcy. After the Red Scare and within the context of this brief period of progressivism, Kilbreth and WPPC were political relics. Their views were reactionary, extreme, and largely discredited by a political establishment which sought to win over new female voters who they assumed would push for progressive, social initiatives.

However, the resuscitation of progressivism proved to be a brief one. Two reasons for this present themselves. First was that the dreaded voting bloc of “20,000,000 organized women” never materialized.¹⁸⁵ A minority of American women voted during this time period, and those who did helped elect conservative candidates.¹⁸⁶ Second was the failure of the progressives to unify behind one party or candidate. During the election of 1924, Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, a well-respected leader of the progressive movement, ran as a presidential candidate for the Conference for Progressive Political Action (CPPA). Senator LaFollette had seen an opening to bring liberal intellectuals, suffering farmers and industrial workers together in the face of an agricultural depression and a rapidly changing economy.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, his vision for this political coalition failed to materialize. LaFollette lost the election by a wide margin, an outcome which Goldberg argues “marked the end of progressivism as a major political

¹⁸⁴ Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 777-778.

¹⁸⁵ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 157.

¹⁸⁶ In general, voter turn-out during this period was very low. In both the 1920 and 1924 election it never surpassed 50%, including female voters, Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 48; 64. As Robert Murray explains, those women who did vote demonstrated a “decided preference” for Harding in the election of 1920. Robert K. Murray, *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 66

¹⁸⁷ Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 62.

movement.”¹⁸⁸ Instead, President Calvin Coolidge would govern over an administration that had a laissez-faire attitude towards both the economy and social welfare and placed Americanism before internationalism, “one of the most conservative governments in US History.”¹⁸⁹ It was within this new era of conservatism that the Woman Patriots moved back into mainstream politics, as the mouthpiece of female conservatism.

No Peace for Patriots: Pacifism and the WPPC

One of the ways in which the WPPC seized the initiative in the changing political world can be seen in its opposition to the women’s peace movement. Growing since the close of World War I, the women’s peace movement was a “broad-based movement,” with activism centering on a campaign for demobilization. It grew out of the advocacy of many women reformers including many of the WPPC’s old enemies, such as Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman Catt. In 1919, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was founded and quickly became the movement’s primary organization, gaining influence in Washington with the help of lobbyist Dorothy Detzer.¹⁹⁰ Alarm bells began to ring for conservatives across the nation as the movement picked up steam, and critics began to attack WILPF and the peace movement as a whole for being dangerously un-American. Phrases like “peace at any price” and the “slacker’s oath” inspired outrage, and the backlash was intense. Pacifism became extremely divisive, as peace activists were slandered for being un-patriotic, un-womanly and un-American.¹⁹¹ Highly

¹⁸⁸ Coolidge, Harding’s Vice President who had assumed the presidency after Harding’s death, collected 54% of the votes compared to the Democratic candidate Davis’s 28.8% and LaFollette’s 16.6% Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 64.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Shally-Jenson, *The 1920s (1920-1929)*, ed. Michael Shally-Jenson (Amenia: Grey House Publishing, 2014), 123.

¹⁹⁰ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 48.

¹⁹¹ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 40-44.

vocal against pacifism and the WILPF, the WPPC capitalized on the growing number of women's organizations who retreated from or attacked pacifism, gaining influence and support among larger and more well-respected organizations. Such is the case with one of the most well-respected women's organizations in America at the time: The Daughters of the American Revolution.

The DAR was founded in 1890 as a patriotic, heritage society with membership limited to those directly descended from veterans of the American Revolution. It was, as Francesca Morgan argues, a "white nationalist" organization, which "constructed a distinctive gendered and racial definition of patriotism and citizenship."¹⁹² Members of the DAR were white, wealthy and of good social breeding. As discussed previously, they were of the same social background as many anti-suffragettes.¹⁹³ Despite these ties, for much of its existence the DAR had actually supported many progressive causes put forward by the suffrage movement. They were by no means progressive, but they endorsed basic reform initiatives and generally tried to remain above the political fray. As noted above, they had supported the Sheppard-Towner Act when it was initially passed in 1921 and counted Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams and Alice Paul among their membership.¹⁹⁴ During the height of the Progressive Era, they opposed child labor and promoted peace, setting up the Child Labor Committee and the Committee on International Peace Arbitration in 1907 and 1911, respectively.¹⁹⁵ However, as the DAR entered the 1920s, they would be pulled, if they did not leap, firmly into the arms of female conservative

¹⁹² Cristina V. Groeger, "Radicalism and Conservatism," in *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), 362–77: 367-368.

¹⁹³ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 49.

¹⁹⁴ Jo Freeman, *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 146.

¹⁹⁵ Margaret Gibbs, *The DAR* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 78-81.

activism.¹⁹⁶

The DAR's shift began with the Red Scare of 1919-1920. President-Generals Ann Rogers Minor and Lora Haines Cook voiced concerns about growing radicalism in America. Cook had branches distribute Richard Whitney's *Reds in America*, a classic work of antiradicalism, which detailed the universal, radical threat which socialism posed towards America. The DAR began to drift away ideologically from their fellow women's organizations, especially those that supported the women's peace movement.¹⁹⁷ While they had considered peace initiatives before the Great War, afterwards the DAR were strong advocates of military preparedness. In 1925, they pressured the National Council of Women to force WILPF out of their organization by refusing to allow their Constitution Hall to be rented for the 1925 International Council of Women's (ICW) Convention, even after it had been advertised as the location.¹⁹⁸ In the 1924 and 1925 Continental Congresses, they announced their opposition to both "red internationalism" and pacifism, viewing both as interrelated.¹⁹⁹

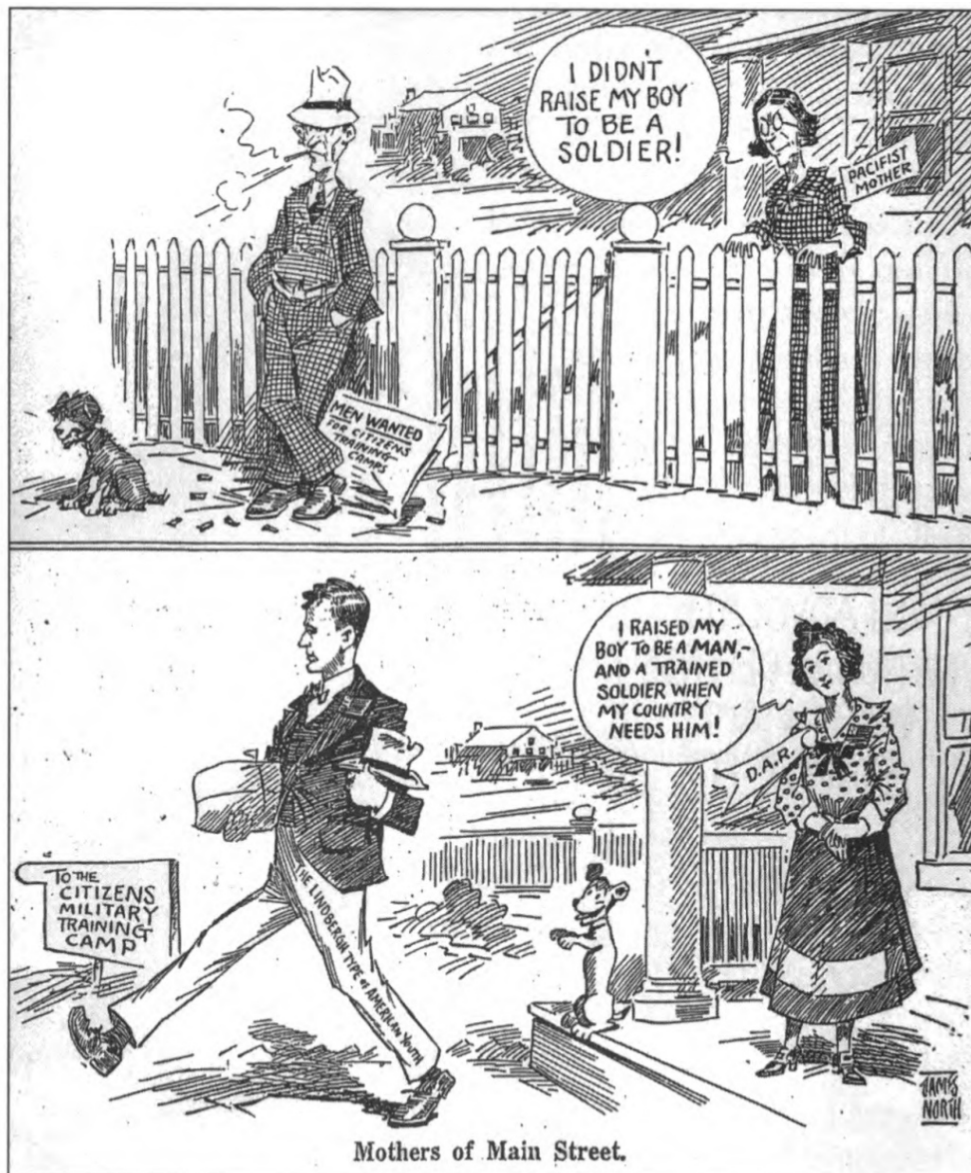
¹⁹⁶ Gibbs argues that the DAR was somewhat primed for this transition. The very reason for the DAR's existence was because its members strongly believed in the necessity of protecting the status quo: "With no royal family or national church to create an automatic status quo, conservative native-born Americans became increasingly convinced that nothing but a faith in the founding fathers would save the country from eventual perdition," The movement of the DAR into conservative advocacy came from a desire to protect this status quo colliding a sense of ownership that DAR members, as upper-class Americans, had over their country. Gibbs is perhaps overly sympathetic when discussing their sense of entitlement: "In that time of stress it is understandable that those who could trace their lines to actual patriots could easily feel that they were the proper people to save our institutions." Gibbs, *The DAR*, 33.

¹⁹⁷ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 57. Richard Whitney was a frequent contributor to *The Woman Patriot*. As the DAR progressed further into the conservative fold, they began distributing texts by authors which existed in the same politically conservative bubble as the WPPC.

¹⁹⁸ There is some slight confusion here in the historical record. Nielsen uses Constitution Hall in her text, however, according to Margaret Gibbs and the DAR's own website, the Constitution Hall was opened in 1929, after the organization out-grew their old hall, the Memorial Continental Hall. The Continental Hall was probably the one advertised as the location for the ICW's Convention. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 119; Gibbs, *The DAR*, 114; Daughters of the American Revolution. (n.d.), *Memorial Continental Hall: 100 Years of History*, <https://www.dar.org/museum/exhibitions/memorial-continental-hall-100-years-history>.

¹⁹⁹ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 58.

In the face of WILPF activism, the DAR took steps to oppose what they viewed as a betrayal, not only of American patriotism, but of the duty of American womanhood. In their eyes, pacifism would not only rob the country of protection during times of war, but also degrade American society until the men became vagrants and the women lost their femininity to so-called reform causes. An example of how they conceptualized the peace movement's threat to American society and womanhood can be seen in the cartoon below:²⁰⁰



²⁰⁰ "Mothers of Main Street," *Washington Post*, April 22 1928, as referenced in Nielson, *Un-American Womanhood*, 128.

The DAR's relationship with the WPPC began with their next President-General Grace Brosseau. On January 22, 1927, Mary Kilbreth wrote a letter to Katherine Balch in which she explained that: "Mrs. Brosseau is entirely our friend, apparently willing to be guided and anxious to actively help." She wrote that Brosseau and the DAR would begin to take their cues from the WPPC. The DAR leadership would help Kilbreth and the WPPC lobby, join in their campaigns against progressive legislation and circulate conservative materials throughout their members "with covering letter from Mrs. Brosseau" to introduce it.²⁰¹ The WPPC's *The Woman Patriot* was already popular with DAR members, who were actively encouraged to read it.²⁰² Through the WPPC's magazine, DAR members were exposed to messaging that linked socialism and feminism together with progressive reform initiatives. These ideas helped shape the transformation of the DAR into a conservative political organization; as DAR historian Margaret Gibb's explains, the *Woman Patriot* had "enormous influence on DAR readers."²⁰³

When Brosseau told Kilbreth that she was "willing to be guided," it meant so much more than just that the WPPC would have influence over the DAR. DAR members were the privileged, female elite of society. As discussed previously, Kilbreth herself was a DAR member, as were many antis.²⁰⁴ Many daughters were married to prominent politicians, business executives or members of academia. Prior to the 1940s, the DAR exposed "hundreds of thousands of people to their gendered and racialized ideas about national loyalty." This included the many children who were members of the Children of the American Revolution, and the students who took part in their essay contests and scholarships. Many of the celebrations,

²⁰¹ Mary Kilbreth to Balch, January 22, 1927, Folder 10, Box 2, Alexander Lincoln Collection. Schlesinger Library.

²⁰² Freeman, *A Room at a Time*, 146.

²⁰³ Gibbs, *The DAR*, 119.

²⁰⁴ Seymour, *Lineage Book*, 299-300; Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 48.

commemorations and other events the DAR held would have been impossible without the cooperation and participation of local communities.²⁰⁵ The DAR were the social leaders of their towns— “most Americans were in a little awe of them.”²⁰⁶ Therefore, through their organization, the WPPC gained influence, not only over their exclusive membership of powerful, elite women, but also over the communities of Americans who idolized them. As Kilbreth said later on in her letter: “I am counting on the huge D.A.R. membership greatly to strengthen us.”²⁰⁷

At the same time, the WPPC had been busy building their network of fellow conservative organizations. The Sentinels of the Republic, which had formed in 1922, was an ultra-conservative umbrella organization bringing together individuals like Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and organizations like the National Security League, the American Constitutional League, the American Defense Society, the American Legion, the WPPC, the Massachusetts Public Interest League (MPIL), the Women’s Constitutional League of Maryland, and the Women’s Constitutional League of Virginia. It served as “a bridge between conservatism and super-patriotism,” bringing organizations like the WPPC into the more conservative mainstream of American politics.²⁰⁸ The DAR also joined, and by 1927, the Sentinels claimed 8,000 members in 48 states.²⁰⁹

It was not just private organizations like the DAR which turned to the WPPC as an indirect result of the women’s peace movement. The government itself, exemplified in the actions of the War Department, began to bolster the WPPC’s reputation and reach. The War

²⁰⁵ Simon Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed. (University Press of Florida, 2020), 5; 14.

²⁰⁶ Gibbs, *The DAR*, 118.

²⁰⁷ Mary Kilbreth to Balch, January 22, 1927, Folder 10, Box 2, Alexander Lincoln Alexander Lincoln Collection. Schlesinger Library.

²⁰⁸ Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 219.

²⁰⁹ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 55.

Department faced cuts in both funding and staff in 1923-1924, but it could not directly attack the Congress or President who allowed it. Instead, they “began publicly denouncing pacifist groups and dismissing women opponents of military preparedness as hysterics.”²¹⁰ They attacked groups like the PTA and the Girls’ Friendly Society, before, as historian Jo Freeman argues, realizing “that women’s patriotic organizations were the best vehicles through which to oppose pacifist sentiments.”²¹¹ The Military Intelligence Division (MID) began referring concerned citizens to female conservative organizations, including the WPPC, the MPIL and the DAR. Mary Kilbreth even claimed to have “direct communication with the heart of the government,” explaining that: “We have access to the most important secret files etc (confidential) and the little Patriot is used or quoted by officials who accept our documentation as reliable and safe to use.”²¹² In short, by 1924 the WPPC had not only found an audience in private, conversative organizations, but in official government agencies too.

Lucia Ramsey Maxwell’s notorious Spiderweb chart exemplifies Mary Kilbreth and the WPPC’s newly achieved political relevance. The author of the chart, Maxwell, was a librarian at the Chemical Welfare Service, an organ of the US military, headed by General Fries.²¹³ The chart ties together women’s organizations and their leaders, all under the heading: “The Socialist-Pacifist Movement in America Is an Absolutely Fundamental and Integral Part of International Socialism.”²¹⁴ It was designed to give the impression that an intimately connected, vast conspiracy of primarily progressive women and their organizations were plotting to

²¹⁰ Freeman, *A Room at a Time*, 144.

²¹¹ Freeman, *A Room at a Time*, 146.

²¹² “To Arms! To Arms! The New Crises!” n.d., Lincoln Papers, Folder 5, as quoted in Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 87.

²¹³ Gibbs, *The DAR*, 109.

²¹⁴ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 76, Gibbs, *The DAR*, 109.

undermine America.²¹⁵ Activist Mary Anderson called it “a whole sale attack on practically every well-known women’s organization in the United States and their leaders.” While the chart was “full of minor inaccuracies, half truths, and downright falsehoods,” the War Department still distributed it to every branch of the armed forces. Many newspapers and magazines published it, including *The Woman Patriot*, and Maxwell, a proud Daughter of the American Revolution, dedicated the chart itself to Mary Kilbreth “with appreciation for her work.”²¹⁶

The Fight Against Sheppard-Towner Renews

When proponents of Sheppard-Towner brought the bill back to Congress for renewal in 1926, the structural underpinnings of the political world had shifted: the Progressive Era had ended; the suffragist dream of a woman’s bloc had never materialized; and the DAR had allied itself with the WPPC, who had joined with a growing network of antiradical, conservative organizations.²¹⁷ Armed with clear statistics proving the effectiveness of their program, supporters of Sheppard-Towner believed renewal would not prove difficult and confidently moved forward. While the House did vote by a 218 to 44 margin to extend the bill for two years,

²¹⁵ Maxwell even included a poem, which reads as follows: “Miss Bolsheviki has come to town / With a Russian cap and a German gown / In women’s clubs she’s sure to be found / For she’s come to disarm AMERICA. / She sits in judgement on Capitol Hill / And watches the appropriation bill / And without her O.K., it passes – NIL / For she’s there to disarm AMERICA. / She uses the movies and lyceum too / And alters books to suit her view / She prates propaganda from pulpit and pew / For she’s bound to disarm AMERICA. / The male of the specie has a different plan / He uses the bomb and the fire brand, / And incites class hatred wherever he can / While she’s busy disarming AMERICA. / His special stunt is arousing the mob. / To expropriate and hate and kill and rob, / While she’s working on her political job, / AWAKE! AROUSE!! AMERICA!!!” Other versions of the chart were printed during this time period. This version is from Swarthmore College’s archives, “‘Spider web’ chart and reply,” Box 1, Series A-5 Literature, Part III U.S. Section, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Collection, the Swarthmore College Peace Collection; As Gibbs says “with a little coaxing,” it can be read to the tune of “Yankee Doodle,” Gibbs, *The DAR*, 109.

²¹⁶ Gibbs, *The DAR*, 109-110.

²¹⁷ Even the culture of the United States had been affected, as “business executives replaced politicians as the exemplars of progressivism.” Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 168.

the act would become stuck in the Senate, where its opponents closed in for the kill.²¹⁸ It was no longer 1921. In this new political world, the WPPC, now seated firmly within mainstream politics, launched their attack against Sheppard-Towner.

This time, Kilbreth did not argue with the Chairman or even speak to the Senate directly; she had her words entered into the Congressional record by Senator Thomas Bayard, from Delaware. On July 3rd, 1926, Senator Bayard submitted a thirty-six page petition written by Kilbreth into the *Congressional Record*. The length is significant; the petition makes up a good third of the entire record for the Senate on that day. From the dignified distance supplied by writing, Kilbreth was able to voice her arguments against Sheppard-Towner without the interruptions of a hostile senator. She was able to control the narrative she wished to weave against the bill, supplying her own statistics, experts and attestations. While the way she organized her arguments within the pamphlet can be confusing and repetitive, they were also impactful.²¹⁹

The pamphlet opens with a “Summary of General Objections” section, in which Kilbreth focuses on three main reasons for opposing the bill: the first is that communists and socialists are tricking women into passing these welfare initiatives. “The Bolshevik wolf rarely gets to the doors of Congress except as a little Red Riding-hood,” Kilbreth exclaims. The second is that these initiatives will destroy the relationship between parents and children, rendering the American family and American democracy, by extension, defunct. “There can be no question where the people stand on Federal interference in their homes,” she argues, “More oppressive

²¹⁸ Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 784.

²¹⁹ It seems that Kilbreth still held some resentment for the way she had been treated in 1921, beginning the petition with “Having been denied a hearing by the Senate Committee on Education and Labor and not having been heard at the hurried, inadequate House hearings opening within 24 hours after the introduction of the bill, we therefore respectfully submit to the honorable Members of the United States Senate, this petition,” US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12918.

invasions of the private lives of citizens have recently been proposed or attempted by the encroaching Federal power than George III would have dared.” Here, the free health instruction offered by the government, which the act allowed private citizens to refuse, is reconceptualized as “federal interference” and “encroaching Federal power,” which threatens the family. Finally, Kilbreth argues that all welfare initiatives, not just Sheppard-Towner, represent this threat. The “general welfare” clause in the Constitution is, in fact, its “Achilles Heel,” as welfare initiatives will make “American citizens mere parasites of their Government instead of its upholders” – turning self-reliance and resilience into passivity and dependence.²²⁰

Historian Stanley Lemons explained the reasoning behind the Sheppard-Towner opposition by arguing that “because suffragists favored the bill, anti-suffragists opposed it.”²²¹ However, this explanation dismisses the powerful reactionary arguments of women like Mary Kilbreth as reactionary parroting. Instead, it is more useful to revisit the idea of gendered class interests and their impact on anti-suffrage women. Antis opposed Sheppard-Towner as both women and members of the upper-class. As women, they saw Sheppard-Towner as lending power and reach to the progressive women who they had opposed for flaunting gender roles and endangering the American family.²²² As members of the upper class, they viewed any interference with the family unit as a potentially disastrous disruption to the social order. The institution of the family was something to be revered and protected; as Kilbreth explains in “The

²²⁰ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12919-12920.

²²¹ Lemons, “*The Sheppard-Towner Act*,” 779.

²²² The connection between proper gender roles and family stability can be seen in the two points anti-suffragist Lyman Abbott raises about the American family: “*First*, that the family is the basis of society, from which it grows. *Second*, that the basis of the family, and therefore of society, is the difference between the sexes, --a difference which is inherent, temperamental, functional.” Therefore, Abbott argues that the family is based on gender difference, and therefore, disruption to the gender binary would lead to a disruption of the family; a disaster for anyone who views the family as “the basis of society.” Lyman Abbott, “Why Women Do Not Wish the Suffrage,” *The Atlantic*, September 1903.

New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” it was “the unit of society.”²²³ Throughout the 1920s, motivated by their class and gender, the WPPC and other newly united, conservative organizations would attack anything that could be regarded as a disruption of the private family unit—from feminism to federal welfare.

Part of protecting the American family lay in protecting the authority of the family—the parents, and mainly, the father. Anti-suffragists had long voiced the opinion that democracy depended on order, and order depended on Americans’ subscription to a hierarchy. This hierarchy was exemplified by “their ordained places in their families,” under the control of the family patriarch.²²⁴ Suffrage undermined the patriarch and the figure of the father. In her petition, Kilbreth asserts that Sheppard-Towner would as well, replacing the father with the federal government as a sort of “overparent.”²²⁵ This “overparent” would take the form of the Children’s Bureau.²²⁶

A self-interested, self-power seeking bureau that juggles statistics in favor of foreign nations and poisons the minds of American mothers against their country as the most “careless” with their lives, simply to bring political pressure on Congress for bureau expression.

The people who supported the Bureau, she argues, are women like Mrs. Florence Kelley and Jane Addams, socialists and feminists who seek “the same general objective, nationalized care, control and support of mothers and children.”²²⁷

In order to help the reader understand what a disaster this kind of control would be, Kilbreth returns to the Red-Scare antifeminism of 1919-1920. She includes quotations from the

²²³ Kilbreth, “The New Anti-Feminist Campaign,” 2.

²²⁴ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 42.

²²⁵ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12935.

²²⁶ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12952.

²²⁷ Kilbreth argues that “self-reliant, resourceful, and energetic American parents” would “never dreamed of a Federal Children’s Bureau in 130 years of American Independence.” US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12933;12930.

Overman Committee and cites a quotation from Professor Boris Sokoloff which presents a narrative of destruction similar to the one Roger Simmons gave about the mythic Bureau of Free

Love:

If you want to visit your children—that is to say, those who were once your children—who have been removed to the communal schools, you will get a permit, because children are not really yours at all, but have become wards of the state. All the children have been deported from their homes to these schools.²²⁸

Worse still, Kilbreth argues that the members of many women’s organizations, who innocently seek to better the conditions of mothers and children, are being manipulated into supporting this destruction. After listing ten prominent women’s organizations by name, she asserts that they are all, in reality, “a device for misrepresenting the masses of organized women without consulting them, and for tricking the United States Congress.”²²⁹ While nominally just against Sheppard-Towner, the petition drives home the message that opposing just one bill is not enough. In order to protect the nation, Americans everywhere must stand against progressive women and their communist legislative program to “capture the child” and “get at the housewives!”²³⁰

Kilbreth’s arguments were extremely impactful, not for their veracity, but for how widely

²²⁸ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12941.

²²⁹ The ten organizations that Kilbreth lists are: The WJCC, the NLWV, GFWC, NCL, National Congress of Mothers and the Parent-Teachers’ Association, National Council of Jewish Women, National Federation of Business and Professional Women, NWTUL, WCTU, Girls’ Friendly Society of America, and American Association of University Women. Kilbreth also attacks Mrs. Florence Kelley as a communist leader: “Mrs. Kelley has been organizing women to promote socialism for 40 years” and argues that she has penetrated and corrupted the Hull House Settlement, the WILPF, NAWSA, the NCL, the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL), the NLWV, the NWTUL, and the WJCC. She attacks other women as well, arguing that these women manipulate major women’s organizations behind the scenes. It is worthy of note that for Kilbreth the true agents of the communist revolution—whether knowing or unknowingly cooperating—are women. Their identity as women validates her belief that women should never have been given the vote in the first place. US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12933.

²³⁰ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12949.

and quickly they were circulated.²³¹ When the WJCC organized a special committee in 1927 to investigate the attacks which had been launched at them from conservative women, they placed “almost exclusive” blame on the WPPC. Tracing the WPPC’s influence from 1922 to the 1926 Senate petition, they argued that these arguments had “no authority” behind them; however, since they had been “seized upon and circulated,” they now posed a dangerous threat.²³²

Historian Katherine Delegard cites Kilbreth’s petition specifically as agitating regular members of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC), one of the most venerable and respectable women’s organizations in America.²³³

It was not just clubwomen but nurses themselves who turned to Kilbreth as an authority after reading her work. On January 8th, 1927, Senator Bayard read the following letter addressed to Mary Kilbreth into the *Congressional Record* from nurse Christine Kefauver, who, after reading the petition, remarked that it was “a complete revelation:”

I had supposed (or rather, had taken for granted) that the bureau was guided by and cooperated with the United States Public Health Service in a nation-wide campaign to increase baby health and lessen maternal mortality. I must say I am shocked at what my investigations, following the reading of your article, have revealed. It is all the harder because I always was, am now, and expect to remain an ardent feminist, but first and foremost an American one...I am sure there are

²³¹ Nielson argues that one of the reasons why the petition spread so fast was because it was entered into the *Congressional Record*. Explaining that “most Americans were (and are) unaware that nearly anything can be inserted into the Congressional Record,” Nielson argues that “use of the Congressional Record... gave antiradicals legitimacy and prestige and allowed them to imply that they had the support of government.” Therefore, when an American was handed a copy of the *Congressional Record* with a pamphlet as detailed as Kilbreth’s was, it would have practically screamed “Legitimate!” Nielson, *Un-American Womanhood*, 146.

²³² “Summary of Report of Special Committee,” Frames 1032-1053, Reel 44, Maud May (Wood) Park Papers, as quoted in Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 184-185.

²³³ On February 1927, GFWC members Dora Arnold and Hariland Lund hosted a meeting in White Plains, New York, that aimed to expose the “Congressional Woman’s Lobby at Washington.” Throughout the meeting they would paraphrase Kilbreth’s petition. For more details see Report of Greenridge Inn Meeting, Frames 321-323, Reel 4, Mary Anderson Papers, as quoted in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 188.

thousands of well intentioned and thoroughly patriotic public-health nurses, who, like myself, have been absolutely misinformed in this matter.²³⁴

Christine Kefauver was an officer of the New York Industrial Nurses Association and the Phi Delta Delta Women's Legal Association. She was also conducting a class in industrial hygiene at Fordham University during this time. At the end of her letter she asks Kilbreth: "How many copies of your article could you spare me for distribution in these organizations?"²³⁵

The renewal of the Sheppard-Towner act would fail. The bill sat in the Senate for almost eight months until its supporters were forced to accept a terminal compromise: it would be extended for two more years and then would automatically repeal itself on June 30, 1929. Further attempts by progressive women to advocate for disarmament, welfare, industrial reform, child labor regulation, and other social reforms were all met with conservative attacks. Indeed, the time and effort that could have gone into researching, creating and passing further social reform legislation was lost as women's organizations desperately tried to fight back against accusations of subversion and radicalism.²³⁶ There would be no more groundbreaking social legislation passed until the beginning of the New Deal in 1933.²³⁷ In this way, the fight against the renewal of Sheppard-Towner represents much more than a single legislative defeat.

For decades, middle-class, white, Protestant women had been tied together through reform-minded organizations respected by their fellow Americans and government. Historian Katherine Delegard refers to the ideas which had united women's organizations like the GFWC and the WJCC as "a distinct female political subculture." The WPPC's attacks, bolstered by the support they received from fellow conservative organizations and a conservative government,

²³⁴ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, January 8, 1927, pp. 1285.

²³⁵ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, January 8, 1927, pp. 1285.

²³⁶ Lemon, *The Woman's Citizen* 209.

²³⁷ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 220.

pierced the heart of this subculture. Furthermore, it made membership to this world of female reform costly. Mrs. Fred Hoffman, a member of the South Dakota League of Women Voters (LWV), weary of the relentless attacks from DAR members, reached out to the national organization requesting aid, explaining it had become “useless for individual members like myself to do anything.”²³⁸

Under the pressure of public disapproval and growing political opposition, organizations which had served as the wellsprings of female progressivism floundered. The WCTU, PTA and GFWC abandoned their legislative reform platforms. The WJCC faced desertion as first the WCTU then the GFWC departed its fold. Against the “coordinated antiradical offensive,” even the defenses of the powerful, female lobby had proved “timid” and “disjointed.”²³⁹ Organizations which stuck to their guns, most notably the LWV, found themselves increasingly marginalized politically. The GFWC itself gave into antiradical pressure, and by the end of the decade, conservative forces would be fully in control of what had once been a powerhouse of reform support.²⁴⁰

The rise of the WPPC from obscurity to prominence demonstrates the lasting power of the anti-suffrage movement. Taking advantage of the changing political landscape, the WPPC built themselves a network of conservative alliances, including connections to the DAR, the Sentinels of the Republic, and the War Department. While on paper they were a small organization, the WPPC’s reach spread throughout the decade, as evidenced by the impact of Kilbreth’s petition. By the time Sheppard-Towner expired in 1929, the Woman Patriots were a force to be reckoned with—and they remain one to this day.

²³⁸ Mrs. F. Hoffman to Mrs. Feige, November 1927, Frame 887, Reel 9, Part 3, Series A, National Office Subject Files, 1920-1932, LWV Papers, as quoted in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviks*, 182.

²³⁹ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviks*, 187; 185.

²⁴⁰ Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviks*, 188-189.

Conclusion

In 1931, *The New York Times* published a small article mocking Mary Kilbreth and Mrs. Randolph Frothingham.²⁴¹ *The New York Times*, once a friend to antis, had no issue characterizing them as out-of-touch housewives, who treated the United States as if it were a country club. The article describes how these inconsequential women, with their “Forbidding Lady-Fingers,” interfered with that which did not concern them, like opposing Albert Einstein’s visa. “It would be unjust to accuse the Woman Patriot of defiance of evolution,” the article quips:

for the publication has evolved at a faster rate than most living species have been able to adapt themselves to changed environments. Time was when it was the organ of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, of which Miss Kilbreth was president, and at its masthead was the declaration that it was ‘Dedicated to the Defense of the Family and the State Against Feminism and Socialism.’

The Times closes with the remark: “So much for ladies with fixed ideas of political housekeeping.”²⁴²

The arrival of the Depression on October 24, 1929 had dealt a massive blow to the WPPC’s political relevance and funding. In this new political world, the anti-radical concerns of the wealthy WPPC board members no longer resonated with the public; the main question on everyone’s mind was how to restore the economy and protect social welfare, not how to oppose socialism. The WPPC would publish their last issue of *The Woman Patriot* in 1931.²⁴³ In the years that followed, Kilbreth slowly slipped into political obscurity. Her appearance in 1932 in front of the House’s Committee on Labor is one of the last mentions of her I can find in the

²⁴¹ “Frothingham, Randolph” and “Balch John,” *Boston City Directory*, 1925, Massachusetts Historical Society as cited in Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki*, 243.

²⁴² *New York Times*, 11 December 1932, p. 2xx

²⁴³ “An Appeal To Our Friends,” *The Woman Patriot*, November 1931, 6-7.

public record.²⁴⁴ She would die in 1957 at the age of 89 “after a long illness,” and was buried in Ohio along with the other members of the Kilbreth family line.²⁴⁵

In my thesis, I have endeavored to take Kilbreth seriously and examine the real impact she and the anti-suffrage movement had on America. Although *The New York Times* intended “Forbidding Lady-Fingers” to be a jab at Kilbreth and the WPPC, I hope I have demonstrated in this work how lady-fingers might actually be forbidding. Arising from the ashes of NAOWS, the WPPC used the Red Scare of 1919-1920 and the changing tides of American politics to gain relevancy in a post-suffrage world. Mary Kilbreth and her fellow Woman Patriots refit the arguments of anti-suffrage to oppose feminism, socialism and progressive reform. With the help of the Sentinels of America, the DAR and numerous other conservative organizations, they tore through legislation which had taken the progressive movement years to construct. The entire network of women’s organizations, who had led an era of private charity and public reform since the end of the nineteenth century, was thrown into jeopardy as a result. The ideas the WPPC and Kilbreth articulated on the roles of socialism and women in America still reverberate in the world of American politics to this day.

As of February 1st, 2021, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia has been stripped of her congressional committee assignments following statements made in support of the QAnon conspiracy and violence against Democrats.²⁴⁶ Campaigning under the slogan, “Save America, Stop Socialism!” Representative Greene claims that Democrats “and their spokesmen

²⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Hearings Before the Committee on Labor House of Representatives Seventy-Second Congress Second Session on H.R. 14105*, 27 January 1933 pp. 195-196.

²⁴⁵ “Mary G. Kilbreth Statistics Card,” Springfield Cemetery Archives, No. 144212 (1957); *The New York Times*, 26 June 1957, 31.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Removing a certain Member from certain standing committees of the House of Representatives*, H Res. 72, 117th Congress, 1st sess., introduced in the house February 1, 2021.

in the Fake News Media...are coming after me because I'm a threat to their goal of Socialism."²⁴⁷ The discredited conspiracy theory QAnon, which Greene got in trouble for supporting, has used female-dominated online communities like mommy pages and fitness platforms to recruit predominately white, suburban women. By arguing that children are at risk of sexual violence from an evil, secret "deep-state," QAnon appeals to women's unique identity as mothers.²⁴⁸ Their fears of child corruption mirror Kilbreth's claims in 1926 that secret socialists were trying to pass legislation like the Sheppard-Towner Act which would: "capture the child" and "get at the housewives!"²⁴⁹ Representative Greene's anti-Socialist rhetoric mirrors Kilbreth's accusations that the feminists were infiltrating the government in order to spread "the most extreme Socialist doctrines" via their "Russian Propaganda system."²⁵⁰ Greene has frequently accused Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other feminist women of color in Congress of planning to "plunge us into communism."²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Marjorie Taylor Greene. "Marjorie Greene - Save America, Stop Socialism!" YouTube Video. January 31, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CETSxg5of7Q&t=73s>

²⁴⁸ Lili, Loofbourow, "It Makes Perfect Sense That QAnon Took Off With Women This Summer," *Slate*, September 18, 2020. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/09/qanon-women-why.html>; Annie Kelly. "Mothers for QAnon," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/10/opinion/qanon-women-conspiracy.html>; "Q-stagram" is full of female influencers with colorful pastel backdrops and fairy lighting who spread misinformation accompanied with the hashtags "#momlife," "#mommyandme," and "#body positivity." Kaitlyn Tiffany. "The Women Making Conspiracy Theories Beautiful: How the domestic aesthetics of Instagram repackaged QAnon for the masses," *The Atlantic*, August 18, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/08/how-instagram-aesthetics-repackage-qanon/615364/>

²⁴⁹ US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, July 3 1926, pp. 12949.

²⁵⁰ Kilbreth, "The New Anti-Feminist Campaign," 2.

²⁵¹ Marjorie Taylor Greene. "Marjorie Greene - Save America, Stop Socialism!" YouTube Video. January 31, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CETSxg5of7Q&t=73s> Representative Greene has called herself "the squads worst nightmare," and landed herself in trouble for posting a photo of her with her AR-15 rifle alongside a photo of three of the progressive congresswomen known as "The Squad:" Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar. Marjorie Taylor Greene, "Squad's Worst Nightmare," Facebook post, September 3, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/MarjorieTaylorGreene/posts/2518095838480511>

There is a tendency to dismiss conservative women, especially extremely conservative women, in the historical record. Yet, the commonality of rhetorical themes between these women, past and present, illuminate how deeply rooted beliefs surrounding gender, family and authority in American culture have passed from one generation to the next. What if one of the reasons why many find conservative women so confusing today is because we do not understand the conservative women of yesterday? How might our failure to account for these women in the historical record contribute to the failure of modern progressive initiatives—the Sheppard-Towner Acts of our own period? Through analyzing the legacy of conservative women’s movements like anti-suffrage, we can, I think, better understand the continuity and strength of conservative women’s beliefs, even if those beliefs seem to us fundamentally flawed. Mary Kilbreth and the Woman Patriots may have been on the wrong side of history, but they still belong within it.

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