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## “The Saloon Is Their Palace”: Race, Immigration, and Politics in the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1874–1933

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

“THE SALOON IS THEIR PALACE”:

RACE, IMMIGRATION, AND POLITICS IN THE WOMAN’S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE

UNION, 1874–1933

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HISTORY

BY

ELLA WAGNER

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2022

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many troubling things have happened in the world since I started this PhD program in fall 2015. During the process I have often wondered if my time might be better spent running for office, lying down in front of a pipeline, or curling up into a ball under the covers instead of trying to become a historian. I am grateful to everyone who has supported me in staying the course and reminded me that we all need to understand the past if we want to do anything about the present. Thank you to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Timothy Gilfoyle and Dr. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, and to my chair, Dr. Michelle Nickerson, for your guidance, thoughtful feedback, and intellectual and professional encouragement. I appreciate the support of the Iowa Women's Archives and the Humanities Without Walls fellowship program in funding research and writing time. Thank you to the faculty, staff, and students of Loyola University Chicago's Department of History, and especially the Public History program, for creating a learned and passionate community. Special shoutout to my colleagues in the Loyola Graduate Workers' Union. I am very proud of what we have accomplished together. Thank you for fighting to make Loyola a more just place.

I am so grateful to everyone at the Frances Willard House Museum and Archives, especially Lori Osborne, Janet Olson, and Vickie Burke, for welcoming me into the world of the WCTU and refusing to let me leave it. You have provided a true center for women's history and leadership, and I would not be where I am today without it. Thank you also to my colleagues at

the National Park Service. I wish so much of it had not been under pandemic conditions, but it has been a joy to work with you over the last two years. I look forward to what's to come. Special appreciation to Barbara Little, who provided invaluable support and flexibility as I juggled work with the last stages of this project.

Thank you to my wonderful friends and family, including but by no means limited to Liz Jacob, Eva Suarez, Meg Witten, Emily Hamilton, Ryan John, Nathalie Barton, Nick Bloom, Hannah Zuber, and Julia Lacher. It would be great if some of you moved to DC. Thank you to Shelby Brewster, my friend and editor extraordinaire. So much love and gratitude to my first friends and my lifelines in graduate school, Ruby Oram and Shannon Pimmel. See you (and Ryan Miller and Gunnar Poole!) at the Whole Foods bar.

I am truly lucky in my family. The Wagners and Haurys have always provided support and love. My sister Hannah Wagner and my sister-in-law Biff Parker-Magyar are two of the funniest, smartest, most caring people I know. I am so grateful to the Murawski/Arcabascio/Mire/Chirino extended clan for welcoming me with open arms. My parents, Amy Haury and Mark Wagner, have always believed in me. Matt Murawski has been on this journey with me since the beginning, when I delayed our first date because I had to study for the GRE. He married me even though he knew I would spend the next three years complaining about my dissertation. There is absolutely no way that I could have done it without him.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: RUINED LIVES, WIDOWED HEARTS: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ALCOHOL IN THE WCTU	23
Cultural and Religious Roots of the WCTU	28
Temperance Narratives in the Mid-Nineteenth Century	32
The Woman’s Crusade and the Birth of the WCTU	38
Alcohol and Family in the WCTU	47
Alcohol, Public Disorder, Violence, and Activism	58
CHAPTER TWO: “THE FOREIGN MIND WORKS SLOWLY”: THE WCTU’S WORK WITH IMMIGRANTS, 1880–1900	66
Founding the Department of “Foreign Work”	73
Nativism, Scientific Racism, and Heredity in the WCTU	78
Planting the Seed: Strategies for Reaching “Foreign-Speaking People”	87
“Foreign Work” as Home Mission	91
Foreign Work and German Immigration	93
Foreign Work in the West	98
“Difficult and Destitute”: Struggles of the Foreign Work Department	105
Conclusion	108
CHAPTER THREE: “THE SHACKLES OF INTEMPERANCE”: RACIAL POLITICS AND BLACK WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN THE WCTU, 1880–1895	111
Founding the Department of “Colored Work”	117
White Organizers of “Colored Work”	122
Defining Black (In)temperance	124
Black Women and Temperance: Political and Personal Motives	128
Black Leadership in the WCTU, 1880–1890	137
“Friend of the Southern People”: Ida B. Wells Confronts Frances Willard, 1890–1895	144
Black Reaction	151
The NACW and the Willard/Wells Conflict	152
Conclusion	156
CHAPTER FOUR: “RIGID LINES OF SEPARATION”: BLACK WOMEN IN THE WCTU, 1895–1933	159
Black Participation in the WCTU at the Turn of the Century	164
Race and Prohibition in the South, 1900–1920	168
White Women, Prohibition, and the Politics of Race	173
Black Women Remain in the WCTU	175
Jim Crow Violence and Temperance Organizing	180
Sexual Assault and Prison Reform Activism	183
Black Women and the WCTU during National Prohibition	187

Conclusion	192
CHAPTER FIVE: DISARMING DRINK, DEFINING AMERICANISM: PATRIOTISM, NATIVISM, AND AMERICANIZATION IN THE WCTU, 1900–1933	194
Background: Prohibition and Immigration in the Early Twentieth Century	198
“The Greeting of the Saloon”: Welcoming, Instructing, and Inspecting Immigrants	200
Exerting Authority at Ellis Island: Saloons, Inspections, and Proselytizing	205
“The Path to Patriotism is the Path to Prohibition”: Americanization and World War I	214
World War I and Prohibition	220
“Give Prohibition Its Chance”: Enforcement, Coercion, and Nativism, 1919–1933	224
Conclusion	232
CONCLUSION	235
The WCTU After Repeal	236
Alcohol Policy, Gender, and Culture in the Twenty-first Century	242
BIBLIOGRAPHY	248
VITA	274

## INTRODUCTION

Mary Torrans Lathrap ascended the speaker's platform of Foundry Methodist Episcopal Church on Fourteenth Street in Washington, DC. It was an October evening in 1881, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had gathered in the nation's capital for the first day of its eighth annual convention. The host committee had adorned the platform with vases of flowers and a large portrait of the recently assassinated president, James Garfield. Thirty decorative shields, each representing a state or territory that the WCTU had organized, hung on the walls. On the convention's opening day, about two hundred delegates—all female—and a mix of guests occupied the pews of the chapel.<sup>1</sup> The days that followed would feature speechmaking, singing, and strategizing in the service of the WCTU's chief goal: to dry out the United States through personal temperance and the prohibition of alcohol.

Addressing the assembled delegates, Lathrap defined the WCTU's *raison d'être* in stark terms. "If you should ask us *why* we came [to Washington]," she told the assembled delegates, "we face, in the answer, two problems—the problem of *womanhood* in America; and the problem of civilization in America."<sup>2</sup> The first "problem" was the unprecedented access to education and

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<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 5–13.

<sup>2</sup> Mary T. Lathrap, "Response to the Addresses of Welcome on Behalf of the North and West," *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 29.



employment that some nineteenth-century women now enjoyed. Technological advances had freed women from at least some of the crushing weight of domestic labor. A woman who attended college could develop a “cultured brain.” At the same time, the griefs and deprivations of the Civil War home front had forced many women to take on work and responsibilities outside the home and to consider how they could be of service to the nation. These factors produced a “womanhood of to-day” that sought lives beyond the idealized Victorian home. These women had both the desire and the capability to take on active and public roles. The WCTU aimed to direct that energy towards social improvement.

Equally important—though Lathrap did not mention it—was the increase in drinking that had occurred in the United States since the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> Historians like Catherine Gilbert Murdock have shown that middle-class women could and did imbibe small amounts of alcohol in private during the late nineteenth century without transgressing the boundaries of Victorian propriety.<sup>4</sup> Public debates over problematic drinking, however, centered on men’s behavior, especially in the rowdy all-male space of the saloon. Wildly popular temperance stories and plays established the archetype of the male drunkard, whose weakness in the face of temptation led him into debt, humiliation, and even violence. Rising drinking rates ensured that many Americans experienced this archetype as reality. The WCTU sharpened the distinction between male intemperance and female victimhood by pointing out that women suffered from domestic abuse, financial insecurity, and public disorder produced by male drinking. In the WCTU’s

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<sup>3</sup> See William J. Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 23–25.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 42–43.

formulation, women's unique moral authority over the social problem of alcohol stemmed from their unique vulnerability to its effects.

Lathrap's second problem, the "problem of civilization," indicated the rapidly expanding and diversifying United States. She singled out immigration and racial politics as threats to the nation's "unity." Immigration from both Europe and China was on the rise. "I look away to the Westward," Lathrap said, "and every time the waves curl up through the Golden Gate they fling on the sands the olive-cheeked, long-queued, crooked-eyed Chinaman. I look away to the Eastward, and through these doorways of emigration there are coming to us people of every tribe and nation and tongue, thousands in a day, a city in a week, an empire in a year." Lathrap and other native-born white Americans like her worried, to varying degrees, that the new arrivals would bring labor conflict, political radicalism, racial contamination, and cultural and religious change that would threaten American "civilization."<sup>5</sup> Many of her hearers felt conflicted between the Biblical imperative to welcome the "stranger" and concern that immigrants would weaken the character of a country they saw as a beacon to the world.

Meanwhile, the negotiations that had installed Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House nearly five years earlier had ended Reconstruction. They inaugurated a new era of "reconciliation" between Southern and Northern white people and a new regime of racist violence and disenfranchisement for Southern Black people.<sup>6</sup> The theme of renewed sectional

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<sup>5</sup> Lathrap, "Response to the Addresses of Welcome," 30–31.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). On the bargain of 1877, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (Cambridge, MA: Harper & Row, 1998), 575–87.

friendship figured prominently at the 1881 WCTU convention.<sup>7</sup> Looking “Southward,” Lathrap lamented that unspecified “sectional strife” had alienated the “Southern people”—by whom she meant white Southerners—from Northerners.<sup>8</sup> White WCTU leaders exhibited a collective desire to put this uncomfortable past behind them. They also shared a tendency to worry over the power of Black voters. As Lathrap put it, “our freedmen [are] coming up into a liberty they know little how to use, and waiting to be safely taken into our civilization. They stand already at the ballot box, and are as masterful there as the white men of the North.”<sup>9</sup> Some suffragists in the WCTU resented the “mastery” of men of any race in the voting booth. The invocation of a powerful and potentially “unsafe” Black male voter, however, spoke to the fears of many members of Lathrap’s audience that they would not be able to instruct or control the Black electorate.

At the center of this chaotic picture Lathrap placed the greatest threat: the “rum shop.” In her telling, liquor was at the root of all dangers to American “civilization.” It threatened homes by encouraging men to drink and neglect or abuse their wives and families. It corrupted the Christian Sabbath by enabling revelry and leisure during a time when God mandated rest and prayer. The rum shop supported other vices—drugs, gambling, and prostitution—whose effects made their way to the “very doors” of respectable homes. Like other temperance reformers, Lathrap associated the saloon with urban machine politics and political corruption. She also believed that drinking impaired the clear thinking necessary for appropriate democratic

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<sup>7</sup> Leslie Kathrin Dunlap, “In the Name of the Home: Temperance Women and Southern Grass-Roots Politics, 1873–1933” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2001), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Lathrap, “Response to the Addresses of Welcome,” 30–31.

<sup>9</sup> Lathrap, “Response to the Addresses of Welcome,” 30–31.

participation. In both senses, alcohol endangered “the free ballot box of this free land.” The crucial question, for Lathrap and the WCTU at large, was how a rapidly changing nation could hope to “crystalize into unity and go down into the future with the rum shop at the center.”<sup>10</sup> Their answer, of course, was that it couldn’t.

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Public understanding of the American temperance movement is limited and fraught with stereotype. Prohibition has receded far enough into the past that most people have a difficult time imagining what motivated a serious movement to ban alcohol. The long lifespan and great diversity of the temperance movement compound the difficulty. Abstention from alcohol has carried a multitude of meanings to different people across time and space. Most obviously, the meaning of “temperance” changed over the course of the nineteenth century from indicating avoidance of liquor to denoting “capital-T total abstinence.”<sup>11</sup> More subtle changes have occurred as well. Over its nearly century-long history, temperance reformers campaigned against the bottle in the name of (to choose just a few): protecting women and children, purifying the body, preserving physical health, eradicating political corruption, defending public safety, safeguarding a Christian nation, assimilating immigrants, controlling immigrants, solving labor conflicts, eliminating poverty, cleaning up the city, improving industrial efficiency, upholding white supremacy, *undermining* white supremacy, and setting an example for the world.

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<sup>10</sup> Lathrap, “Response to the Addresses of Welcome,” 31.

<sup>11</sup> The origin of the term “teetotaler.”

Historical scholarship on the temperance movement has not always captured these changing meanings. The repeal of national Prohibition in 1933 colored the earliest works exploring it. Books by Richard Hofstadter and Andrew Sinclair, published in the 1950s and early 1960s, respectively, dismissed it as a sanctimonious excuse for white, middle-class, rural Protestants to control the leisure behavior of working-class urban immigrants. They viewed the Eighteenth Amendment as the epitome of Progressive Era-government “excess,” the fruit of a futile quest for human and social perfection that represented an aberration in US history.<sup>12</sup> Even scholars like Joseph R. Gusfield, who regarded temperance reformers with a more sympathetic eye, characterized the reform as an expression of white Protestants’ fears of losing status and cultural power to new immigrants.<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately, since the late 1960s, many scholars have examined temperance and prohibition seriously and on their own terms. Excellent studies on the main phases of the movement by historians like William Rorabaugh, Jack Blocker, Ruth Bordin, Ann-Marie Szymanski, K. Austin Kerr, Kenneth Rose, and Lisa McGirr elucidate its antebellum origins, late-nineteenth-century popularization, and early-twentieth-century political triumph and defeat.<sup>14</sup> However, they do not always show change over the entire scope of the temperance

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Knopf, 1955); Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (New York: Little, Brown, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

<sup>14</sup> For example, William J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Jack S. Blocker Jr., *Retreat from Reform: The Prohibition Movement in the United States, 1890–1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981); Ann-Marie Szymanski, *Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates, and Social Movement Outcomes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League*

movement. Survey accounts like Rorabaugh's *Prohibition: A Concise History* tend to focus on a different main actor (the Washingtonians, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League) for each phase, explicating how prohibitionists won political victory but sometimes obscuring how the meanings of and justifications for temperance changed over time.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, historians have identified temperance with many different reform traditions and reactionary trends in American history, depending on where, when, and on whom they focus. While James H. Timberlake describes prohibitionists' attacks on the greedy liquor traffic as fundamentally progressive, Norman H. Clark links temperance to rural dries' conservative efforts to preserve social order in an industrializing society.<sup>16</sup> Though Ruth Bordin portrays WCTU women in the 1890s as forward-thinking feminists, Lisa McGirr describes them in the 1920s as backward-looking forerunners of the twentieth-century Christian right.<sup>17</sup> The work of Joe L. Coker emphasizes white Southerners' success in using racist tropes to pass prohibition laws, while the scholarship of Lisa Materson shows that Black Republican activists compared the

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(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Kenneth Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*.

<sup>16</sup> James H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*; Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); McGirr, *War on Alcohol*.

potential repeal of Prohibition to the South's nullification of the Reconstruction Amendments.<sup>18</sup>

Such a varied literature makes it difficult to understand how the big tent of the temperance movement could simultaneously contain—albeit for much different reasons—Black clubwomen and members of the Klan.<sup>19</sup>

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union holds one key to understanding the diversity and change in the American temperance movement between the 1870s and the 1930s. This study explores how the WCTU sought to dislodge the rum shop from American society and achieve the “unity” that its members believed was essential for the nation's survival. Beginning with the WCTU's origins in the 1870s, it builds on previous scholarship to show how evangelical Protestant religion, popular temperance sentiment, awareness of women's oppression, and—for Black women—a desire to “uplift the race” motivated women to join the WCTU. It also examines WCTU members' own personal experiences with the social harms of alcohol. Several leaders had divorced their alcoholic husbands; others suffered over sons or nephews who strayed into dissipation. Overlooked by previous historians, these stories reinforce a crucial fact about alcohol: it is not only a symbol, but also a material substance that engenders real addiction, violence, and suffering.

The WCTU initially focused on changing the behavior of men in its members' own families and communities. However, its focus and goals expanded rapidly from this local

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<sup>18</sup> Joe L. Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Lisa Materson, “African American Women, Prohibition, and the 1928 Presidential Election,” *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 63–86.

<sup>19</sup> Materson, “African American Women, Prohibition, and the 1928 Presidential Election”; Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

advocacy to include the whole nation. This shift happened in the context of a country preoccupied with territorial expansion, the persisting fractures of the Civil War, and the impact that the inclusion of non-white, non-Protestant Christian people would have on the polity. The WCTU aimed to reach two populations in particular: immigrants and African Americans. Their growing numbers and political power made their conversion to temperance principles essential to achieve a dry society. At the same time, the racial, ethnic, and religious characteristics of these groups led many WCTU members to perceive them as a threat to the organization's goals. In the early 1880s, the WCTU set up two departments for this purpose, the "Department of Work Among Colored People" ("Colored Work") and the "Department of Work Among Foreign Speaking People" ("Foreign Work," later the Department of Americanization). Their work, primarily carried out by white women but complicated and contested by the presence of immigrant and Black women within the WCTU, was a centerpiece of the WCTU's program well into the twentieth century.

As the WCTU's ambitions grew and its focus expanded to encompass the nation, it confronted increasing tension between the aim of achieving temperance through individual education and conversion and the reality of an increasingly diverse country. Many constituencies rejected both temperance and women's political power, or at least the WCTU's ideas about them. To resolve this tension, the WCTU worked along two tracks, expressed in the words of the pledge that was the centerpiece of the WCTU's organizing:



I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all distilled, fermented and malt liquors, including wine, beer and hard cider, and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same.<sup>20</sup>

The first track was a continued effort to educate and persuade others to adopt a temperate life in their homes and at the ballot box. The WCTU aimed to define such a life as the truest expression of virtue, progress, civilization, and “Americanism.” The second track was a struggle to implement legal curbs on drinking and, in some cases, voting and immigration. The WCTU pursued these restrictions in the name of “protecting” citizens and the nation from various degrading influences. These threats included alcohol, domestic violence, political corruption, racial contamination, and religious change.

In its attempts to persuade and legislate, the WCTU intervened in the larger cultural debates that preoccupied Americans during the turbulent period of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. WCTU members challenged Victorian gender ideals that reserved the public sphere for men and confined women to the home. They argued for the centrality of evangelical Christianity to the American polity at a time when a diversifying and secularizing country was questioning its role. African American temperance women demanded protection from increasing racist violence and segregation even as they strove to improve and “uplift” their own communities through dry reform. Native-born women of both races doubted and questioned the impact of increasing immigration to the United States, torn between an impulse to welcome and assist and a desire to restrict and exclude. The WCTU’s advocacy on these varied fronts reveals that the meaning of drinking and the meaning of Americanism were inextricably tied.

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<sup>20</sup> “About,” WCTU, accessed October 22, 2021, <https://www.wctu.org/about>.

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The Foundry M. E. Church was a natural choice for the convention where Mary Lathrap made her speech. Established in 1814, it was one of the oldest Methodist churches in DC. The congregation had hosted anti-alcohol meetings since at least 1833, during the first wave of the American temperance movement. Its congregants would have heard temperance messages from the pulpit and read the popular temperance stories that newspapers and church presses printed in huge numbers by midcentury. Foundry was the home church of President Rutherford B. Hayes and his wife Lucy Webb Hayes, who had banished alcohol from the White House during their occupancy from 1877 to 1881. “I have young sons who have never tasted liquor,” Lucy Hayes said, becoming a heroine to the WCTU. “What I wish for my own sons I must do for the sons of other mothers.”<sup>21</sup> For decades, the Foundry had been a center of the kind of evangelical reform and missionary activity, often carried out by women, that had shaped the WCTU and many of its members.<sup>22</sup>

The WCTU had emerged in 1874 to capture and build upon the energy of a series of spontaneous women’s protests against saloons during the winter of 1873–1874. Springing up mostly in small towns in the Midwest and Northeast as word of the marches passed via newspaper, railway, and correspondence networks, this movement was known as the Woman’s Crusade. Its participants, often motivated by personal experiences with the poverty, violence,

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<sup>21</sup> “Lucy Hayes, Temperance, and the Politics of the White House Dinner Table,” White House Historical Association, October 25, 2018, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/lucy-hayes-temperance-and-the-politics-of-the-white-house-dinner-table>.

<sup>22</sup> “About,” Foundry United Methodist Church, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.foundryumc.com/about/history>.

disorder, and social humiliation that alcohol abuse could cause, denounced alcohol as a threat to families, communities, and immortal souls. They sought to convert the people around them to temperance principles and to enact restrictions on the sale and use of intoxicating drinks.<sup>23</sup>

Historians of the WCTU have focused considerable attention on the first challenge Mary Lathrap identified in her speech: the “problem of womanhood.” With her comments about the “womanhood of to-day,” Lathrap accurately described most of her audience. She herself was a former teacher and a published poet whose husband had been a doctor in the Union Army. By the early 1870s she was a licensed Methodist preacher, part of an early and contested wave of women entering the ministry. She participated in the Woman’s Crusade in Michigan.<sup>24</sup> Like Lathrap, most early WCTU members were educated, native-born white women who had some experience with church reform or Civil War relief work. As historians like Ruth Bordin, Barbara Leslie Epstein, Rebecca Edwards, and Carol Mattingly have shown, involvement with the WCTU opened a range of new possibilities for them. It provided training in public speaking, writing, and organizing their peers. Many WCTU women discovered interests in causes beyond temperance—such as prison reform, sanitation, and suffrage—that would occupy increasing numbers of them into the Progressive Era. With its flexible and appealing slogan, “Home

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<sup>23</sup> Jack S. Blocker Jr., *“Give to the Winds Thy Fears”*: *The Woman’s Temperance Crusade, 1873–1874* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> See Nancy A. Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984). Biographical information on Lathrap is from Frances Elizabeth Willard and Mary Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life* (Buffalo, NY: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 449; and Mary T. Lathrap, *Rare Gems from the Literary Works of Mary T. Lathrap* (Bay City, MI: Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1895).

Protection,” the WCTU invited these energetic women to define public and political work as part of a period-appropriate female concern with the domestic sphere and the family.<sup>25</sup>

Historians of the WCTU have ably analyzed the organization’s gender politics and its significance as a large and powerful force for women’s political organizing at a time when the suffrage movement remained small. Scholars like Bordin, Epstein, and Mattingly have shown that WCTU leaders employed maternalist arguments and imagery to carve out a place for themselves in public debates over alcohol. Victorian women had moral authority over the welfare of homes and children. WCTU leaders argued that they had a special role to play in what the organization called “Home Protection”—fighting intemperance even outside the domestic space through social and political activism. Further, the deep links between temperance fervor and evangelical Protestantism made WCTU women’s anti-alcohol work acceptable and admirable in the eyes of the churches that were central to their lives.<sup>26</sup> From this starting point, forward-thinking leaders like Frances Willard made the case that American women needed more power through religious leadership opportunities, reforms to the coverture system, and especially suffrage.<sup>27</sup> Later scholars, including Holly Berkley Fletcher, Elaine Frantz Parsons, and

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<sup>25</sup> Bordin, *Women and Temperance*; Bordin, *Frances Willard*; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> On the motives and rhetorical strategies of the WCTU, the definitive study is Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*. See also Bordin, *Frances Willard*; Epstein, *Politics of Domesticity*; Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Rachel Bohlmann argues that the WCTU not only promoted reforms like suffrage that attacked coverture, but that their activism critiquing their male family members’ drinking also challenged the “daily, informal habits of female submission to male authority” that supported the coverture system. See Rachel Bohlmann, “Drunken Husbands, Drunken State: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s Challenge to American Families and Public Communities in Chicago, 1874–1920” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2001), 25–26. On coverture and its impact on American women at this time, see Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be*

Catherine Gilbert Murdock, further analyzed the gendered nature of public debates about alcohol by showing that drinking behavior helped to construct late-nineteenth-century manhood and womanhood.<sup>28</sup>

While these analyses of the WCTU's savvy gender politics and rhetorical innovations have restored the organization to its rightful place as one of the most significant reform groups of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, historians have not sufficiently explored how women's personal contact with alcohol shaped their participation in the temperance movement. A complete accounting of how many WCTU women had alcoholic husbands or sons or encountered public violence related to alcohol is probably impossible to achieve, given the powerful impact of shame and stigma in keeping these stories quiet.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the historical record does reflect some of them. Eliza Thompson's son died in an "inebriate asylum" in Binghamton, New York. Frances Joseph Gaudet lived happily with her husband for a decade until drink "destroyed" their marriage and necessitated a divorce. The stories of these WCTU leaders remind us that alcohol was not merely a metaphor for disorder and sin. It was—and is—a material substance that acted on real bodies and real lives. Historians have too often seen prohibition as, in Joseph Gusfield's words, a "symbolic crusade" standing in for feminism,

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*Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*; Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement*.

<sup>29</sup> Bordin, *Women and Temperance*, 160–61. An exception is Jack Blocker's study of the Crusade, "Give to the Winds Thy Fears".

racism, nativism, or class anxiety.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, this study grounds the WCTU's activism in members' direct, embodied experiences with alcohol's personal and social harms. A more nuanced appreciation of the physical effects of alcohol clarifies the ways in which it did act as a symbol and how that symbol changed over time.

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Despite significant scholarly work on the “problem of womanhood,” fewer scholars have investigated how the WCTU confronted the “problem of civilization” in the way Mary Lathrap defined it. One exception is Ian Tyrrell, whose 1991 book *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* informs this study's examinations of “Colored Work” and “Foreign Work” in the WCTU. Tyrrell explores the complex blend of Anglo-American cultural imperialism and women's temperance activism that animated the World's WCTU (WWCTU).<sup>31</sup> Founded in the early 1880s by American and British female temperance activists, this internationalist arm of the WCTU sent missionaries to deliver the temperance message to dozens of countries across the globe. Tyrrell argues that, with these trips and its international orientation, the WCTU became “a critical instrument for spreading the American dream”—albeit its own brand of it that highlighted temperance, evangelical Christianity, and women's leadership.<sup>32</sup> In forging its “own version of a cultural imperialism,” the WCTU took part in a larger process of Anglo-American economic and

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<sup>30</sup> Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire*, 4.

cultural expansion. However, its members' distinct priorities sometimes brought them into uneasy conflict with more mainstream American society in the late nineteenth century. For example, Tyrrell writes that because drinking was "as much if not more commonly associated with European peoples, the notion of the cultural superiority of whites and the Christian religion could not be assumed."<sup>33</sup> As a result, the WCTU carried out mission work as intensively in the United States and Britain as it did in "non-Christian" lands.

This study shows that many of the dynamics Tyrrell articulates applied to the WCTU's "home missions" as well as its foreign ones. When white, native-born women led the departments of "Foreign Work" and "Colored Work," we can understand their activities as attempts to understand and define target groups' drinking behavior and cultural practices. The leaders of these departments produced pamphlets and instructions that aimed to make immigrant and African American groups legible to their main audience of native-born white women. Readers used this "knowledge" to make plans either to persuade immigrants and African Americans or to support their arguments for restricting their right to immigrate or to vote. These materials reflect the influence of prevailing "knowledge" about immigrant and African American culture, which gave way during the 1880s and 1890s to harsher systems of "scientific racism." However, they also reveal that moments of contact between white native-born women and immigrants and African Americans challenged some of these assumptions. Further, African American women's leadership in the WCTU directly contested many white women's prejudices and expectations.

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<sup>33</sup> Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire*, 5–6.

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While Foundry Church reminded the women of the WCTU where they had come from, the wider setting of the nation's capital hinted at where they hoped to go. By 1881, the WCTU's aspirations had broadened considerably from those at its founding. Via its growing "Department of Organization," the WCTU aimed to establish unions in every state and territory of the still-growing nation, and among populations beyond its initial white and native-born constituency.<sup>34</sup> Organizers and evangelists with links to the Protestant "home missionary" movement fanned out across the country, seeking to reach Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants with temperance and Christianity. The WCTU's charismatic president, Frances Willard, stimulated this expansionist vision. "When we cease to lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes, the period of decadence and downfall will be fully come," Willard warned in her speech to the 1881 convention, drawing on a rich tradition of Protestant rhetoric that described American politics in highly charged terms of regeneration and destruction.<sup>35</sup> "The nation is our parish; the far frontier is not too far for us to reach."<sup>36</sup>

In the course of reaching toward this "frontier," the WCTU came into contact with African Americans and immigrants, many of whom did not share WCTU convictions about the harms of alcohol, but whose support—and votes—would be essential to achieving a dry nation.

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<sup>34</sup> Bordin, *Women and Temperance*, 72.

<sup>35</sup> James H. Moorhead, *World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009); Sacvan Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

<sup>36</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), lxix.



In setting up the “Colored Work” and “Foreign Work” departments, white WCTU leaders enacted a missionary project that envisioned educating, instructing, and persuading these populations to embrace temperance. While their approach was paternalistic, many white leaders really believed in “welcoming the stranger” and in the benefits immigrants and African Americans could bring to the nation, if they were properly instructed.

However, a shift in the years after Reconstruction in Americans’ rhetoric surrounding race, gender, and politics reached the WCTU and can be seen in Lathrap’s comments about immigration and race. As scholars of the suffrage movement have shown, many reformers shifted from describing voting as a right of citizenship to describing it as a privilege of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant “civilization.”<sup>37</sup> White suffragists, including many in the WCTU, frequently expressed resentment that Black and immigrant men, whom they regarded as inferior, enjoyed the vote while educated, native-born white women did not. As the nineteenth century wore on, the rhetoric of many WCTU leaders on Black and immigrant Americans’ “fitness” for citizenship became harsher, moving away from paternalistic declarations of their need for education and uplift and toward calls to prevent them from voting or even arriving to the country in the first place.

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<sup>37</sup> Allison L. Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870–1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5–6; Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Louise Newman, *White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Faye E. Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle Over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Laura E. Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed: Gender, Race, and Voting Rights in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009).

This kind of rhetoric did not go uncontested within the WCTU. Another delegate from Michigan who also sat in the Foundry Church for Mary Lathrap's speech perhaps took issue with some of its sentiments. Her name was Lucy Simpson (later Lucy Thurman), and she would become one of the WCTU's most prominent Black leaders. Like Lathrap, Simpson was based in Jackson, Michigan; the two women probably knew each other. Also like Lathrap, Simpson was a former teacher and a devoted Christian. However, as a Black woman, Simpson had access to a perspective that Lathrap lacked. As a teacher in Maryland immediately after the Civil War, Simpson had seen firsthand the immense needs of formerly enslaved people for education and the means to make a living. She also understood the intense discrimination and violence that Black people in the United States continued to face. Along with other Black churchwomen, Simpson disparaged alcohol as an impediment to the advancement of her race and embraced temperance as a means to uplift. She and other Black leaders within the WCTU challenged the racism of white members and pursued their own priorities, even in the face of intense racial violence that intruded into their work in ways that white WCTU leaders ignored.

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Chapter 1 of this study examines the WCTU's origins, grounding them in the context of evangelical Protestant religion, the popularity of temperance narratives in the mid-nineteenth century, rising American drinking patterns by the 1870s, and women's political vulnerability. It then explores WCTU women's personal experiences with alcohol as a factor in their participation in the movement. These stories fall into four main categories: marriage to alcoholic husbands and the poverty, danger, and heartbreak that could result; struggle to keep erring sons and nephews out of the saloon and the attendant social humiliation; loss of loved ones in the

public disorder that could surround bars and saloons; and violence and harassment experienced in the course of activism against alcohol.

The remaining chapters follow the WCTU's work among immigrants and African Americans. Chapter 2 explores the origins and work of the "Foreign Work" department, including the tension between a missionary, welcoming attitude toward immigrants and a posture of nativism and fear. It finds the WCTU very much entangled with emerging discourses of heredity and scientific racism. Case studies of the WCTU's work among German immigrants, Chinese immigrants, and Spanish-speakers in the Southwest United States round out the chapter.

Chapters 3 and 4 tell the story of the department of "Colored Work" and of the Black women, like Lucy Simpson, who joined the WCTU. Established in 1880, the Department served as a locus for white women's theories and anxieties about Black drinking as well as Black women's leadership. Chapter 3 looks at the origins of the department in white Northern and Southern women's shared concern over Black drinking and Black voting. Growing Southern white influence in the WCTU and white leaders' interest in sectional "reconciliation" drove an increase in racism within the organization, which burst into view in the mid-1890s during a conflict between president Frances Willard and journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells over racist comments Willard had made.

Yet since the Department's founding, Black women in the WCTU had challenged white women's condescending attitudes and fought for their own positions of leadership within the organization. They brought their own priorities for temperance work to the WCTU, rooted in a broader politics of racial uplift and respectability that they hoped would improve the lives of

their communities.<sup>38</sup> Chapter 4 follows these women and the department of “Colored Work” into the twentieth century. Increasingly segregated within the organization, vulnerable to the violence that undergirded Jim Crow society, and facing a larger prohibition movement that became more overtly committed to racist tactics, Black WCTU leaders persevered. They used the WCTU’s organizational framework to advance their goals of protecting Black men and women from alcohol, sexual violence, and incarceration.

Finally, chapter 5 of this study investigates “Foreign Work” (rebranded as the Department of Americanization in 1917) between 1900 and the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. Attention to the WCTU’s work with immigrants during this time period reveals its sincere—if ultimately failed—effort to define “Americanism” as both sober and Christian. Via missionary work with arriving immigrants at the ports of entry and an extensive program of “Americanization” efforts in concert with a larger movement, the WCTU sought to assist immigrants and help them assimilate in ways that would serve its larger aims. Though they seemed to have achieved the cultural consensus they wanted with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment, it quickly became apparent that this consensus did not exist. On the defensive, WCTU leaders increasingly turned towards superpatriotic and sometimes nativist and racist rhetoric, casting Prohibition opponents as enemies to democracy and the rule of law.

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<sup>38</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Opposition to Prohibition helped to assemble a new political coalition that would sweep Franklin D. Roosevelt into the White House in 1932 and endure for decades. Immigrants and African Americans formed a key part of this coalition. The WCTU attempted and ultimately failed to convert these groups into durable prohibition supporters. The intense backlash against Prohibition and its eventual repeal revealed the WCTU's failure to define the terms of "Americanism" as it wished. While by 1920 the WCTU had celebrated the triumph of both of its chief goals—Prohibition and the women's ballot—the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1933 marked the ultimate failure of the WCTU's vision of a transformed society.

## CHAPTER ONE

### RUINED LIVES, WIDOWED HEARTS

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ALCOHOL IN THE WCTU

After finishing her first speech as president of the new women’s temperance group in the small town of Stryker, Ohio, Mrs. Lindsley stepped down from the podium.<sup>1</sup> She and her audience that evening in May 1874 had organized as part of what would become the “Woman’s Crusade.” This grassroots movement against alcohol had swept through the Midwest United States over the previous months. It would lead to the formation of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) later that year.<sup>2</sup> As Lindsley made her way to her seat, her husband, a “confirmed drunkard,” burst into the room and “came staggering toward the stage.” A bottle of liquor protruded from his pocket. The crowd went deathly still. Rushing to intercept him, Lindsley slipped the jug out of his pocket and coaxed him into a chair. Then, “half-frenzied,” she stood and held up the bottle. “Here is the cause of my sorrow!” she cried, “here are the tears—

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<sup>1</sup> Sources do not indicate Mrs. Lindsley’s first name.

<sup>2</sup> The most detailed study on the Crusade is Jack S. Blocker Jr., *“Give to the Winds Thy Fears”*: *The Woman’s Temperance Crusade, 1873–1874* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985). See also Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 15–33; Camilo García-Jimeno, Angel Iglesias, and Pinar Yildirim, “Information Networks and Collective Action: Evidence from the Women’s Temperance Crusade,” *American Economic Review* 112, no. 1 (January 2022): 41–80.

yea, the very life-blood of a drunkard's wife." As one witness wrote to the Methodist newspaper the *Christian Advocate*, Lindsley dramatically called attention to the "poison" that had reduced her husband, a "noble and honored man," to a disgrace. "Can you wonder that I raise my voice against this terrible evil?" Lindsley asked. "Sisters, will you help me?"<sup>3</sup>

In the story of the late-nineteenth-century women's temperance movement, the example of Mrs. Lindsley is both familiar and strange. On one level, her predicament was well known. The evangelical Protestant readers of the *Advocate* were likely already temperance supporters. They would certainly have heard sermons decrying drunkenness and read the many popular temperance narratives that had filled the pages of evangelical newspapers and the catalogs of religious publishers since midcentury. To an *Advocate* reader, Lindsley fit the tropes of many of these stories. Her formerly upstanding husband had taken to drink and destroyed his health, livelihood, and reputation. His appearance at the Crusade meeting revealed the family's shame in dramatic and public fashion. Lindsley bore the ruinous consequences of her husband's conduct. Undoubtedly, knowledge of temperance tropes shaped the way that the witness to Lindsley's speech experienced and recorded the event.<sup>4</sup> The sight of women organizing together to respond to this pattern was new—even shocking—in the early 1870s. It would soon become common and recognizable thanks to the work of a new organization, the WCTU, and its advocacy for the protection of the home against the saloon.

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<sup>3</sup> *Christian Advocate* (New York City), May 7, 1874, quoted in Blocker, "Give to the Winds Thy Fears", 94.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 8.

This brings us to what makes Lindsley's story strange. Historians have recorded very few examples of real-life women who joined the temperance movement and spoke publicly about their personal experiences with drunkenness. As historians like Ruth Bordin have shown, WCTU members saw public speech about family members struggling with addiction as overstepping the bounds of privacy. She explains that they were "unlikely to acknowledge that personal relationships where alcohol was a problem brought them to the WCTU—rarely would they find it appropriate to expose the weakness of a close relative."<sup>5</sup> The stigma against publicly speaking about or writing down such personal testimony would have been high. Mrs. Lindsley did not volunteer her story; it forced its way into the public sphere. We do not know how many WCTU members had drunkards in their families or close circles, and how or if their personal experiences with drunkenness influenced their decision to join the movement. As Bordin noted in her pioneering 1981 study of the WCTU, this question is "crucial" but likely impossible to answer.<sup>6</sup> While a few scholars, notably Jack Blocker, have investigated the personal experiences of female temperance activists, in general, studies of the WCTU have overlooked this critically important dimension of the movement.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Bordin notes that some biographical sketches of WCTU women point out that their interest in temperance was *not* related to personal experience but entirely altruistic. She suggests that this might mean total altruism is the exception but concludes that there is probably no way to know for sure. Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 160–62.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Blocker's study of the Woman's Crusade investigates the real threat of alcohol to the women who participated. See Blocker, *Give to the Winds Thy Fears*, especially chapter 4. His thorough analysis is limited, however, to this relatively short-lived period of direct action and to a few small communities in the Midwest.



Nevertheless, some evidence of alcohol's toll on WCTU members survives in personal accounts, newspaper articles, and court records. This chapter shares several narratives that reveal the intersections among drunkenness, violence, despair, and advocacy in the lives of some WCTU women in the late nineteenth century. They fall into four broad categories. At least a few of these women, perhaps many, suffered from being married to alcoholic men or otherwise recognized that drink could exacerbate women's social and economic disempowerment. Others struggled and despaired over wayward sons they could not keep out of the saloon, and the shame and humiliation such a family story brought on. Some women lost friends or loved ones to alcohol-fueled accidents or violence, making the public disorder excessive drinking could cause feel like a stark and present threat. Finally, other WCTU members personally experienced harassment or violence in reaction to their anti-alcohol activism itself.

Why are these stories important? They do not provide a systematic answer to Bordin's question. They do, however, help us understand the context into which the WCTU was born and through which it evolved. These stories illuminate the ways WCTU members understood the world and defined the problem they sought to solve. The history of the antebellum temperance movement and the vast body of temperance literature it produced is part of that context. So are the systems of oppression to which American women were subject in the late nineteenth century, especially disenfranchisement and the coverture system. The world of evangelical Protestant reform, with its postmillennial belief that an improved and Christianized world would lead to the Second Coming, is likewise essential background. This chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion of these contextual factors as foundation for the understanding of women's personal stories.

More importantly, these stories matter to the history of the temperance movement because they ground it in the physical realities of the drink problem: the way it acted on real bodies and real lives. The work of Elaine Frantz Parsons offers a guide for this analysis. Parsons writes that nineteenth-century Americans saw alcohol as both a symbol and as a physical reality. She draws on testimony from lawsuits against saloons and liquor dealers to show how witnesses made meaning from the addiction, poverty, and chaos alcohol could cause. These “observable phenomena,” she argues, provoked nineteenth-century Americans to ask deeper questions about women’s participation in the public sphere and the role of the environment in shaping individuals’ actions.<sup>8</sup> For example, witnesses to Mrs. Lindsley’s speech must have wondered whether her husband’s public drunkenness indicated a crisis in American masculinity or whether her desperation reflected a need for a redeeming feminine morality in the public sphere.

Scholars of the WCTU have emphasized the features that made the organization and its program accessible to the mostly white, middle-class churchwomen who formed its backbone. In the 1870s and 1880s, advocating for temperance fit within the confines of respectable femininity. Even as forward-thinking leaders like Frances Willard stretched the boundaries of the WCTU’s agenda, fitting a wide variety of activities like prison reform, labor activism, anti-prostitution campaigns, and suffrage into its program, the domestic ideology of “Home Protection” provided cover and encouragement for women who wanted to venture outside of the strictures of the Victorian domestic sphere without enduring the social rejection and charges of “manliness” that other women’s rights activists faced. Many women who joined the WCTU did so not only

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<sup>8</sup> Parsons, *Manhood Lost*, 4, 14.

because they believed in the cause, but because the organization provided an outlet for their energy and talents and a forum to participate in public life.<sup>9</sup>

This analysis does not tell the whole story. Temperance advocacy was not simply a steppingstone on the way to becoming a suffragist. Many members of the WCTU, influenced by a vast amount of temperance literature and by the messages of their evangelical religion, sincerely viewed drinking as a scourge that threatened physical bodies and immortal souls, not to mention the success of American society. Far from being sheltered from and ignorant of alcohol's toll, an unknown number of them observed and experienced its harms directly, even before their activism began. Though their personal testimonies emerged most strongly during the emotional experience of the Woman's Crusade of 1873–74, the stories of leaders like Sophie Grubb, Lide Meriwether, and Ada Kepley make clear that alcohol remained a stark and present threat—both inside and outside temperance women's homes. It affected their relationships with their own families and friends, fellow congregants, and closest neighbors. It was these people whom they first struggled to transform, sometimes at considerable personal cost.

### **Cultural and Religious Roots of the WCTU**

The WCTU's emergence in the 1870s marked a new and significant wave of temperance activism that built upon a strong foundation. In the early nineteenth century, Americans' consumption of alcohol, especially whiskey, increased precipitously. In response, temperance flourished. Initially indicating a moderated approach to drinking that advocated avoiding hard liquor and drunkenness, by midcentury temperance meant complete abstinence from alcohol.

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<sup>9</sup> Bordin, *Women and Temperance*; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

Organizations focusing on alcoholics' personal sobriety, such as the Washingtonian movement, sprang up during the 1840s. Evangelical religion, however, proved the main driver of dry sentiment. Temperance gained particular strength in the Northeast and Midwest among members of the evangelical churches that had spread rapidly during the Second Great Awakening.<sup>10</sup> Christians rejected the polluting influences of alcohol and drugs on their bodies; for them, temperance signified control of their own behavior and appetites. "God has made the human body to be sustained by food and sleep," declared the Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher in one of his popular 1826 "Six Sermons on Intemperance," an early call for prohibition. Anyone who "applies habitually the stimulus of ardent spirits, does violence to the laws of his nature, puts the whole system into disorder, and is intemperate long before the intellect falters, or a muscle is unstrung."<sup>11</sup>

Along with abolition and women's rights, the temperance movement responded to a real and often devastating problem. It also reflected the hopes of many adherents for more holistic and lasting social improvement. For the many reformers who were liberal Protestants, reform work like temperance and abolition grew naturally from the prevalent doctrine of "postmillennialism." This version of Christian eschatology held that Jesus would return to Earth only *after* the millennium—the thousand-year-long era of peace and Christian ethics foretold in

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<sup>10</sup> On the antebellum temperance movement, see William J. Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9–23; William J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Ian Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800–1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on Intemperance* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1828), <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sentimnt/sneslbat.html>.

the Book of Revelation.<sup>12</sup> It was the responsibility of earthly Christians to bring about the millennium, and subsequently the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, by converting people to Christianity and reforming society. The millennium would look like a world of believers that was just, harmonious, and balanced.

As James Moorhead has shown, the belief that humanity was moving toward this glorious future motivated the intense activity of a growing network of Protestant reform organizations and missionary societies in the mid-nineteenth century. The WCTU would join this network in the 1870s. While religious temperance supporters did not believe that a soberer society alone would bring about the hoped-for era of peace, many of them did read growing temperance sentiment as a sign that things were moving in the right direction. Maine's dry law, passed in 1851 and inspiring a dozen other states to pass their own, was a positive sign.<sup>13</sup> The abolition of slavery

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<sup>12</sup> On postmillennialism, see James H. Moorhead, *World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 285–89; Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 5–8, 33–34. See also George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*; Nathan Hatch and John Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*; Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*.

Postmillennialism was far from the only eschatology popular in this period; several premillennialist sects (most famously the Millerites, who became the Seventh Day Adventists) also expanded during the Second Great Awakening. Premillennialists believe that the period of tribulations and the Second Coming will arrive prior to the millennium.

<sup>13</sup> The implementation of the “Maine Law” was largely the work of Neal Dow, a Maine legislator and the two-term mayor of Portland, who became a hero to the midcentury temperance movement. See John Kobler, *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (Boston: Da Capo, 1993), 78–89; Frank L. Byrne, *Prophet of Prohibition: Neal Dow and His Crusade* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin for Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1961).

was another victory, despite its bloody cost. Advancements in technology that promised economic efficiency and human flourishing also provoked optimism.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to guiding the progress of society, the theology of postmillennialism linked the fate of each individual to the prospects for the kingdom of God on Earth. Conversion formed the centerpiece of the evangelical religious experience. In the course of conversion, a sinner struggled against the influence of the devil, eventually accepted Christ, and emerged reborn. This process transformed each convert in a fundamental way, even (as some Methodists believed) to the point of perfection.<sup>15</sup> “At the heart of evangelicalism,” Moorhead writes, “was the believer’s intense struggle to pass from sin to holiness. That stress on conversion and sanctification established a complex symbolic linkage between each person’s destiny and the millennial sense of history.”<sup>16</sup> Transformed individuals would bring about a transformed society. They would do this not only through their own regeneration, but through their work to bring evangelical religion and its values to others.

Despite the cultural prevalence of this optimistic vision of religious and social progress by midcentury, darker and more apocalyptic images also endured and helped shape the worldviews of religious temperance women. The Book of Revelation, which promised the

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<sup>14</sup> Moorhead, *World Without End*, 10–18.

<sup>15</sup> The Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection, also called “entire sanctification,” held that Christians could progress from the initial victory over sin during the conversion experience to a state of perfection or sanctification characterized by personal holiness and complete experience of God’s love. The nineteenth-century holiness movement revived this doctrine and spread it beyond the Methodist church; holiness leaders like Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874) held that Christians could be made completely free from sin through an experience of entire sanctification. See David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Moorhead, *World Without End*, 12–15.

millennium, also warned of accompanying violence and upheaval. Many Christians saw this prediction borne out in the disruption of the Civil War. In addition, as Moorhead argues, some evangelical Christians experienced their own conversions as a kind of trauma, a “miniature apocalypse” that entailed a close brush with damnation before a choice to be born again.<sup>17</sup> Most of the women who would form and join the WCTU were not theologians, but they integrated these apocalyptic images and beliefs about modernity and spirituality into their worldviews.<sup>18</sup> The majority of WCTU members were both literate and devoutly religious. They would have heard these messages from the ministers at their churches, read about them in religious publications, and discussed them with their neighbors. In addition, the archetypal story of struggle against evil, followed by either regeneration or doom, materialized far beyond the pulpit on Sundays. It appeared over and over again in the popular genre of temperance fiction, another strong influence in shaping eventual WCTU members’ worldviews.

### **Temperance Narratives in the Mid-Nineteenth Century**

In Maria L. Buckley’s 1852 temperance novel *Edith Moreton*, characters Charles Sinclair and Thomas Harvey are intelligent and accomplished law school classmates who “together rose to honor and distinction.” They seem to have bright futures ahead of them, but dangers lurk. Harvey starts a promising relationship with a young woman named Edith Moreton and inherits a large sum of money, but he lacks the judgment and restraint to handle it wisely. He stumbles into a life of dissipation that eventually drives Edith to despair and death. Sinclair, by contrast, resists

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<sup>17</sup> Moorhead, *World Without End*, 14–15.

<sup>18</sup> Moorhead, *World Without End*, 17–18. See also Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*.

temptation. One evening, his friends pressure him to enter “a well-known fashionable, and gorgeously fitted-up underground saloon.” Hardly the dirty dive depicted in temperance propaganda, it seems to fit his status and social circle. Sinclair declines. He remains on the straight and narrow, cherishing a happy engagement and enjoying a successful career. The two men share a similar start in life and similar abilities, but Sinclair musters the self-control to resist the first steps along the fatal path of intemperance. Harvey does not. Sinclair’s wife reaps the benefits of a temperate husband, while Harvey’s dissipation destroys his “angelic” lover Edith as well as himself.<sup>19</sup>

The genre of temperance fiction served as one field for Americans to define and debate the problem of drunkenness in the mid-nineteenth century. As multiple scholars have shown, temperance themes pervaded American popular and literary culture at this time.<sup>20</sup> These stories structured the worldview of the women who would found and join the WCTU after 1873. A consideration of the relationship between temperance fiction and women’s personal experiences with alcohol is important because the boundaries between the two were porous. As Elaine Frantz Parsons argues, nineteenth-century Americans drew on a common set of images and tropes to

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<sup>19</sup> Maria L. Buckley, *Edith Moreton, or, Temperance versus Intemperance* (Philadelphia: Published for the Author, 1852), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Works on temperance and drunkenness in American literature include Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); John Frick, *Theatre, Culture, and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal, eds., *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Nicholas O. Warner, *Spirits of America: Intoxication in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997). Works that explore temperance narratives and rhetoric with a particular focus on gender include Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); Carol Mattingly, ed., *Water Drops from Women Writers: A Temperance Reader* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001); Parsons, *Manhood Lost*.



discuss temperance and alcohol use. Scrutinizing testimony in lawsuits against saloons, Parsons finds that people “grappled to shape what they ‘knew’ about how a particular drunkard fell, or how drunkards generally fell, into a cogent and familiarizing framework.”<sup>21</sup>

That framework went something like this: a popular, promising young man from a respectable family seems to have a successful and happy life ahead of him. One day a saloon tempts him to enter. He enjoys a fateful first drink—unaware or dismissive of the potential consequences. In these stories, the drunkard’s first drink is never entirely his fault. Instead, ignorance or a weak will meets malign outside influences and leads to destruction. The man may want to be popular with new friends or to experience the kind of illicit thrill that his staid upbringing has denied him. In short order, the man becomes a lush. His drinking becomes visible to his community and threatens his reputation and his family’s security. His wife or daughter begs him to take the temperance pledge and change his ways. He repents and vows to do better, but quickly breaks his promises.

Before long, the drunkard arrives at complete degradation; contemporary alcohol recovery parlance calls this point “hitting rock bottom.” His drinking destroys his relationships, economic productivity, reputation, and health. The drunkard abandons or abuses his family. Because of him, they suffer poverty, deprivation, violence, and even death. Eventually, horror may overcome the drunkard as he realizes the consequences of his actions. The realization might come too late to save his life or those of his loved ones. On the other hand, he may get one more chance to take the temperance pledge and redeem himself—humbled and committed to helping

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<sup>21</sup> Parsons, *Manhood Lost*, 8.

others avoid his mistakes.<sup>22</sup> The drunkard's final confrontation with his appetites, leading either to his destruction or his redemption, mirrors the dramatic experience of conversion that lay at the heart of evangelical Christianity.

The American reading public devoured temperance narratives in the mid-nineteenth century. Magazines, newspapers, and church presses published hundreds of stories and novels with titles like *The Drunkard's Daughter* and *The Inebriate's Hut*. Plays like William Henry Smith's *The Drunkard* (1844) and Timothy Shay Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room and What I Saw There* (1858) sold out theaters. Authors well known to twenty-first-century readers, like Walt Whitman and Louisa May Alcott, published temperance novels or included temperance themes in their work.<sup>23</sup> Abolitionist narratives, most famously Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), associated intemperance with the evils of slavery and borrowed the familiar tropes of temperance stories to dramatize the latter's horrors.<sup>24</sup> In the vast majority of these stories, the drunkard is a white, middle-class man from a good family with bright career prospects. Readers and audience members might recognize a husband, son, or brother in him, making his fate appear even more chilling.

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<sup>22</sup> Scholars broadly agree on these main features of the drunkard's arc. Ryan C. Cordell, "'Enslaving You, Body and Soul': The Uses of Temperance in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and 'Anti-Tom' Fiction," *Studies in American Fiction* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 5–7; Parsons, *Manhood Lost*, 10–13; Reynolds and Rosenthal, *Serpent in the Cup*, 3–4.

<sup>23</sup> Whitman's early temperance novel *Franklin Evans; or, The Inebriate* was published 1842; although Whitman later distanced himself from it, it was very popular when it debuted. See Stephanie Blalock and Nicole Gray, "Introduction to *Franklin Evans* and 'Fortunes of a Country-Boy,'" The Walt Whitman Archive, 2015, [https://whitmanarchive.org/published/fiction/franklinevans\\_introduction.html](https://whitmanarchive.org/published/fiction/franklinevans_introduction.html). On temperance in Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), see Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, 146–47.

<sup>24</sup> Cordell, "'Enslaving You, Body and Soul.'"

Female readers, on the other hand, might see themselves in the stories of Edith Moreton and other drunkards' victims. As Carol Mattingly has shown, much temperance fiction written by women in the decades before the WCTU's founding uses the drunkard figure to dramatize women's vulnerability under coverture.<sup>25</sup> Authors published temperance novels during a time of rising criticism of the legal doctrine that rendered married women "civilly dead"; gave husbands control over wives' assets, wages, and property; limited divorce; and permitted marital rape. Readers would have found temperance fiction printed alongside accounts of states' debates over Married Women's Property Acts expanding women's rights. Early women's rights activists questioned the idea that coverture benefited women by offering protection in exchange for independence.<sup>26</sup> While most female temperance authors and readers would not have gone so far as to agree with suffragists like Lucy Stone, who declared flatly that "marriage is to a woman a state of slavery," they used temperance fiction to dramatize the abuses that could occur when a man did not hold up his end of the marriage contract.<sup>27</sup>

Temperance novels by women often begin with a wedding rather than ending with one. Many stories include scenes of female characters discussing whether a particular suitor will

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<sup>25</sup> Mattingly notes that most nineteenth-century temperance fiction written by women was published in the 1840s and 1850s, along with women's fiction in general; she speculates that the decline after the Civil War may be attributable to women having more opportunities for education and work, and therefore more outlets for their talents and energy. Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, 140.

<sup>26</sup> On coverture and the history of marriage, see Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Early women's rights activists linked the legal regimes of enslavement and coverture, both of which enshrined hierarchical relationships of dependence and economic exploitation and entailed a loss of liberty and bodily autonomy. See Cott, *Public Vows*, 56-67.

<sup>27</sup> Stone quoted in Cott, *Public Vows*, 64.

make a good husband. The characters are very aware that social and economic pressure to marry circumscribes their decisions. They also know that their husbands' choices will dictate the course of their lives. Much temperance fiction finds pathos in the fact that women cannot escape these circumstances, but some novels by women depict them acting to protect themselves.<sup>28</sup> In *The Price of a Glass of Brandy* (1841), protagonist Sidney Percey marries her suitor Albert despite his drinking. She believes that he will change his ways. When he doesn't, she finally decides to take her children and move away to escape the marriage. As Mattingly shows, other heroines successfully obtain divorces. Often, their neighbors support them. Though the respectable communities to which these heroines belong might deplore divorce in theory, the harm these drunkards do to their wives and children outweighs the social stigma of separation.<sup>29</sup>

In prolific temperance author Mary Dwinell Chellis's 1868 book *The Temperance Doctor*, a wealthy woman marries a drunkard who squanders her inheritance. Poverty forces her to work to support her children. Her husband attempts to claim her wages, as is his legal right under coverture. The woman resists. "I have earned what money I have, and I will keep it for myself and my children," she tells him. "You can drink up your own earnings, but you shall never again drink mine."<sup>30</sup> This wife cannot escape the trap nineteenth-century America has set for its women. Her husband neglects his duty to support and protect her. Society makes it

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<sup>28</sup> Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, 127–31.

<sup>29</sup> Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, 131.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Dwinell Chellis, *The Temperance Doctor* (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1868), 93, quoted in Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, 138.

difficult for her to support herself. Even when she succeeds in making her own money, her husband's power over her hobbles her independence.

Over the next decades, the women of the WCTU would work to move these critiques from the realm of fiction into the realm of politics. They succeeded, particularly after charismatic reformer Frances Willard took over the WCTU's presidency in 1879. As historians of the WCTU have shown, Willard described her project of women's political, social, and economic advancement in terms of "Home Protection"—imagery compatible with the nineteenth-century ideal of female domesticity, even as it challenged many of its foundations.<sup>31</sup> The slogan "Home Protection," and the powerful imagery of male neglect, liquor industry greed, and maternal, womanly strength and care that the WCTU used to advance it, was so successful that it has eclipsed the messier underlying reality of WCTU women's personal experiences with alcohol.

### **The Woman's Crusade and the Birth of the WCTU**

Although the previous wave of temperance agitation had receded in the tumult of the Civil War, several changes in the nation's relationship with alcohol became visible in the postwar period and fueled a new crest. In the 1860s and 1870s, consumption of both liquor and beer grew rapidly. Beer consumption rose due to increased immigration from countries like Germany and former Union soldiers' acquisition of a lager habit during their war service.<sup>32</sup> More liquor dealers went into the business, and alcohol became easier to obtain and more publicly

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<sup>31</sup> On the "home protection" slogan and ideology, see Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 57–58; Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 100; Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 47, 78–79.

<sup>32</sup> Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*, 23–24.

visible. More drinking led to more scrutiny of alcohol producers, and the public did not always like what it saw. During the Lincoln presidency, distillers had organized into a “Whiskey Ring” that bribed US Treasury officials to evade steep taxes on spirits. Uncovered in 1875, the conspiracy discredited distillers and contributed to the resurgent temperance movement.<sup>33</sup>

Americans experienced the consequences of rising drinking unevenly. Larger cities could confine drinking establishments to vice districts, rendering them both spatially and psychically distant from temperance-minded citizens. In smaller and more rural towns, however, abstainers could not keep physical distance between themselves and proliferating saloons.<sup>34</sup> Their proximity meant that it was easier for drinking establishments to become part of daily life, with disastrous consequences for some families. Their central locations also ensured that the public disorder and violence saloons sometimes engendered were more likely to touch the lives even of those townspeople who chose to avoid them. Though one Crusader later claimed that she “knew so little about this drinking business that [she] couldn’t have pointed out a saloon in the whole town,” most participants did not have the luxury of being so naïve.<sup>35</sup>

The WCTU emerged from a protest movement called the Woman’s Crusade, the occasion of Mrs. Lindsley’s Ohio meeting and hundreds of others across the country. During several breathless months beginning the winter of 1873, women took to the streets in direct

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<sup>33</sup> Taxes were lower on brewers than on distillers. Brewers calculated that it was better to pay, avoiding the same social disapprobation accorded to distillers and ensuring the revenue from the beer tax was indispensable to government coffers. Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*, 23–24.

<sup>34</sup> Blocker, “*Give to the Winds Thy Fears*”, 4, 97–101.

<sup>35</sup> Frances Willard, “Introduction,” in Annie Wittenmyer, *History of the Woman’s Temperance Crusade* (Philadelphia: The Christian Woman, 1878), 14–15.

actions against saloons and liquor sellers in their mostly small, rural towns of about two thousand people.<sup>36</sup> Most of them were native-born white women who belonged to evangelical Protestant denominations: Methodists, Congregationalists, Quakers, Universalists, Baptists, and a few Episcopalians. Many, though not all, Crusaders came from socially prominent families.<sup>37</sup> They would have read temperance fiction and heard temperance messages in church. They also would have seen and experienced the evidence of intemperance around them.

In a typical Crusade, women marched solemnly through the streets of their town, perhaps singing a hymn, until they arrived at the doors of a saloon or drugstore that sold liquor. They would ask for admittance. If the owner obliged, the Crusaders would persuade, argue with, and shame him until he agreed to pour all his spirits down the nearest drain—or until he forced them to leave and move on to the next establishment. Sometimes this was violent. Crusaders in Chicago visited City Hall to present a temperance petition in March of 1874 and had to leave under police guard. A mob of “5,000 jeering men” showered “a storm of profanity, a rain of tobacco-juice, and a staccato of pokes, grabs, and punches” upon them.<sup>38</sup> During a Crusade, ministers would write public letters of support to the local newspaper and ring the bells of their churches during the march. Sympathetic businessmen would close up shop.<sup>39</sup> The Crusaders succeeded in shutting down scores of drinking establishments. Though many of them later reopened, the movement’s success was exciting enough that several of its participants met in

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<sup>36</sup> Blocker, “*Give to the Winds Thy Fears*”, 99–101.

<sup>37</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Blocker, “*Give to the Winds Thy Fears*”, 37.

<sup>39</sup> Blocker, “*Give to the Winds Thy Fears*”, 45.

Chautauqua, New York, in the summer of 1874 and founded the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>40</sup>

The town of Hillsboro, Ohio, was one Crusade community. Located fifty miles east of Cincinnati, Hillsboro had grown rapidly during the nineteenth century. It transformed from a small county seat at its founding in 1807 to a stop on two different railroad lines by midcentury. By the 1870s, the town was a bustling center of agricultural trade and manufacturing. Its factories produced flour, lumber, and carriages, and it boasted two profitable distilleries.<sup>41</sup> Most of its three thousand residents attended one of its eight churches and read the news from Ohio and the rest of the country in one of Hillsboro's three newspapers.<sup>42</sup> During the winter of 1873, one of the topics reported by those newspapers was a heated debate in the Ohio legislature about whether to loosen liquor licensing laws.<sup>43</sup>

Against this backdrop, the experiences of respected, fifty-seven-year-old local matron Eliza Jane Thompson provided the spark that lit the flame of the first successful women's Crusade—though she would not have admitted as such. They also give us a window into the importance of private family experiences with alcoholism in starting the Crusade. One evening in December 1873, temperance lecturer Diocletian Lewis delivered a talk at Hillsboro's music hall. Two of Thompson's children were in the audience. Lewis exhorted his listeners to do what his

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<sup>40</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> "Hillsboro, Ohio," Ohio History Central, accessed January 20, 2022, [https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Hillsboro,\\_Ohio\\_](https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Hillsboro,_Ohio_)

<sup>43</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 28–29



own mother had done when his father had taken up drink forty years earlier: gather a group of women, go down to the local saloon, and petition the owner to close his business. If she had succeeded then, Lewis argued, why couldn't the women of Hillsboro succeed now? Inspired by the lecture and the energy of the audience, the Thompson children returned home and excitedly told their mother the news: the group planned to give it a try the very next day.<sup>44</sup> They wanted her to lead it.

Thompson balked. She did not feel comfortable speaking in public or taking part in political action. She was a conservative churchwoman during a time when women, though they were the backbone of many congregations, had few visible leadership or public speaking roles. The organizers cajoled her, however, and she finally decided it was the right thing to do. Overcoming her reticence, Thompson led a band of women, praying and singing hymns, through the streets and into Hillsboro saloons and drugstores. The movement swept across communities like Hillsboro. It united Protestant women across denominations and left Thompson with a new vocation. "Mother Thompson" joined the new WCTU just after its founding and remained an active and respected member until her death in 1905.<sup>45</sup>

Why did Eliza Thompson, against her own instincts and inclination, decide to become an activist? She was from a prominent family in the state; her father had been governor of Ohio and her husband was a respected judge. In her own recollection of the Crusade, Thompson described a religious motivation; troubled by doubt about whether she should participate, she prayed and

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<sup>44</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 16–17. For more on Thompson and a detailed study of the Crusades, see Blocker, "Give to the Winds Thy Fears", 114–16. The Thompson story is also retold in Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America: A History* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 57–69.

<sup>45</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 18–19.

finally found inspiration in one of the psalms.<sup>46</sup> Historians like Ruth Bordin have suggested that the Crusade was successful because “it tapped the growing, if frequently unconscious, need of women everywhere to assert themselves.”<sup>47</sup> According to Bordin, women like Thompson, concerned with questions of temperance and public morality like those being considered by Ohio legislators, were frustrated at their lack of voice in the debate. The Crusade acted as a “liberating force” for women who wanted to exercise power but still remain within the bounds of acceptable discourse and behavior for middle-class white churchwomen. This assessment echoes Frances Willard’s view of one important effect of the Crusade: that it, for the first time, “brought women face to face with the world’s misery and sin.”<sup>48</sup>

This assessment was certainly true for some participants, maybe even for Thompson. It does not tell the whole story, however. The Thompson family’s social status had not insulated them from the effects of alcoholism. Five years earlier, Eliza’s son Allen had died at the age of thirty in the New York State Inebriate Asylum in Binghamton. A drinking habit derailed his career as a promising young minister. Quickly, his drinking grew so uncontrolled that he abandoned the pastorate. Allen became a teacher; the county Teachers’ Association even elected him its president. That triumph did not last long. He turned up on the morning of his first meeting as president in “shameful dereliction.” Despite the leadership committee’s efforts to “deal gently” with him, Allen declined to, or couldn’t, sober up. By the evening, he was still

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<sup>46</sup> Wittenmyer, *History of the Woman’s Temperance Crusade*, 38. The psalm in question was 146: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. ... Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.”

<sup>47</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 32; Willard, “Introduction,” 16.

drunk. He refused, “with oaths and imprecations,” to resign as president. The association expelled him.<sup>49</sup>

At one point Allen recovered enough to take up temperance work, citing his own case as an example of its importance. His recovery was brief. He ultimately ended up in the asylum in Binghamton, one of the first institutions devoted to treating drinking as a disease. Allen died from complications of a lung abscess (most frequently caused by alcoholism) and pneumonia, leaving behind a wife and two young children.<sup>50</sup> Newspaper accounts of his fate took care to note that, according to the “best evidence,” once Allen arrived at the asylum he had remained sober until his death. It was important to his legacy and to public assessment of his character to make it clear that he had surrendered to God and been “reclaimed” and redeemed from his temptation before dying.<sup>51</sup> However, the details of his story were well known locally. They served as a warning to the other respectable, temperate families of the area: no matter how promising your sons might be, as long as they can get liquor, they will not be safe. Allen may have achieved real sobriety and won his own struggle against the “demon drink” before losing his life. The conclusive pathos of a temperance novel, however, was not available to the family he left behind.

Yet in the memoirs Thompson and her daughters later wrote about the Crusade and their family history, the account of Allen’s illness and death is deliberately obscure. Rather than mention drinking at all, they describe his struggle as “a sad and silent elapse of his work.” The

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Blocker, “*Give to the Winds Thy Fears*”, 115–16.

<sup>50</sup> “The Late Allen T. Thompson,” *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, OH), July 30, 1868, 2; “State News,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), July 30, 1868, 2.

<sup>51</sup> “The Late Allen T. Thompson.”

description of his death leaves out any mention of the asylum and gives the impression that he caught a cold after giving a particularly demanding sermon and then died from pneumonia.<sup>52</sup> Even thirty years on, with temperance having become Eliza Thompson's life's work, certainly powerfully motivated by her son's death, the stigma attached to it and the desire not to air one's family's dirty laundry was too powerful to overcome.

At the time of the Crusades, however, some participants proved willing to speak more openly about their suffering. They frequently used rhetoric that echoed the arc of the drunkard narrative and spoke in general but searing terms about the problems they sought to combat. Four Crusaders from the small town of Washington Court House, Ohio, for example, composed an appeal to the town's saloonkeepers and liquor dealers to stop their work. "Knowing, as we do," it began, "the fearful effects of intoxicating drinks, we, the women of Washington, after earnest prayer and deliberation, have decided to appeal to you to desist from this ruinous traffic, that our husbands, brothers, and especially our sons, be no longer exposed to this terrible temptation ... in the name of desolate homes, blasted hopes, ruined lives, widowed hearts."<sup>53</sup> The later rhetoric of the WCTU would place the image of the drunken husband at the center of the family destroyed by liquor, but the women of Washington Court House pleaded "especially" for their male children.

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<sup>52</sup> Eliza Jane Trimble Thompson et. al., *Hillsboro Crusade Sketches and Family Records* (Cincinnati, OH: Cranston & Curts, 1896), 44–45.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Blocker, "Give to the Winds Thy Fears", 93.

This was not purely symbolic language. One of the appeal's authors, Bethiah Ogle, had a son who had been arrested for drunkenness several times over the previous few years.<sup>54</sup> As Jack Blocker shows through careful analysis of family relationships among the people of Washington Court House, many other Crusaders also brought their own sorrow to the movement. Local police had arrested the nephews of Crusaders Eliza Melvin Worley and Ruth Bereman Dahl, charging the young men with public drunkenness and disorderly conduct. Crusader Susan Evans Gardner had two brothers, William and Harvey, who were both named "habitual drunkards" in lawsuits against local liquor dealers. Harvey's wife, Mary, had filed one of the suits. The era's civil damage laws empowered her to seek redress from the liquor dealers who enabled her husband's drinking.<sup>55</sup> The fairly spontaneous, highly emotional nature of the Crusades may have created the conditions for women like Mrs. Lindsley and the petition signers of Washington Court House to share experiences they would have otherwise kept quiet, and to undertake an attempt at reform where before they might have resigned themselves to their burdens.

The high energy and emotion of the Crusade were short-lived. Its mission, however, lived on in the WCTU. Several Crusade leaders assembled in Chautauqua, New York, in the summer of 1874 to found the new organization. At its first official convention that November, delegates established the foundations of an organization that would grow briskly over the next two decades. It expanded far beyond the small Crusade towns of the East and Midwest to encompass the states and territories of the growing nation and eventually cross its borders. By deciding at

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<sup>54</sup> Blocker, *"Give to the Winds Thy Fears"*, 117.

<sup>55</sup> Blocker, *"Give to the Winds Thy Fears"*, 117–18.

that first meeting to limit membership and voting power to women, the WCTU institutionalized the female space that the Crusade had created.<sup>56</sup> They established a formal structure consisting of state delegations, elected officers, and yearly conventions conducted under Robert's Rules of Order. This arrangement created the conditions for longevity and expansion, but also meant that participation would rarely be as dramatic as it had been during the Crusade. House visits, convention meetings, petition drives, and print correspondence largely replaced direct confrontation of liquor dealers.

Though the WCTU always remained concerned with the moral transformation of individuals, as it expanded, it increasingly focused on systematic and political solutions to the problems it identified—especially prohibition and women's suffrage. Coupled with the powerful stigma surrounding alcohol abuse in respectable families, this outward focus narrowed the opportunity for temperance women to share their own painful stories. Accordingly, historians have not looked for them, and literature on the organization has minimized the importance of WCTU women's contact with alcohol. Although these stories did not always conform to the established tropes of temperance stories, they remind us that personal experience remained essential to many members of the WCTU even as the organization expanded.

### **Alcohol and Family in the WCTU**

On a chilly November evening in Boston in 1891, Mary Livermore mounted the speakers' platform at the Baptist Tremont Temple to address the hundreds of women—and a few men—gathered for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's eighteenth annual convention.

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<sup>56</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 36–37.

Since 1874, the WCTU had dedicated its efforts to achieving temperance and prohibition. In the process, it had endorsed suffrage and provided a venue for women to train as public speakers and organizers. Its members demanded more control over the workings of society and the course of their own lives. Livermore had founded the Massachusetts chapter; at the time, she served as its president. She praised the “phenomenal” progress the WCTU had made, which would have seemed “impossible” just twenty-five years earlier. She also described the WCTU’s mission and evolution in unusually blunt terms for an organization often given to euphemism. “I have heard asked in a pulpit: ‘If a woman has a drunken husband, what shall she do?’” she recounted, “and the answer was, ‘Accept her burden, and resign herself to it.’ It has been burned into us that ‘women must weep.’ But all at once we awoke and ceased our weeping, and went to the Lord and went to work.”<sup>57</sup> Livermore’s characterization communicated the WCTU’s assertion of women’s power.

Livermore herself did not awake “all at once.” Almost seventy years old at the time of this speech, she had spent her life in the public sphere advocating for abolition, temperance, and suffrage. She campaigned for Abraham Lincoln in 1860, nursed Union soldiers on Civil War battlefields, coordinated veterans’ relief through the US Sanitary Commission, founded suffrage associations, edited feminist journals, and traversed the country as a sought-after lecturer, writing prolifically all the while.<sup>58</sup> Like many of the WCTU’s founding leaders, she believed that women

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<sup>57</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting* (1891), 33.

<sup>58</sup> Livermore biographical details are from Wendy Hamand Venet, *A Strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary A. Livermore* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Charles A. Howe, “Mary and Daniel Livermore,” *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography*, February 26, 2001, <https://uudb.org/articles/livermorefamily.html>.

must resist cultural and religious pressures to accept suffering and powerlessness, especially at the hands of men. Also like them, she was a Northern white woman with activist experience whose deep engagement with religion (in her case, Unitarianism) guided her life and public work.

We can be fairly sure that Livermore did not experience the “burden” of a drunken husband. Her marriage lasted half a century and seems to have been happy and stable. Her husband, a Unitarian minister, supported her long public career. Other prominent leaders, most notably Frances Willard, avoided the pitfalls of a drunken husband (or one who would limit their reform careers) by refusing marriage altogether. Remaining single or having a sober husband offered protection from the greatest vulnerability the WCTU identified. However, it did not mean that WCTU members avoided direct experience of the dangers of drink. Even Willard did not: her two nephews, Frank and Robert, both struggled with alcohol.<sup>59</sup> Like Eliza Thompson and her family, the Willards took care to keep Frank and Robert’s struggles confidential.

We do, however, know of a few other prominent, long-term WCTU leaders who struggled with alcoholism in their families and whose cases made their way into the historical record. One of them was Lide Parker Meriwether, a white Southern woman who was a major force in establishing the WCTU in Tennessee in the early 1880s. Like Livermore, Meriwether was well educated and had a background in reform work. Smart and independent, she left home in the 1840s at age seventeen to work as a schoolteacher in Memphis. She married Niles Meriwether in 1855, and the couple had three daughters. While Meriwether’s children were

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<sup>59</sup> Bordin, *Frances Willard*, 124–26.



young, she became involved in reform work for prostitutes and “fallen women” who bore children out of wedlock. Such women often suffered social disgrace while their male sexual partners escaped unscathed. Meriwether published short essays and stories about the unfairness of this sexual double standard for women. She helped found a “rescue home” for such women in the early 1880s—an unpopular cause even among other reform-minded women in Memphis.<sup>60</sup>

This background alone would probably have inclined Meriwether toward the WCTU. The sexual double standard and the pursuit of “social purity” became major concerns for the group under Frances Willard’s leadership.<sup>61</sup> But the terrifying experience Meriwether and her youngest daughter Virginia underwent in 1882 almost certainly spurred her on. In May of that year, twenty-one-year-old Virginia eloped with a man named Lowe Davis whom she had met on a train. Again, as warned by temperance novels, choosing a marriage partner without careful consideration was risky for a woman. Virginia’s choice quickly proved disastrous. Davis was apparently addicted to opium and gambling. Within weeks, Virginia had left him, moved back in with her parents, and become quite ill. Meriwether took her daughter to a resort in east Tennessee to recover. Though he had promised to stay away, Davis followed them there. His attempts to persuade his wife to come back to him quickly turned threatening, and he finally showed up at their room with a gun and threatened Meriwether’s life. She somehow talked him down and got him to give her the pistol. He left—only to return the following day with a

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<sup>60</sup> Margaret Caffrey, “‘A Life of Larger Thought and Activity’: Lide Meriwether, from Local to Statewide to National Reformer,” in *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol. 2, ed. Beverly Greene Bond and Sarah Wilkerson Freeman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 215–20.

<sup>61</sup> On the WCTU and the “social purity” movement, see Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 110–11; Tyrrell, *Woman’s World/Woman’s Empire*, 191–220.

different gun. When Virginia left the hotel room, he threatened to kill her unless she agreed to come with him. Instead, Virginia pulled out the gun her mother had taken from Davis the day before and shot Davis in the stomach. He died the next day, supposedly taking the blame for his death and asserting that his wife had only acted in self-defense.<sup>62</sup>

Meriwether did not write in detail about the impact this experience had on her life. The authorities seem to have accepted that Virginia had acted in self-defense and did not charge her with the killing. Virginia left Tennessee not long afterward for New York City, where she studied medicine and became one of the first female doctors in the United States. Although she did not escape the trauma of having an alcoholic or drug-addicted husband, she had more options available to her than the drunkards' wives of 1860s temperance novels. She benefited from family support and even went on to have a groundbreaking career.

Nevertheless, this incident was not without social consequences for the family. Meriwether's biographers have speculated that the shooting caused a scandal. Both Meriwether and her sister-in-law, the suffragist Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, were well known. The extended visit Meriwether made to a friend in Arkansas the next year may have been an attempt to get away from the gossip and restore some inner calm.<sup>63</sup> In any case, she attended her first WCTU meeting while in Arkansas and gave her first public speech there. For middle-class and wealthy women, especially white women in the South, speaking in public was a significant risk—almost as frowned upon as advocating for prostitutes. Meriwether had experienced firsthand, however,

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<sup>62</sup> “Killed by His Bride, the Terrible Tragedy at Rhea Springs, the Full Particulars of the Most Remarkable Killing of the Age,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, September 14, 1882; Caffrey, “A Life of Larger Thought and Activity,” 220–21.

<sup>63</sup> Caffrey, “A Life of Larger Thought and Activity,” 221.

the kind of violence and terror the WCTU described when it decried the toll of alcohol and drugs on families and the lack of power women had to respond. She had witnessed the impact that an ill-advised decision to marry could have on a woman's life and how few pathways there were out of it. It is hard to believe that she did not carry that experience with her in her subsequent leadership of the WCTU.

While Virginia Meriwether experienced the terrifying consequences of an imprudent marriage, other WCTU women learned how difficult it could be for a woman to live without the stability and protection that marriage could afford. One of them was Sarepta M. I. Henry, a WCTU leader in Rockford, Illinois. Henry, the daughter of a Methodist clergyman, had joined the Crusade in Rockford in 1873. She attended Rock River Seminary in Mount Morris, Illinois, where she developed her talent for writing and began publishing poems and stories in religious magazines. She went on to serve as an evangelist and as superintendent of the WCTU's Evangelical Department in 1888. Henry's husband had returned disabled from the Civil War and died in 1871, leaving her with three children to support.<sup>64</sup> To make ends meet, Henry took a job teaching at the same school where her late husband had worked. She earned twenty dollars a month—a third of his salary. "The difference being," she recalled, "that I was a woman, and he a man. As my necessities required that I should be a housekeeper as well as a breadwinner, I did more than double the labor for one-third the pay." Struck by this injustice, Henry also realized

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<sup>64</sup> Biographical information on Henry is from Frances E. Willard, *Woman and Temperance: Or, the Work and Workers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (Hartford, CT: James Betts & Co., 1883) 186–92; "Mrs. Sarepta M. I. Henry," in *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life*, ed. Frances E. Willard and Mary Livermore (Buffalo, NY: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 373; Mary Henry Rossiter, *My Mother's Life: A Memoir of Mrs. S. M. I. Henry* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900).

that, with three children to feed, she had no choice but to accept it.<sup>65</sup> Eventually, she began to make enough income from writing—mostly Christian books for young children—to support her family.<sup>66</sup>

Henry also joined the WCTU and remained a lifelong member. She described the incident that first made her worry about the dangers of the saloon in a memoir published by her daughter. Henry had sent her youngest son, Arthur, out on an errand to a neighbor in Rockford. On her way to another chore, she noticed him exiting a downtown building next to a church. He waved goodbye to another child his age who was standing in the doorway. When Henry asked him what he had been doing, Arthur explained that the other boy had invited him into the building, his father's store, with the promise that he would "treat" him with sweets. Henry made her son throw away the "colored dirty lumps" of candy. Noticing that the building did not seem to be a candy store, she felt "instinctively" that her duty to protect her children required her to investigate. Arthur objected, telling her he didn't think it was safe: "It is not a nice place. I don't think there is anything in it for ladies."<sup>67</sup>

Henry was determined, and, holding her son's hand, she stepped through the doorway. To the temperance reader, the scene that met Henry's naïve eyes was familiar: "an American saloon in full blast." The room smelled foul; drunk men lounged around the space, napping, drinking, or smoking. One of the bartenders seemed to be a teenage boy. There was a long pause as Henry felt a "tremor" pass through her whole body and the saloon's inhabitants registered her presence.

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<sup>65</sup> Rossiter, *My Mother's Life*, 116–17.

<sup>66</sup> Rossiter, *My Mother's Life*, 126–28.

<sup>67</sup> Rossiter, *My Mother's Life*, 130–31.

Finally, the owner started to walk toward her. “He evidently thought I was some drunkard’s mother or wife, although I had not at that time experience enough to understand this,” Henry wrote. She backed away, terrified, and dragged her son out of the saloon and straight home. The incident proved indelible. Henry’s daughter described it as “the foundation of her whole public life.”<sup>68</sup> “Although I had never seen the inside of any place of vice before,” Henry wrote, “I recognized the creature that was hidden behind that door and screen,—recognized it as an enemy of my own home, of my peace, and of the purity of my children.”<sup>69</sup>

As Henry wrote it, this scene contains many of the tropes of temperance fiction and WCTU rhetoric. A peer who seems friendly tempts Arthur into the saloon. Although unfamiliar with the environment, he correctly perceives it as a place only for men. Henry herself is not merely curious about the strange building but feels an immediate motherly instinct that it might be dangerous for her child. Her strong feelings of revulsion and fear confirm this intuition. Later, when Henry has learned more about the usual circumstances of women’s entry into such places, she understands that the saloon patrons expected her to look for her husband or son or plead with the owner to stop serving him drinks. Before even that knowledge comes intuitive awareness that the saloon is the den of a “creature” intent on destroying her home and family.

Lying beneath these familiar tropes was Henry’s lived experience and precarious position as a widowed, working mother of three children in the 1870s. In the aftermath of the enormous loss of life caused by the Civil War, many women—in both the North and South—whose

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<sup>68</sup> Rossiter, *My Mother’s Life*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> Rossiter, *My Mother’s Life*, 132.

marriage relationships had once protected them found themselves and their children exposed to deprivation and sometimes violence. Historians like Drew Gilpin Faust and Stephanie McCurry have shown that in the South this kind of exposure fueled many early white women's rights activists who felt betrayed by the broken promises of Southern chivalry and protection.<sup>70</sup> Women in Northern states underwent similar experiences. Needing to both work and raise her children on her own, Henry faced extra pressure to appropriately supervise her children and keep them away from potentially destructive influences. Perhaps the loss of a father figure in Arthur's life made Henry worry more about the damaging potential of an unsuitable male role model.

Yet even families with a stable parental presence could find themselves at risk, as in the case of Sophie Grubb and her two sons. From 1884 until 1899, Grubb was the superintendent of the "Department of Work Among Foreign-Speaking People," which handled the WCTU's outreach to immigrants (her work in this role is discussed in detail in chapter 2). Born Sophronia Farrington Naylor in Ohio in February 1834, she worked for several years as a teacher until she married Armstead Otey Grubb of St. Louis in 1856. The couple had five children, including sons Fred and Arthur. Like Mary Livermore, Grubb threw herself into relief work during the Civil War. After it ended, she and her husband returned to his home in St. Louis. Grubb began to worry about her growing sons. According to an early biographer, "the dangers surrounding them

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<sup>70</sup> One example is Rebecca Latimer Felton, another WCTU leader whose story is discussed in more detail in chapter 4 of this dissertation. See also Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

growing out of the liquor traffic led Mrs. Grubb to a deep interest in the struggle of the home against the saloon.”<sup>71</sup>

Her fears turned out to be prescient. During the 1890s, the Grubb family suffered two scandals involving their sons and alcohol or drugs. In 1896, Sophie and Armstead’s daughter-in-law Florence filed for divorce from their younger son Alfred on the grounds of his “habitual drunkenness.”<sup>72</sup> A journalist, Fred had worked at newspapers in St. Louis and Chicago and spent three years in DC on the staff of the *Washington Post*. Concerned about the pace of his work, and probably also his reputation for revelry, Sophie persuaded him to return to the family home in Kirkwood, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. In Kirkwood, he was under his mother’s eye, bound by the house’s rules of total abstinence and laid up with a knee injury.

During this time Fred met and proposed to a local woman named Florence MacCrellis. He took advantage of her “considerable wealth” to avoid going back to work and instead “live on his wife.”<sup>73</sup> He also abandoned the temperate ways to which he had been bound when he and Florence met. The combination of his drinking and unemployment caused a break between the couple. This course of events was exactly what female temperance authors had warned their readers about in novels written a few decades earlier. Fortunately for Florence, divorce was more

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<sup>71</sup> “Mrs. Sophronia Farrington Naylor Grubb,” in *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life*, ed. Frances E. Willard and Mary Livermore (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 345.

<sup>72</sup> “Fred Grubb Divorced,” *Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), July 1, 1896, 7. Many thanks to Leslie Dunlap for bringing this story to my attention.

<sup>73</sup> “He Defamed His Young Wife—Fred Grubb Arrested by Federal Officers in Cincinnati,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, MO), May 12, 1896, 2.

available to women in the 1890s than it had been in the 1860s, and she had the support of her family in leaving Fred. She filed for divorce in April 1896.

Fred did not react well. According to multiple newspaper reports, as soon as he found out about Florence's divorce petition, he started to harass her—sending her “infamous letters and slanders of various kinds.” The last straw came when a letter Fred sent to a friend in Kirkwood complaining about his wife ended up in the hands of Frank Nevins, Florence's stepfather. Although lawyers for both families were working on a divorce agreement and Fred was not contesting the separation, the “infamous and unfounded charges” Fred made against Florence in this letter so incensed Nevins that he took it to the authorities, who charged Fred with criminal libel and sending indecent material through the mails. Federal agents arrested him in Cincinnati, where he had moved, in May. A court granted the divorce in July.<sup>74</sup>

This tragedy did not cause Sophie Grubb to join the WCTU, but it undoubtedly confirmed in her mind the necessity of the cause. At the time of the scandal, Grubb had already been a prominent leader for many years, and newspaper reports noted the sad irony of her position. “It could hardly be said by any stretch of the imagination that Fred Grubb followed the teachings of his mother with respect to the use of alcoholic liquors,” wrote the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* after Fred's arrest. “In fact, it was quite the contrary, and to this his present disagreeable situation is in part due.”<sup>75</sup> This situation must have confirmed for Grubb and her fellow WCTU workers that even a temperate home could not guarantee safety, just as it had for

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<sup>74</sup> “Fred Grubb Divorced”; “He Defamed His Young Wife.”

<sup>75</sup> “He Defamed His Young Wife.”



Eliza Thompson and her fellow Crusaders two decades before. Unfortunately, Fred was not even the first son Grubb had lost to alcohol- and drug-related causes. The story of her son Arthur leads us into another genre of WCTU members' personal experiences with alcohol: their contact with disorder and even violence that could spill outside of the private realm and into the public sphere.

### **Alcohol, Public Disorder, Violence, and Activism**

In May 1892, Grubb's oldest son Arthur was working as a newspaper reporter. He visited a St. Louis opium den to research a story on their role in the city's life.<sup>76</sup> Arthur brought along a friend. According to multiple newspaper reports, the men each smoked some of a pipe in order to preserve their cover as customers. Shortly thereafter they both collapsed. Someone called for help, and while doctors revived Arthur Grubb's friend, Arthur died, possibly due to an underlying heart condition. Anti-Chinese sentiment, a hallmark of panic about opium dens, pervaded much of the coverage about the tragedy. The *St. Joseph Weekly Gazette's* report described an improbable scenario of foul play: "It is charged that while asleep the keeper of the place and his assistant held the pipes again and again to the nostrils of the two reporters. It is said that the crowd of half drunken inmates of the place stood about and joked at the helpless and dangerous condition of the boys."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For more on the history of opium addiction in the US, see David T. Courtwright, *Dark Paradise: A History of Opiate Addiction in America*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Timothy Hickman, *The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days: Narcotic Addiction and Cultural Crisis in the United States, 1870–1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> "Shocking!—Arthur Grubb Found Dead in an Opium Joint," *St. Joseph Weekly Gazette* (St. Louis, MO), May 12, 1892, 3.

Speculation about Arthur in some of the local newspapers led his father to write to defend his memory and character. “Our son died in the prosecution of his appointed work, at the post of duty, and within a few minutes after entering for the first time in his life,” Armstead Grubb wrote. “He was there as a journalist and not as a smoker.”<sup>78</sup> At its convention later that year, the WCTU memorialized Arthur as having “lost his life in an attempt to investigate an opium den in the interests of our work.”<sup>79</sup> While it seems clear that Arthur was not a habitual smoker, we cannot know for sure what his motives were entering the bar. Regardless, it must have been devastating to Grubb that she had been unable to prevent her sons from suffering and causing harm because of alcohol and drugs. To her colleagues in the WCTU, Arthur’s tragic death was a reminder for the world that the costs of mind-altering substances did not remain with those who used their “personal liberty” to imbibe. They easily spilled over into the broader community.

Other WCTU leaders also suffered from public disorder caused by alcohol. WCTU leader Matilda B. Carse, an immigrant from Ireland, lost her young son in Chicago when a drunken driver (described as a German immigrant) ran him over with a wagon. Her son was clearly an innocent victim, and the shame and stigma that might have accrued to Lindsley, Meriwether, and Grubb did not apply in her case. Carse was outspoken about her loss and its role in her choice to dedicate her time to achieving prohibition. After the tragedy, she “register[ed] a vow that until the last hour of her life she would devote every power of which she was possessed to annihilate the liquor traffic.”<sup>80</sup> Mary Antoinette Hitchcock’s public loss also jump-started her involvement

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<sup>78</sup> A. O. Grubb, letter to the editor, *Chanute Blade* (St. Louis, MO), June 23, 1892, 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Nineteenth Annual Meeting* (1892), 43.

<sup>80</sup> Mrs. John A. Logan, *The Part Taken by Women in American History* (Philadelphia: Perry-Nalle, 1912), 673.

with the WCTU. The death of her cousin, who was murdered by a “drunken ruffian” in Sioux City, Iowa, prompted her to “promise [his] sorrow stricken wife to devote the remainder of her life to the eradication of the terrible liquor evil.” She kept her promise by working to build a WCTU in her home state of Nebraska.<sup>81</sup>

Some WCTU members faced violence directly related to their activism against drinking and drugs. Rebecca Irons, a WCTU member in Welton, Iowa, and her husband had advocated for the strict prohibition laws the state passed in 1882. After they took effect, a local saloonkeeper murdered Irons’s husband in the shop he ran.<sup>82</sup> “Would that I could blot out from memory’s pages the agony and pain I had to endure when the hand of a demon rum-seller cut down my noble pure-souled husband,” Irons wrote in 1904.<sup>83</sup> Violent backlash against temperance activists, including women, was not uncommon. Mary A. Cornelius, a temperance leader in Arkansas, faced danger during her leadership of a prohibition campaign in the state: “her life was threatened by the desperate element in the capital of Arkansas and personal violence attempted. Still she persevered.”<sup>84</sup> Ella Reeve Bloor, a socialist feminist who later became a high-ranking official in the Communist Party USA, got her start in activism with the WCTU. As a young woman, she was attending a Prohibition Party meeting when local saloonkeepers burst into the

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<sup>81</sup> Logan, *Part Taken by Women in American History*, 678

<sup>82</sup> “Grand Temple of Iowa,” *Lyons Weekly Mirror* (Lyons, IA), May 6, 1882, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Rebecca Bovey Irons, “Reminiscences of Amendment Days,” *WCTU Champion*, January 1904, Box 35, WCTU Collection, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa.

<sup>84</sup> Logan, *Part Taken by Women in American History*, 674

room and forcibly broke up the gathering. “Frankly,” she wrote in her memoir, “I felt that I was a martyr to my principles.”<sup>85</sup>

Ada Kepley, a prominent WCTU leader in Illinois, narrowly escaped the same fate as Irons’s husband. A force and frequent gadfly in the local affairs of the town of Effingham, she published a temperance newspaper called the *Friend of Home* in the 1880s and 1890s. One of its regular features was a list of the local men she observed frequenting the bars and saloons in town.<sup>86</sup> She followed up on tips, rumors, and bits of gossip to report on the men who drank; the saloonkeepers who sold them alcohol; the brewers and distillers who supplied it; and the voters and politicians who kept it all in business. Kepley seemed so all-knowing about everyone’s bad behavior that men would frequently show up at her door and beg her not to write about them. They assumed she already had all the details of their recent benders. (In these cases, whether she knew or not, she would advise them to stop drinking and leave them out of the paper.)<sup>87</sup>

Her tactics converted some temperance allies, but they also attracted many enemies, including saloonkeeper Otto Reutlinger and his family. The Reutlingers took their ire out through physical violence against Kepley with alarming frequency. In 1893, Kepley and other WCTU members set out to enact a temperance “Crusade” to honor the original event that precipitated the founding of the WCTU. She and another WCTU member named Mrs. Lacock entered the Reutlingers’ saloon while fellow members visited Effingham’s other drinking establishments. As

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<sup>85</sup> Ella Reeve Bloor, *We Are Many* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 39.

<sup>86</sup> Virginia G. Drachman, “Kepley, Ada Harriet Miser,” *American National Biography*, February 2000, <https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1100991>.

<sup>87</sup> Ada Kepley, *A Farm Philosopher: A Love Story* (Teutopolis, IL: Woman’s Printery, 1912), 277.

their counterparts had done twenty years earlier, the women prayed and sang hymns, hoping to call attention to the sin and degradation they believed originated in saloons.<sup>88</sup> This occasion was less successful. Perhaps the presence of Mrs. Reutlinger and her daughter, who greeted Kepley and Lacock at the saloon door, diluted its gendered symbolism. A physical fight followed as the Reutlinger women “soundly thrashed” Kepley and Lacock, bodily forcing them back outside. Other saloonkeepers unceremoniously ejected other temperance women from saloons across town. The WCTU sought to press charges for assault, but a judge dismissed all the cases except for those against the Reutlingers. Their trial was a speedy affair days later. The hundreds of spectators who had come out to witness it approved of their acquittal. “Public sentiment is largely against the crusaders,” one newspaper noted dryly, “as they clearly transcended the proprieties of the occasion.”<sup>89</sup>

Kepley would have another run-in with the same family just a year later, when an infuriated Otto Reutlinger approached her in the street, “slapped her in the face several times and shook her furiously.” News accounts observed that an article in Kepley’s paper “reflecting on the character of Reutlinger’s mother” had provoked his ire.<sup>90</sup> Three years later the most disturbing incident occurred: someone broke into Kepley’s home and shot at her. Despite serious injury, she survived. Later reports identified the assailant as the son of a saloonkeeper or liquor dealer.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Women Crusaders Beaten,” *Daily Review* (Decatur, IL), March 12, 1893, 8.

<sup>89</sup> “Women Crusaders Beaten.”

<sup>90</sup> “Woman Editor Is Slapped by a Man,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1894, 12.

<sup>91</sup> “Mrs. Ada Kepley Injured,” *Decatur Daily Republican* (Decatur, IL), March 4, 1897, 3; Drachman, “Kepley, Ada Harriet Miser.”

Contemporary newspaper accounts carry a lightly mocking tone about the violence Kepley underwent. Most of them seem to view her as at least a slightly ridiculous person who probably deserved at least some of what she got.

In her 1912 autobiography, Kepley also wrote lightly about these experiences. She described constant threats of physical harm. Once, a saloonkeeper had her arrested. “I was reviled in all sorts of places; there was a feeling about that I would be killed,” she remembered. “I am certain many at that time would have enjoyed attending my funeral.”<sup>92</sup> Still, she made it clear that she believed her cause was deadly serious. On one occasion, a saloonkeeper’s wife approached Kepley to confide that her husband had beaten her face “to a pulp.” Kepley reported on it.<sup>93</sup> She also worked on the unsavory intersection of big business and alcohol that was another focus of reformers. Effingham was a major stop on the Illinois Central Railroad, and much of Kepley’s work involved exposing railroad employees who “were dragged from their beds drunk, and put on their engines” to drive trains with hundreds of passengers. She also targeted the railroad officials who looked the other way. Kepley recalls reasoning that her death would also be the death of the saloon in Effingham County. As such, “the price was not too high.”<sup>94</sup>

Social ostracization seems to have been more difficult for Kepley than physical violence. Although her husband never complained, Kepley suffered from guilt as the cause of her loved

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<sup>92</sup> Kepley, *A Farm Philosopher*, 274–76.

<sup>93</sup> Kepley, *A Farm Philosopher*, 277.

<sup>94</sup> Kepley, *A Farm Philosopher*, 275.

ones' exclusion from town society.<sup>95</sup> While Kepley certainly repeated nativist stereotypes about Germans and alcohol, she did not understand the drunkard as a remote, foreign other whose appetites should be controlled through coercive legislation. Both the perpetrators and victims of this industry were her neighbors: the men and women she and her husband would have socialized with had she not taken on what she felt to be holy work at great personal risk. Over the years, however, the seeds Kepley had sown (a favorite metaphor of the WCTU) sprouted. The local schools taught a temperance curriculum. The prohibition question popped up everywhere. Some of Effingham's younger men and ethnic Germans began to vote for temperance. Finally, the county voted to go dry. Writing in 1912, Kepley rejoiced in the fruits of her labor and what she believed would be an unstoppable tide of progress. "Best of all," she wrote, "is that I who was hated and despised and ridiculed, have been forgiven, and everywhere kindly friends and kindly faces and voices greet me among all classes of our people."<sup>96</sup>

The women of the WCTU, of course, did not confine their work to their own families and communities. Though the organization never lost its commitment to moral suasion, education, and personal transformation, from its early years it aimed for what it hoped would be systemic and lasting solutions, especially the legal prohibition of alcohol. To achieve this goal, early WCTU leaders understood they would need to do more than organize unions of women like themselves. They would need to, as Frances Willard put it, "agitate—educate—organize" among

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<sup>95</sup> Kepley, *A Farm Philosopher*, 274.

<sup>96</sup> Kepley, *A Farm Philosopher*, 278.

groups whose lived experience, religion, political beliefs, and drinking customs they perceived as far different from their own, including Black Americans and immigrants.



## CHAPTER TWO

### “THE FOREIGN MIND WORKS SLOWLY”

#### THE WCTU’S WORK WITH IMMIGRANTS, 1880–1900

In the 1880s and 1890s, many brand-new immigrants to the United States stepped out of the processing station at Castle Garden in Lower Manhattan. Perhaps they looked forward to the prospect of a cold beer and a free lunch at one of several nearby taverns after their long journeys. Instead, they encountered a Woman’s Christian Temperance Union missionary distributing pamphlets in their own language. “Dear friend, we bid you welcome to our land,” one read. “We beseech you not to go near the beer saloons ... dear stranger, they are the gates of hell.” The pamphlet warned its readers that, though the United States may have attracted them with its reputation as the “land of the free,” it was quickly becoming a nation of “slaves” to alcoholism. Only by steering clear of the saloons could the new arrivals avoid becoming a “curse” to their adopted country.<sup>1</sup>

This tension between a message of welcome and one of warning characterized the WCTU’s approach to immigrants in the late nineteenth century. This period saw rapidly increasing migration from Europe; between 1880 and 1890, more than five million immigrants

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<sup>1</sup> Sophie Grubb, “A Welcome to the Stranger,” *Union Signal*, January 20, 1887, 5.

arrived in the United States. More than 4.6 million came from Europe—nearly double the number who had arrived the previous decade.<sup>2</sup> Many states allowed European immigrant men to vote relatively soon after arriving, potentially making them a significant factor in close contests over prohibition and woman suffrage.<sup>3</sup> Some immigrants' cultural traditions surrounding drinking—for example, Germans' affinity for visiting beer gardens on Sundays—provoked native-born whites' anxieties about cultural and religious change. At the same time, an upsurge of anti-Chinese sentiment led lawmakers to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The first federal program of immigration restriction, Exclusion represented a significant step towards hardening the nation's boundaries against those deemed unassimilable. As Erika Lee has shown, the Chinese Exclusion Act helped to transform the United States into a “gatekeeping nation” that restricted immigration on the basis of race and class.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, the “foreign question” became an urgent one for temperance women. With their ultimate project of a dry America firmly in view, they debated immigration policy and worked out strategies to transform new arrivals into sober citizens. From 1884 until well into the twentieth century, the WCTU included “Work Among Foreign Speaking People” (frequently shortened to “Foreign Work”) as one of its many departments. Using foreign-language

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of Homeland Security, “Total Immigrants from each Region and Country, by Decade, 1820–2010,” Scholastic, accessed December 7, 2021, [http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/pdfs/by\\_region/region\\_table.pdf](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/pdfs/by_region/region_table.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Sara Egge, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest: 1870–1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 9–10.

<sup>4</sup> Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 6. See also John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Alexander Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1975).

pamphlets, lecturers, and outreach efforts, the department aimed to educate immigrants about the harms of alcohol and persuade them to become abstainers in their homes and prohibitionists at the polls. It also pressed the importance of Anglo-Protestant traditions like Sabbatarianism, the practice of reserving Sundays for rest and prayer rather than work or leisure activities. At the same time that the WCTU worked to influence immigrants, the organization's largely white, native-born, Protestant membership debated how and whether the nation should admit newcomers at all.

Historians of prohibition have explored the xenophobia and anti-Catholicism that many temperance supporters expressed, as well as significant opposition to dry laws from many immigrant leaders and organizations.<sup>5</sup> Many of these works begin from the premise that temperance essentially represented a mask for, as Michael Lerner puts it, drys' "strong nativist sentiments."<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this sweeping characterization neglects the more complex dynamics of ethnicity, religion, and gender that appear with a closer look at the relationship between temperance and immigration. One exception is the work of Sabine Meyer, whose 2015 study of temperance in Minnesota offers a helpful analytical framework. Meyer interrogates how temperance opposition—or, occasionally, support—acted as a driver of identity formation among immigrant ethnic groups. German and Irish American leaders in Minnesota, she shows, “strategically employed” the temperance movement to “promote the invention or renegotiation of these groups’ respective identities, with drink acting as a marker of ethnic identity.” Meyer’s

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Michael Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, 97.

study reveals that immigrant opposition to temperance was not monolithic; instead, temperance provoked “the formation of heterogeneous alliances, which shifted according to the involved actors’ needs and interests.”<sup>7</sup>

“Foreign Work” has also earned little attention from historians of the WCTU. Meyer’s study is local and does not cover the national context. Ruth Bordin discusses immigrants only in passing in *Woman and Temperance*; she writes that WCTU leaders understood immigrants in “two ways: first as another group of women with special characteristics who needed to be organized into unions, and second, as a disadvantaged group cutting across sex lines.” Immigrants needed charity and social services, and the WCTU understood immigrant men as particularly vulnerable to the evils of drink. While Bordin correctly notes that the WCTU adopted increasingly nativist rhetoric during the 1890s, she does not explore how or why, merely stating that “the WCTU could not really rise above its white Protestant middle class origins.”<sup>8</sup> Bordin’s study ends in 1898 with the death of Frances Willard. While some scholars have looked at the links between nativism and the WCTU in the twentieth century, they have focused primarily on the national Prohibition years and links between some WCTU women and the Ku Klux Klan (discussed in further detail in chapter 5). For example, the historian Kathleen Blee writes that, while the WCTU was neither “vicious” nor “hate-mongering” in its racial politics

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<sup>7</sup> Sabine N. Meyer, *We Are What We Drink: The Temperance Battle in Minnesota* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 5–8.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 86.

(unlike the Klan), “by the 1890s the WCTU bowed to increasingly popular nativist sentiment and stressed alleged connections among Catholics, immigrants, and alcohol.”<sup>9</sup>

These analyses depict the women of the WCTU as merely absorbing and reflecting nativist currents in broader American society. However, as this chapter demonstrates, they were active agents and contributors to the evolution of discourse around immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The observations that WCTU made of immigrants’ drinking behavior, the literature they created to persuade them, and the debates they had about how to include or exclude them informed the WCTU’s definitions of Americanism. This chapter explores the mission, structure, and activities of the Foreign Work department during the 1880s and 1890s. It examines WCTU women’s changing attitudes toward immigration and its role in the world they worked toward.

During this period, the WCTU’s approach to immigrants contained two conflicting impulses. The first was a sense of confidence that a reasoned appeal to morality, or “moral suasion,” would make inroads among immigrants as they assimilated. This hopeful perspective guided the mission and activities of the Foreign Work department. While they usually took a condescending approach to immigrants, many temperance women really believed both that they could save new arrivals from intemperance and that it was their duty to do so. “Foreign Work” was linked both ideologically and institutionally to the broader evangelical “home missionary” movement, which organized Protestants to found churches and seek converts within the nation and at its expanding borders. The home missionary movement pursued the goal of mainstream

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<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 103–4.

liberal Protestantism to bring about the kingdom of God on Earth. This belief harmonized with the country's expansionist drive and sense of "Manifest Destiny."<sup>10</sup>

A missionary worldview structured native-born white WCTU women's understanding of the work they were doing. Other scholars have examined how the WCTU applied this missionary perspective in Indian Territory and overseas.<sup>11</sup> Within this worldview, immigrants appeared as less fortunate people who did not yet understand true "civilization." White temperance women had a responsibility to share what they perceived as the pillars of civilization: salvation through evangelical Christianity and the rejection of alcohol. Always existing alongside this impulse, however, was one toward nativism and exclusion, which grew stronger with time. Some WCTU members were always inclined to see the presence and power of immigrants as a significant threat to their chances of achieving a temperate nation. European immigrants seemed to pose a particular threat. As the Foreign Work department seemingly failed to make significant progress with persuasion, other WCTU members began to doubt that the kind of assimilation they believed was necessary was even possible. The growing popularity of scientific racism prompted WCTU leaders to discuss immigrants in terms of the supposedly inborn characteristics of "Anglo-Saxon," "Teutonic," "Alpine," and other "races." Though they still championed

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<sup>10</sup> On "manifest destiny" and expansionism as a millennial role for the United States, see Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas J. Lappas, *In League Against King Alcohol: Native American Women and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1874–1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020); Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

persuasion, they also feared that including these immigrants would alter the fundamental nature of the nation.<sup>12</sup>

Along with much of the native-born white American public, some WCTU leaders turned toward harsher nativist rhetoric and immigration and voting restrictions.<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, immigrants appeared not as unfortunates seeking a better life in the “city upon a hill” but as an invading threat that would overwhelm the WCTU’s chances of purifying the country. Many WCTU leaders linked the dangers of immigrants’ inclusion with racist fears of Black citizenship, as discussed in further detail in the following two chapters. As considerable scholarship on the suffrage movement has shown, leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Laura Clay increasingly turned to variations of the argument that Black and immigrant voters were inferior and unfit in order to make the case for the women’s ballot. The WCTU contributed to this trend.<sup>14</sup>

Almost every member of the WCTU, native- and foreign-born alike, agreed that the goal for new arrivals should be assimilation into an American way of life. The battle over what that

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<sup>12</sup> On the role of scientific racism in late-nineteenth-century nativism, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> On Stanton, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> On white suffragists’ use of racist and nativist arguments, see Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman’s Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*; Laura E. Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed: Gender, Race, and Voting Rights in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Faye E. Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle Over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Allison Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870–1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Louise Newman, *White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

way of life looked like was far from settled, however, especially when it came to alcohol consumption. The WCTU therefore fought to define assimilation on two fronts. Its members sought to transform their own society from within *and* to define the culture they wanted for the new arrivals as the truest expression of America.<sup>15</sup> They set a temperate, law-abiding, English-speaking, Sabbath-keeping, suffrage-supporting existence in front of new immigrants as the model to which they should aspire. At the same time, the WCTU struggled to persuade other white native-born Americans to embrace it. By the 1890s, frustration at slow progress on both of these fronts encouraged the WCTU to embrace policies that restricted immigrants' entry and participation in civil society, as well as their drinking behavior. WCTU leaders hoped that such restrictions would provide them time and power to bring the society they wanted into being.

### **Founding the Department of "Foreign Work"**

Only a couple of years after founding the WCTU in 1874, its leaders were already looking to expand beyond the Northeast and Midwestern communities that had been the seedbeds of the Crusade. The WCTU's first official foray into "Foreign Work" began in 1880. Members created a committee of "Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People."<sup>16</sup> The following year, national convention delegates appointed superintendents for Germans, Chinese, and Scandinavians, as well as a committee on "Friendly Relations with Roman

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<sup>15</sup> Tyrrell points out that, while the WWCTU was certainly part of an Anglo-American cultural imperialist project, it was also opposed to several of the incentives of economic imperialism, such as the sale of liquor in the colonies, and that a propensity for drinking and vice was in many cases more common among Westerners. Thus "the notion of the cultural superiority of whites and the Christian religion could not be assumed." *Woman's World/Woman's Empire*, 5–6.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah P. Morrison, "Report of Committee on Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People," *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Seventh Annual Meeting* (1880), 61–65.



Catholics.”<sup>17</sup> As part of its broader push to reach all parts of the rapidly expanding nation with the “Department of Organization,” in 1884 the WCTU formalized and consolidated its outreach to immigrants as the “Department of Work Among Foreigners,” led by Superintendent Sophie Grubb.

Motivated by her fears about the threat alcohol posed to her sons (discussed in detail in chapter 1), Grubb committed herself to “the struggle of the home against the saloon.”<sup>18</sup> An energetic, college-educated woman, Grubb would become the face of the department, remaining superintendent until 1899.<sup>19</sup> Born in 1834 in Ohio, Grubb had been active in Civil War relief work in Quincy, Illinois. She founded a Freedman’s Aid Society and proved herself a “woman of nerve” who didn’t balk at the grisly work of battlefield surgeries. After the end of the war, she and her husband returned to his home in St. Louis. She joined the WCTU and quickly rose to a leadership position.

It is unclear what drew Grubb to “Foreign Work” in particular, but she threw herself into the department wholeheartedly. During her fifteen years of leadership, she oversaw a rotating roster of volunteer “assistants.” Both native- and foreign-born and located around the country, these assistants spearheaded temperance work among different groups of immigrants. In 1884, for example, Grubb supervised assistants working with Germans, Scandinavians, Mexicans, and

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<sup>17</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 50.

<sup>18</sup> “Sophronia Farrington Naylor Grubb,” in *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women*, ed. Frances Willard and Mary E. Livermore (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893).

<sup>19</sup> Katharine Lent Stevenson, *A Brief History of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union: Outline Course for Local Unions*, 3rd ed. (Evanston, IL: Union Signal Press, 1907), 35.

Chinese people. Later years saw formal work among Bohemian, Polish, Dutch, Italian, and Spanish groups.<sup>20</sup> Grubb wrote frequently in the WCTU's newspaper, the *Union Signal*. She encouraged state and local unions to appoint their own superintendents and do their best to reach the "foreign-speaking people" in their areas with the temperance message.

Given the connections among the WCTU and other social causes, the organization's attention to immigrant groups—especially Europeans—is not surprising. The antebellum temperance movement overlapped with nativist movements. "Drys" clashed several times with immigrant communities, most famously during Chicago's "Lager Beer Riot" of 1855. This episode of civil unrest, during which one person died and more than sixty others were arrested, resulted from a battle over the city's "blue laws." These statutes restricted public drinking and alcohol sales on Sundays.<sup>21</sup> Newly elected mayor Levi Boone, who had run on a platform of nativism and anti-Catholicism as a member of the Know-Nothing Party, began enforcing these laws specifically to target German and Irish immigrant communities. Chicago police frequently cited and closed down immigrant-owned establishments while allowing native-born whites to keep operating saloons. This discrimination provoked fierce opposition from immigrant groups, culminating in the riot.<sup>22</sup> Anti-German riots in which nativist mobs attacked breweries and their

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<sup>20</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), 5. By this point "Colored Work" and "Work Among Indians" had been established as distinct departments.

<sup>21</sup> "Anton C. Hesing," Wikipedia, February 21, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_C.\\_Hesing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_C._Hesing); Rachel E. Bohlmann, "Sunday Closings," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed December 6, 2021, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1221.html>; Jack S. Blocker Jr., *Cycles of Reform: American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Robin Einhorn, "Lager Beer Riot," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed October 21, 2021, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/703.html>; Mark Benbow, "German Immigrants in the United States Brewing Industry," *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, August 22, 2018, [https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=284#\\_ednref43](https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=284#_ednref43).

employees also occurred in Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio, in the same year.<sup>23</sup> Since Irish and German immigrants continued to compose the majority of new arrivals in the 1870s and 1880s, the WCTU had reason to expect this kind of resistance to continue.

As a longtime resident of the Chicago area, WCTU president Frances Willard was very familiar with this history. She nevertheless marked the beginning of formal Foreign Work at the 1880 convention on a hopeful—if paternalistic—note. Willard acknowledged that immigrant drinking was much discussed but argued that temperance forces had taken very little action to address it. She expressed confidence that the WCTU would win foreign-born people over with thoughtful tactics of moral suasion. “Their hearts are by no means set in them to do evil,” Willard said. Germans and Scandinavians, in particular, were “intelligent and well-intentioned people” who had simply learned bad habits through their traditions and culture. All WCTU members needed to do was talk to them as equals about how bad booze was for their bodies, wallets, and families—not scolding or condemning them, but inviting them to “reason together.”<sup>24</sup>

Other early WCTU leaders also took care to avoid blaming immigrants for intemperance. Sarah Morrison, a young officer from Indiana, suggested that anyone who thought that getting rid of the “foreign element” would guarantee a temperate nation needed to take the beam out of their own eye. Americans of English descent had been struggling with intemperance for over a century and passing along the “appetite” to their children. Not until “American born citizens”

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<sup>23</sup> Benbow, “Germans in the United States Brewing Industry.”

<sup>24</sup> Frances Willard, “President’s Address,” *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Seventh Annual Meeting* (1880), 16.

had won prohibition for themselves, Morrison argued, could the battle against sin really begin.<sup>25</sup> Sophie Grubb agreed, arguing that native-born drinking was actually more pernicious because Americans had learned it was wrong and yet continued to “sin knowingly.” Immigrants, on the other hand, had been “educated to call evil good.” In places like Germany, they had turned to beer drinking because of a lack of clean water—a problem that the pure and abundant resources of the United States would solve. Their wrong ideas were an unfortunate reality, but not an inevitable one if the WCTU could intervene.<sup>26</sup> The tracts and lectures distributed by the Foreign Work department would give them the chance to learn the truth.

These perspectives demonstrate the WCTU’s early emphasis on changing the behavior of the men in their own communities.<sup>27</sup> The emphasis on moral suasion for those of European extraction also reflects many temperance women’s belief that these people were similar enough to native-born whites—in other words, assimilable enough to American society—that reasoned discussion should work to convert them. That immigrants should assimilate into American culture almost went without saying. The WCTU took for granted that migration should include a willingness to shed the ways of the old country and adopt those of the new—as the WCTU

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Morrison, “Some Reflections and Suggestions Respecting the Relation Existing Between Our Foreign Population and the Drink Habit of Our Country,” *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), lxii.

<sup>26</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), xlv.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter 1 of this dissertation discusses this emphasis in greater detail. See also Rachel Bohlmann, “Drunken Husbands, Drunken State: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s Challenge to American Families and Public Communities in Chicago, 1874–1920” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2001).

defined and envisioned them. “When we change our skies we do in an important sense change our times and are changed with them,” Sarah Morrison wrote in 1881.<sup>28</sup>

Morrison insisted that the WCTU did not need to force immigrants to stop drinking or do anything that temperance opponents would describe as curtailing the drinkers’ “personal liberty.” When the “thinking German or quick-resolving Frenchman” arrived in the US and observed the availability of clean water and all the positive effects of a temperate country, he would naturally conclude that he should give up the “luxury” of drink. Even if he himself did not abuse alcohol, his own personal temperance would prove more powerful in persuading those “to whom it is proving a curse” that they should abandon drinking.<sup>29</sup> Of course, not all WCTU members saw this rosy story of voluntary conversion as likely or even possible. Alongside the promise of the Foreign Work department in the early 1880s was a strong nativist strain that would become stronger in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The terms in which WCTU members expressed their fears about immigration reflect the influence of the increasing nativism of the late nineteenth century. The rise of pseudoscientific racial classifications painted immigrants, especially those from Eastern and Southern Europe, as inherently inferior.<sup>30</sup>

### **Nativism, Scientific Racism, and Heredity in the WCTU**

Concern that new immigrants were of low “quality” would become central to nativist rhetoric during the late nineteenth century, including within the WCTU. At the same convention that established the Foreign Work department, former WCTU president Annie Wittenmyer

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<sup>28</sup> Morrison, “Some Reflections and Suggestions,” lxiii.

<sup>29</sup> Morrison, “Some Reflections and Suggestions,” lxiii.

<sup>30</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*.

reported from the “Committee on Crime and Pauperism.” Finding that inmates at jails in Pennsylvania and New York were disproportionately immigrants, she argued that this proved that new arrivals were mostly criminals and the indigent.<sup>31</sup> South Carolina leader Sallie Chapin went further, claiming that immigration should prompt the WCTU to favor educational restrictions on voting. “What do these men that landed at Castle Garden a few weeks ago— whiskey, beer drinking Irish and Germans, and their wives not much better than they—what do they know about using the ballot?” she demanded during an 1881 speech. “The idea that they are the men that are in five years to make our laws, is a disgrace.”<sup>32</sup>

Some members of Chapin’s audience certainly believed that if the WCTU could just address the whiskey and beer drinking everything might turn out all right. Chapin, however, saw intemperance as just one disqualifying factor among many. She clearly did not believe that the WCTU could make these voters suitable to participate in self-government on a reasonable timescale. In fact, she doubted whether they could ever assimilate into the polity she imagined. She depicted immigrant men as uneducated and possibly in thrall to the “autocratic” tendencies of their native countries. The idea that immigrant men would vote before white women who had been born on American soil and understood the principles of democracy especially offended her. Chapin used similar arguments to support limiting Black civil rights. This particular resentment became increasingly common within the larger women’s rights movement to which the WCTU belonged.

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<sup>31</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Seventh Annual Meeting* (1880), 68.

<sup>32</sup> Sallie Chapin, “Response to Addresses of Welcome on Behalf of the South,” *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 26.

Historians have demonstrated that many white suffragists in the late nineteenth century resented the fact that Black men and many immigrant men gained the vote before they did.<sup>33</sup> They asked why their society had chosen to enfranchise these men before educated, literate white women. As scholars Laura Free and Faye Dudden have shown, acrimonious debates over the Reconstruction Amendments in the 1860s had set the stage for these tensions.<sup>34</sup> Some women's rights leaders, especially Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, protested the addition of the word "male" to the Fourteenth Amendment's definition of legitimate voters—the first time this gendered term had appeared in the Constitution. "If that word 'male' be inserted," Stanton warned, "it will take us a century at least to get it out."<sup>35</sup> They also objected to the Fifteenth Amendment, which enfranchised only Black men while excluding women of all races. As Free argues, Black male advocates and congressional Republicans argued for Black men's claims to voting rights and citizenship on the basis of their manhood. By making gender the basis of this historic expansion of the franchise, Free writes, "Republican Reconstruction politics codified a gendered vision of the voting polity in America's fundamental law." This vision reinforced the link between voting and masculinity and left women even more firmly on the outside, strengthening Victorian gender values that relegated women to the "private sphere."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*; Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*; Newman, *White Women's Rights*.

<sup>34</sup> Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed*; Dudden, *Fighting Chance*.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement, 1848–1869*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 61.

<sup>36</sup> Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed*, 166.

Frustrated by what they correctly understood as a retrenchment against their cause, Stanton and Anthony turned to racist rhetoric and alliances with Democrats to oppose the Fifteenth Amendment. Debate over the proposed amendment placed them on the opposite side from erstwhile allies like Frederick Douglass, Lucy Stone, and Julia Ward Howe, who argued that achieving both Black suffrage and women's suffrage at the same time was impossible. In the context of Reconstruction, they claimed, Black men's need for the ballot was more urgent. This debate led to a rupture in the suffrage movement that did not heal until the 1890s; it also prefigured white women suffragists' increased use of racist and nativist rhetoric in the decades that followed. For Stanton, it was self-evidently absurd for "Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung who do not know the difference between a Monarchy and a Republic" to make laws for educated white women.<sup>37</sup> Many women who joined the WCTU shared Stanton's belief in class and racial hierarchies that placed women like themselves above "Hans" and "Yung Tung." The historian Allison Sneider demonstrates that, between the 1860s and the 1890s, many women's rights activists shifted from understanding voting rights as a feature of citizenship to seeing them as a privilege of "civilization." As comments like Sallie Chapin's reveal, that civilization was defined by race and religion.<sup>38</sup>

The WCTU's work with immigrants occurred against the backdrop of and contributed to important developments in Americans' definitions and understandings of "race." As a wealth of

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<sup>37</sup> Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony, Volume II: Against an Aristocracy of Sex* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 196.

<sup>38</sup> Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age*, 5–9. See also Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*; Newman, *White Women's Rights*; Ginzburg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*.



historical scholarship has shown, beliefs about the existence of natural hierarchies of race, gender, and religion were widespread in nineteenth-century America. The influence of new theories of human evolution permeated American cultural consciousness during the years after the publication of Charles Darwin's work *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Some late-nineteenth-century white Americans sought to apply Darwin's concepts and terminology to human culture, ultimately developing increasingly arcane systems of racial classification that characterized variations in ethnicity, language, and culture in terms of "race" difference. According to historians like Matthew Frye Jacobson, the language and ideology of race were central to the country's approach to understanding and eventually restricting immigration from Europe.<sup>39</sup> In an atmosphere of anxiety about increasing immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, this scientific racism provided justification for restrictions on immigration and voting that proponents argued were necessary to preserve American democracy and protect it from being undermined by "backward" peoples.

With their understandings of immigrant drinking, WCTU women put their own stamp on these concepts. During the 1880s, Foreign Work leaders increasingly replaced accounts of immigrants' cultural drinking behavior with explanations of difference rooted in scientific racism. In an 1881 report, for example, WCTU leader Sarah Morrison wrote that, while the Chinese were "not a drinking people" and the Mennonites existed "on a plane too high for gross

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<sup>39</sup> See Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age*.

temptation,” German and Irish immigrants were “the nationalities among us exceeding in respect to drink.” She blasted Irish “ignorance, idleness, and swagger.” She allowed, however, that Germans held a potentially well-founded belief that beer was safer to drink than water in their homeland—one that was “food for thought and subject for sympathy.”<sup>40</sup> Though this assessment was negative and stereotypical, it did not suggest that any of these traits were innate or unchangeable.

By 1886, though, Sophie Grubb wrote that “the foreign mind, particularly the German mind, works slowly. The Teutonic is not like our nervous excitable Anglo-Saxon race.”<sup>41</sup> Grubb still advocated persuasion; she meant to suggest that more time and patience would be required for the “Teutonic mind” to be fully convinced of temperance principles. And her assessment of “Anglo-Saxons” such as herself as “nervous and excitable” was not overwhelmingly positive. The idea underlying this view, however, was new: some groups of new immigrants possessed distinct, inborn traits that differentiated them from the “Anglo-Saxon” communities most WCTU workers came from. This shift foreshadowed the course that the ideology of scientific racism would take over the succeeding decades, toward ever-more detailed and rigid hierarchical classifications that emphasized the permanent inferiority of non-Anglo-Saxon “races.”

In tandem with the exploration of these new views of racial difference, WCTU women contributed to popular discourse around the emerging science of “heredity.” Always attuned to the social consequences of alcoholism for the family and community surrounding the drunkard,

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<sup>40</sup> Morrison, “Some Reflections and Suggestions,” lxi–lxix.

<sup>41</sup> Sophie Grubb, “Department of Foreign Work,” *Union Signal*, August 12, 1886, 12.

members of the WCTU became increasingly concerned that alcoholism's effects would also reverberate through time to the drunkard's offspring. In light of contemporary knowledge about environmental and genetic components of alcohol use, WCTU members' intuition that drinking and heredity were related makes sense. We now know, for example, that alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to birth defects and developmental delays; that it is dangerous for young children to have alcohol even in small amounts (such as was used medicinally in the nineteenth century); and that a tendency towards alcoholism or drug abuse may be inherited.<sup>42</sup>

The exact mechanisms of the relationships between drinking and heredity, however, were obscure during the late nineteenth century. Many WCTU women understood heredity in what we now call the "Lamarckian" sense. Researcher Jean-Baptiste Lamarck posited that environmental conditions and experiences could alter a person's genes and be passed on to the next generation. Future WCTU organizer (and German immigrant) Henrietta Skelton wrote a temperance novel in 1876 entitled *A Fatal Inheritance* that illustrates this understanding. In it, a young woman named Frances Harcourt uses alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding on the advice of her doctor. She quickly surpasses the small medicinal dose, however, and begins drinking large glasses of brandy and water daily. Her first child dies of "convulsions" caused by Frances's tainted milk. Her second baby, Harry, is spared the same fate only because he is adopted by some of the Harcourts' friends, one of whom laments, "What a sin! What a fatal inheritance she gives to her innocent child, for as the children of thieves are born thieves, so are the children of those who

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<sup>42</sup> For more on the history of medical understanding of alcohol and reproduction, see Elizabeth M. Armstrong, *Conceiving Risk, Bearing Responsibility: Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and the Moral Diagnosis of Disorder* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

drink (especially the mother) born to become drunkards, if an almighty power does not keep guard of them from their infancy.”<sup>43</sup> This prediction comes true; after the deaths of his adoptive parents, Harry topples into drunkenness. Only the return of his former fiancée, who helps him sign and keep the temperance pledge, saves him from destruction. In Skelton’s story, Harry’s commitment to the pledge, faith in God, and supportive family members prevent his “fatal inheritance” from determining his future. Skelton does not clearly define the mechanisms of inheritance; while characters attribute the first baby’s death to alcohol in breastmilk, the precise nature of Harry’s susceptibility to drink is harder to discern.

As Riiko Bedford has written, in the 1880s and 1890s the WCTU used and understood “heredity” as a flexible, ambiguous concept. Inheritance was a “stabilizing force” that connected people to their ancestors. The environment or a person’s free will or soul, however, could influence inheritance.<sup>44</sup> Inspired by these concerns, WCTU workers launched projects aimed at regulating food and improving sanitary conditions in poor neighborhoods—in other words, orchestrating changes to the environment they believed would benefit children and future generations. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, some temperance advocates began to unite ethnic stereotypes with ideas about heredity to express concern about “degenerating” patterns that they supposedly observed across entire ethnic groups or “races.”

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<sup>43</sup> Henrietta Skelton, *A Man Trap; and, The Fatal Inheritance: Two Temperance Tales* (Toronto: J. B. Magurn, 1876), [https://archive.org/details/cihm\\_13634/page/n5/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/cihm_13634/page/n5/mode/2up).

<sup>44</sup> Riiko Bedford, “Heredity as Ideology: Ideas of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of the United States and Ontario on Heredity and Social Reform, 1880–1910,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 86.

Some temperance advocates feared that alcohol might cause the “white race” itself to degenerate. In 1885, for example, the *Union Signal* published a letter from Chicago temperance advocate A. Bartow Ulrich, who was of German ancestry, in which he argued that native-born white Americans of French or English ancestry had been degrading themselves with strong drink for decades and therefore were in danger of “dying out.” Within a few decades, these “degenerate sons” would be gone from the United States, and their replacements—very likely, Germans less enlightened than Ulrich himself—could “force their customs on the whole country.”<sup>45</sup> This rhetoric foreshadowed the theme of “race suicide” that would become a chief message of the eugenics movement after 1900, as well as the anxieties expressed by figures like President Theodore Roosevelt about the supposed degenerating weakness and “overcivilization” of white men.<sup>46</sup>

Some WCTU members also interpreted racial degeneration as the possible result of incorporating inferior people into the American polity. Fortunately, temperance and prohibition could provide the solution, especially if the WCTU could reach immigrant children. At the 1891 WCTU convention in Boston, a teacher and reform worker named Mary E. McDowell described her plans for the department of “Kindergarten Work” she superintended. In addition to her role with the WCTU, McDowell worked at Hull House, the new settlement house that reformers Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr had established on the West Side of Chicago two years earlier.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Bartow A. Ulrich, “A German View of the Temperance Question,” *Union Signal*, April 30, 1885, 8–9; Ada Kepley, “German Utterances,” *Union Signal*, April 16, 1885, 8–9.

<sup>46</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

<sup>47</sup> “Mary McDowell (1854–1936),” Social Welfare History Project, accessed October 20, 2021, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/people/mcdowell-mary/>.

McDowell taught kindergarten to the children of the immigrants who filled the neighborhood, and she argued that the WCTU had already solved the problem of what to do “with the Italian, the Scandinavian, the German.... If we had Prohibition, we are just beginning to overcome the long line of degenerating hereditary influences.” As a complement to legal restrictions, however, McDowell explained that immigrant children needed patriotic education. Her plans reflected the WCTU’s continuing belief that it could transform individual minds through education and suasion, even in the face of strong innate racial forces. With the “truest, fullest, most religious education,” McDowell said, immigrant children would “kiss our American flag.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Planting the Seed: Strategies for Reaching “Foreign-Speaking People”**

Sophie Grubb and the “Foreign Work” department pressed forward. They aimed to reach both newly arriving immigrants and those who had already made their homes throughout the country. In order to educate and persuade new arrivals, they worked to disseminate the WCTU’s message in as many languages as possible. Grubb worked tirelessly from her home in the small city of Lawrence, Kansas. She arranged for lectures and translated temperance pamphlets into foreign languages. Grubb sent the drafts of tracts like “The Dangers of Social Drinking,” “Appeal to German Women for the Home Against the Saloon,” “Is Wine a Poison?,” and “Liberty and Drunkenness” to the WCTU’s press in Chicago, which churned out hundreds of copies.<sup>49</sup> Missionaries distributed a large number of these tracts at Castle Garden, a former fort

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<sup>48</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting* (1891), 40. McDowell also assured her hearers, who worried that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe would bring along political and economic radicalism, that children who kissed the American flag would not “carry the red flag of Anarchy.”

<sup>49</sup> “A List of Tracts and Leaflets Now Published by the Foreign Dept. of W. C. T. U.,” *Union Signal*, March 3, 1887, 13; “A List of Tracts and Leaflets Now Published by the Foreign Dept. of W. C. T. U.,” *Union Signal*, March 31, 1887, 12.

on the southern tip of Manhattan that served as the first official immigration station in the United States until Ellis Island opened in 1892. The WCTU's work there began in 1886, when Grubb started cooperating with missionaries to distribute temperance tracts in Swedish and German. Grubb described this kind of work as "*preventive* counsel." Since immigrants could walk out of the building and straight into one of the several nearby saloons and beer gardens, Grubb considered this point-of-entry work urgent.

To reach those "foreign-speaking people" who had already settled across the US, a small corps of lecturers spent months on the road. They rode jolting trains between large cities and tiny rural towns, organized new unions, and preached the temperance gospel wherever they could get a hearing.<sup>50</sup> The WCTU remained a predominantly native-born, white organization, but several foreign-born women did take up leadership roles in this area. They included Laura Fixen (nicknamed the "little Dane"); a German-American woman named Henrietta Skelton; and Mariette Van Olinda, who was of Dutch extraction.<sup>51</sup> Immigrant women never joined the WCTU in large numbers, but some of those who did have left behind records that provide insight into what drew them to the WCTU and the rhetorical strategies they used to communicate with its largely native-born membership.

Henrietta Skelton in particular became one of the Foreign Work department's standard-bearers. Born Henneriette Hedderich in 1839 in Giessen, in the German state of Hesse, she

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<sup>50</sup> On Skelton and Fixen, see *Minutes of the National WCTU at the Seventh Annual Meeting* (1880), 68. Skelton traveled extensively in Illinois and Pennsylvania in 1883 and in California in 1884, organizing unions among German immigrants. See, for example, "Pennsylvania," *Union Signal*, August 9, 1883, 10–11; "News in a Nutshell," *Union Signal*, February 14, 1884, 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Union Signal*, May 8, 1884, 9.

moved to Heidelberg as a young child when her father became a professor at the university there. When she was sixteen, her parents died within six months of each other, and she and her brother immigrated to Canada to live with an uncle. Two years later she married Samuel Murray Skelton, a railway superintendent originally from England. After her husband's death in the early 1870s, Skelton embarked full-time on temperance work with the WCTU. She served as a national organizer and lecturer in Midwestern and Western states, giving lectures in both English and German and organizing dozens of new unions.<sup>52</sup> As a middle-class woman, she came from the milieu of Germans and immigrants most likely to be sympathetic to temperance. She argued, however, that most Americans overestimated how hard it would be to persuade other Germans. She described them as “pre-eminently a reasonable people, on whom kind and considerate methods have a magic power.”<sup>53</sup>

In concert with the WCTU's departments specifically for lumbermen, railroad workers, soldiers, and sailors, women like Skelton and Emma Obenauer visited remote labor camps in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. There, they preached about temperance to mostly Scandinavian and German workers. Once, according to Frances Willard, Skelton climbed atop a “lumber pile” to deliver a temperance speech to three hundred German loggers. As she descended, she overheard a conversation between two anti-temperance listeners. “I declare there

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<sup>52</sup> Luther A. Ingersoll, “Mrs. Henrietta Skelton,” in *Memorial and Biographical History of the Coast Counties of Central California*, ed. Henry D. Barrows and Luther A. Ingersoll (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1893); “Henriette Skelton,” in *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life*, ed. Frances Elizabeth Willard and Mary Livermore (Buffalo, NY: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893); “Skelton, Henrietta,” *Canada's Early Women Writers*, 2016, <https://digital.lib.sfu.ca/ceww-736/skelton-henrietta>.

<sup>53</sup> “A Barrier Breaking Away,” *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls, VT), September 8, 1882, 2.



is no one so much to be dreaded as that Mrs. Skelton,” one man insisted. “She goes about worming herself in among the people with her pious trash, and this lumberman who wouldn’t give his men ten minutes to hear our speakers will let them have an hour and a half to listen to this temperance virago; and there they stood with open mouths because they like to hear the ‘sprechen Sie Deutsch.’”<sup>54</sup> In Willard’s telling, Skelton’s German fluency was the secret weapon that would get through to these workers, who were interested in hearing their own language even if they might not have cared about the content.

In urban areas, Grubb advised WCTU members to approach foreign-born clergy who might be sympathetic and could help the WCTU reach their congregations. She also recommended that temperance women make “home visits” to reach immigrant women and children—also a common tactic for organizing native-born women. “Win the women and children,” Grubb urged. Even though they could not vote, they might get through to the men in their households: “Every foreign family exerts an influence.”<sup>55</sup> Within the female-defined space of the home and family, the WCTU bet that its members could more persuasively sell the union’s message of temperance as “home protection” and establish themselves as trusted authorities on how to live good American lives. They also hoped to undermine what they viewed as unacceptably patriarchal family structures among many immigrants. WCTU women believed that their own culture and religion valued women more and provided them more equality and

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<sup>54</sup> “A Barrier Breaking Away,” 2.

<sup>55</sup> Sophie Grubb, “Foreign Work Department,” *Union Signal*, December 8, 1886, 12.

opportunity, and that this was a sign of a more fully developed “civilization.” This assumption of superiority was at the heart of the WCTU’s missionary work both at home and abroad.

### **“Foreign Work” as Home Mission**

There were strong institutional and cultural links between evangelical Protestant missionary societies of the late nineteenth century and the WCTU. Thus, Foreign Work must also be compared to the international arm of the organization, the World’s WCTU (WWCTU). Like the WWCTU, the Foreign Work department is part of the broader history of Anglo-American Christian missionary work. Both “home” and foreign temperance missionaries aimed to spread the evangelical Christian culture, institutions, and values that they believed were superior. Within both organizations, non-white, non-Protestant women could become leaders as long as they accepted these values. However, within Foreign Work as within the WWCTU, as Ian Tyrrell has argued, hierarchical structures of “motherhood” limited true cross-cultural “sisterhood.” Even those temperance women who took a more benevolent, welcoming view of immigrants still assumed that they needed mentoring and instruction.<sup>56</sup> The Department of Foreign Work often described itself as a “home missionary” project. Among certain populations, notably the Chinese in California, WCTU leaders urged members interested in the work to cooperate with local churches that were already conducting Bible studies and English classes.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> As Tyrrell puts it, “the WWCTU’s genuine egalitarianism was inevitably encased in hierarchical conceptions of evangelical reform. The processes of benevolence created constituencies of givers and receivers locked in reciprocal and unmistakably maternal relations that sat uneasily alongside the commitment to sisterhood.” *Woman’s World/Woman’s Empire*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Edith Morris, “Work Among the Chinese,” *Union Signal*, July 29, 1886, 9.

With Foreign Work at home, temperance leaders urged native-born women to help others as a way of helping themselves. In 1886, the Rev. E. J. Funk, editor of a German temperance newspaper called *Der Deutsch-Amerikaner*, encouraged *Union Signal* readers to donate to his publication using this line of argument. “It is missionary work in the most eminent sense of the word; it is work in our own interest and welfare,” he wrote. “It is guarding our own homes, our domestic, commercial, and religious interests,—for what will be the result if no antidote is applied to the destroying work of intemperance among foreigners of this land?”<sup>58</sup> While not all missionaries might have agreed that their highest purpose was to improve their own lives rather than the lives of those they sought to convert, the image of missionary work as a means of home defense threads throughout Foreign Work in the WCTU.

WCTU literature emphasized that Foreign Work missionaries needed to work across boundaries of class as well as those of language, religion, and national origin. In part this was because many white, native-born temperance women might only encounter immigrants in their day-to-day lives as servants, laundresses, and errand boys. In 1899, a *Union Signal* columnist writing as the “Busy Woman” reminded her readers that every temperance woman was “essentially a missionary. That she may stay at home and be a foreign missionary she does not always realize.” The Busy Woman pointed those unsure where to start toward a “Chinaman” who might do their laundry; a German cleaning woman; a “Dutchman” delivering coal; and the “foreign clerks” working in almost every store. “Vegetable and fruit venders who assail the back door several times per week are few of them Americans. Have I not a mission to each of

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<sup>58</sup> “Der Deutsch-Amerikaner,” *Union Signal*, December 9, 1886, 7.

these?”<sup>59</sup> This image of the white middle-class temperance woman providing help and guidance to working-class immigrants reinforced a hierarchical relationship, regardless of the immigrant’s ethnicity.

### **Foreign Work and German Immigration**

So far, this chapter has examined how the white temperance women of the WCTU understood and approached “Foreign Work” in general during the 1880s. The next sections will delve more deeply into what this work looked like in different places and among different ethnic groups. While the WCTU lumped all “foreign-speaking people” into one department, there were important variations in how the organization approached European and Chinese immigrants as well as the Spanish-speakers living in what is now the Southwest United States. These differences illuminate the imagined community the WCTU was constructing and how its boundaries changed during this period, as it tested out theories about which groups could be included “safely” and which might prove threats.

During its first few years, the Foreign Work department focused primarily on the German and Scandinavian immigrants who were then arriving in large numbers. Of particular concern were Germans. Many had responded to previous prohibition efforts by organizing politically and forming brewers and tavern-keepers’ associations (*Der Wirthsverein*) to represent their interests. Particularly in cities with large German populations, this community dominated the brewing industry and translated that economic power into political power, taking the form of the urban political machine politics that reformers like Frances Willard deplored. In 1881, Willard had

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<sup>59</sup> “Chats with Our Workers,” *Union Signal*, November 2, 1899, 9.

bemoaned what she saw as the undue influence of German brewing interests and machine politics locally in Chicago and on the Northern Republican Party as a whole. Republicans were relying on German votes to win, she argued. They therefore had to “grovel in the dust” to German-American bosses like Anton C. Hesing, the prominent editor of the German-language newspaper *Illinois Staats-Zeitung*.<sup>60</sup> In 1872, Hesing had organized a pro-liquor faction of the Republican party to successfully oppose Chicago Mayor Joseph Medill’s attempts to enforce the blue laws. Pro-liquor Republicans infuriated temperance supporters like Willard, who saw them as betraying the party’s moral reform origins in order to cater to immigrants, or as corruptly “bought” by immigrant-run political machines.

The German brewers’ community used its influence to protect the business of brewing as well as German cultural traditions surrounding drinking. The practice of visiting beer gardens on Sundays proved a flashpoint. To the WCTU, which strongly advocated for “Sabbath observance,” the combination of leisure and drinking on Sundays was a public menace. They believed that God had designated Sundays for rest and prayer, not revelry. Sunday drinking represented a disturbing unwillingness to adhere to what they aimed to establish as American norms. The beer garden was often a destination for the whole family, and the presence of children in such an environment especially offended the WCTU. The organization advocated for restrictions on Sunday liquor sales and other measures to end this practice.

German temperance opponents, for their part, decried attempts to mandate Sabbath observance as an attack on their “personal liberty.” They viewed the WCTU’s insistence on total

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<sup>60</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), lxxvi. Gambrinus is a European mythological hero associated with beer and partying; see Einhorn, “Lager Beer Riot.”

abstinence from alcohol as absurd—unfairly equating harmless, traditional beer drinking with overindulgence in liquor. The vibrant German-language newspaper scene of late-nineteenth-century Chicago offers a window into this constituency’s views on the WCTU. German newspapers invariably described Frances Willard as an “old spinster” and American reform women in general as unfeminine and shrill. Prohibitionists were “temperance fanatics” and “cranks,” and the “Prudery Movement” (*Muckerthum*) was a hotbed of vice and hypocrisy.<sup>61</sup> The papers were full of anecdotes about temperance types who preached prohibition and abstinence in public but supposedly drank like fish and indulged in sexual perversion behind closed doors.

Nevertheless, the WCTU thought it spied some cracks in the German anti-temperance wall. The *Union Signal* touted a summer 1882 meeting in Lake Bluff, Illinois, as the “first German Convention” for temperance reform.<sup>62</sup> (The German newspaper *Chicagoer Arbeiter Zeitung* was more skeptical, describing it as “a pitiful fiasco, aside from a few ministers and crazy women.”<sup>63</sup>) Another meeting held in Chicago a few weeks later resulted in the organization of a German temperance society. The work of Henrietta Skelton and another

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, “The Ladies’ Club of the German Society,” *Illinois Staats-Zeitung* (Chicago), April 24, 1879; “Saloons Must Go,” *Abendpost* (Chicago), October 23, 1890. The choice of vocabulary is that of the translators. “Muckerthum” is from “The Temperance Problem,” *Illinois Staats-Zeitung* (Chicago), June 9, 1871. All articles are part of the Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, published in 1942 by the Chicago Public Library Omnibus Project of the Works Progress Administration of Illinois. The project translated and classified approximately 120,000 pages of material from Chicago’s foreign language newspapers from between 1855 and 1938.

<sup>62</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Ninth Annual Meeting* (1882), x.

<sup>63</sup> “German Temperance Meeting,” *Chicagoer Arbeiter Zeitung* (Chicago), August 24, 1883.

German temperance lecturer named J. Adolph Schmitz, whom the WCTU employed to speak to German groups, was largely responsible for this progress.<sup>64</sup>

One of Skelton's most enthusiastic converts was Elise Pfeiffer, a young German immigrant whose articles frequently appeared in the *Union Signal* during the mid-1880s. Pfeiffer had been born and raised in Strasbourg, in Alsace-Lorraine (now part of France). Not long after arriving in the US as a young married woman, she attended a WCTU meeting, but didn't understand much of the discussion due to the language barrier. Nevertheless, she had planned to sign the temperance pledge—until her husband pointed out that it demanded “total abstinence” from alcohol. Pfeiffer was fond of the common practice of drinking a little wine or whiskey when she was sick. She didn't understand the WCTU's objection to medicinal alcohol use and decided not to sign, feeling “very sorry that the temperance people had a principle which was against common sense.”<sup>65</sup>

Pfeiffer didn't go to another WCTU meeting for three years, until Skelton came to her town in Pennsylvania to speak, and a local friend invited her to the lecture. She was skeptical of the literature she received claiming that alcohol harmed the body. She liked the women she met there, however, so she kept attending. Before long, Pfeiffer wrote, she had stopped drinking whiskey when she felt sick—not because she really thought it was bad, but because she felt ashamed to go into the drugstore and buy it when her neighbors knew she attended WCTU meetings. After a few “spells” of poor health untreated by alcohol, she realized that she felt

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<sup>64</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Ninth Annual Meeting* (1882), 28.

<sup>65</sup> Elise Pfeiffer, “Wrong Views on Temperance by Germans, and How They Are to Be Treated,” *Union Signal*, July 9, 1885, 9.

better. This experience led her to take a second look at the “scientific temperance” literature that claimed alcohol was poisonous. She ultimately concluded that “total abstinence is not against common sense, but every man of common sense ought to be a total abstainer, because it is unnatural to use poisonous drinks.”<sup>66</sup>

In Pfeiffer’s telling, her “conversion” to temperance principles worked because the WCTU welcomed and included her, giving her time to awaken to the truth about alcohol on her own. Social pressure, rather than internal conviction, initially kept her from buying alcohol. That progress built on itself when she experienced benefits from temperance firsthand. Pfeiffer’s story, as tailored for her audience of mostly native-born, white *Union Signal* readers, was a model of the “moral suasion” approach. She recommended a similarly patient method for the WCTU’s foreign work. Rather than preaching total abstinence, which the intended audience would find nonsensical, the WCTU should begin with alcohol’s “poisonous” nature and allow Germans to reach their own conclusions. Working in this way, Pfeiffer argued, would cause “thousands of Germans [to] come over into our ranks freely” and undercut the main objection among Germans to the temperance movement—that it was an attack on “personal liberty.”<sup>67</sup>

The Foreign Work department attempted to reach more people like Pfeiffer by promoting a German-language temperance newspaper, *Der Bahnbrecher (The Pioneer)*, edited by Schmitz and Skelton.<sup>68</sup> At the WCTU’s 1882 convention in Louisville, delegates agreed that each state

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<sup>66</sup> Pfeiffer, “Wrong Views on Temperance by Germans,” 9.

<sup>67</sup> Pfeiffer, “Wrong Views on Temperance by Germans,” 9.

<sup>68</sup> “Skelton, Henrietta,” Canada’s Early Women Writers I have not been able to find any extant issues of *Der Bahnbrecher* or *Der Deutsch-Amerikaner*. On date of founding, in *Minutes of the National WCTU Ninth*



union would work to financially support *Der Bahnbrecher*, either raising one dollar for every five hundred German citizens in that state or signing up one subscriber per one hundred Germans. “If this looks a little like ‘drafting,’ to some of our overburdened and depleted treasuries,” wrote the editors of the *Union Signal*, members should recall that the temperance “war” made unusual measures necessary.<sup>69</sup> Native-born white women’s alarm about German drinking, however, did not translate into significant financial support for *Der Bahnbrecher*, which ceased publishing around 1884. Its successor, a WCTU effort launched in 1886 called *Der Deutsch-Amerikaner (The German-American)*, fared little better, despite a strong fundraising push spearheaded by Sophie Grubb. “What a victory it will be for the enemy if it goes down,” she wrote in 1888. “Sisters, let us save this paper!”<sup>70</sup> Her appeals were unsuccessful; by 1890 the paper had shut down. Its demise marked the end of the WCTU’s most serious attempt to organize German Americans on the side of the temperance cause.

### **Foreign Work in the West**

In keeping with Frances Willard’s ambition that the WCTU “lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes” to encompass the whole nation, the Foreign Work department included “foreign-speaking people” who did not come from Europe under its purview. The department devoted special attention to Chinese immigrants in California and Spanish-speakers who lived in the states carved from the Mexican Cession of 1848. In both of these cases, the WCTU

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*Annual Meeting* (1882), x, Skelton’s report of work among Germans, she wrote that the paper had “passed through its first year.”

<sup>69</sup> *Union Signal*, February 22, 1883, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Sophie Grubb, “Official Communications: In Time of Peace, Prepare for War,” *Union Signal*, June 28, 1888, 12.

conducted its work primarily through an existing network of Protestant “home missionaries” who set up schools, churches, rescue homes, and medical clinics to assist and convert these populations.<sup>71</sup> While relatively few of the people they reached ultimately converted to Christianity, the education and English instruction offered by missionary institutions ensured that temperance literature would find at least some audience among these groups.

Protestant missionaries had begun traveling to China from the United States in the early nineteenth century. Single women undertook missions in increasing numbers in the 1860s. Several of these women, including Dr. Kate Bushnell, later took on leading roles in the World’s WCTU. By the 1870s, American organizations were also sending missionaries into the Chinatowns that new arrivals were establishing on the West Coast. Their goal was to convert Chinese laborers; they expected most of these workers to eventually return to China, hopefully becoming “native” ministers who could aid in the project of Christianizing the country.<sup>72</sup> This work continued even after the Page Act of 1875 banned Chinese women from immigrating and

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<sup>71</sup> On the Protestant missionary movement among Chinese immigrants in California, see Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Barbara L. Voss, “‘Every Element of Womanhood with Which to Make Life a Curse or Blessing’: Missionary Women’s Accounts of Chinese American Women’s Lives in Nineteenth-Century Pre-Exclusion California,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 21, no. 1 (February 2018): 105–34. On Protestant missionaries in the Southwest, see Juan Francisco Martinez, *Sea La Luz: The Making of Mexican Protestantism in the American Southwest, 1829–1900* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006); Susan M. Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths: Missionary Women and Pluralism in the American Southwest* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Voss, “‘Every Element of Womanhood,’” 110. See also Wesley Stephen Woo, “Protestant Work Among the Chinese in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850–1920” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1983).

the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 added most Chinese men (with a few exceptions for merchants and students).<sup>73</sup>

Missionaries and WCTU members opposed the Chinese Exclusion Acts and deplored the anti-Chinese harassment and violence that rose throughout the 1870s and intensified during the 1880s. Temperance leaders argued that the Chinese were the “most industrious and harmless” of American immigrant populations and that discrimination against them was unjust.<sup>74</sup> This opposition aligned with mainstream Republican opinion on the Exclusion Acts, which held that they were harmful to American industry. While WCTU leaders would come to favor immigration restriction in general, prominent temperance voices decried Chinese exclusion as unjust and hypocritical. Even as late as 1892, the WCTU convention passed a resolution allowing that “while we feel the necessity of more strenuous immigration laws, nevertheless we earnestly deprecate invidious distinction against any one nationality, as embodied in the Chinese Exclusion Act.”<sup>75</sup>

Why did the Foreign Work department appear relatively sympathetic to the Chinese? First, the majority of the evidence suggested that they were not heavy drinkers. Writing in 1880, Sarah Morrison referred to months spent visiting and living among missionaries (including Mary Carey) in San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose. She observed that alcoholism was unusual among Chinese people and that the real danger was opium; however, she blamed the British, and

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<sup>73</sup> As scholars have documented, Chinese immigration continued during the Exclusion era as migrants found ingenious ways to evade immigration requirements. See Lee, *At America's Gates*.

<sup>74</sup> *Union Signal*, December 19, 1889, 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Nineteenth Annual Meeting* (1892), 57

specifically Queen Victoria, for forcing first contact with the Chinese, and then the opium trade. “Oh! How different Queen Victoria’s compliance with schemes of greed and blood with which her otherwise long, fair record has been tarnished,” she wrote—a surprising charge given reverence for Queen Victoria as a model of moral female leadership.<sup>76</sup>

Mrs. H. N. Harris, another missionary based in Los Angeles who served as superintendent for “Spanish and Chinese” in 1884, reported that the WCTU’s usual methods of approaching drinkers did not work with Chinese immigrants. “They promptly tell us that when they do drink they do it quietly in their own quarters, and do not fight and riot in the street; and they advise us to turn our attention to our own countrymen who lie in the streets drunk,” she stated. Businesses that employed Chinese workers reported that they showed up more reliably than their white counterparts, and Harris argued that the anti-Chinese labor movement’s argument that Chinese “coolies” suppressed white workers’ wages was “nearly groundless.” What advocates of Exclusion were implying, Harris said, was that the United States was “too weak, with all its wealth of Christian institutions and wide spread knowledge, to cope with and put down the evil habits of a fraction of foreign born inhabitants.” She and her missionary and WCTU colleagues would attempt to prove them wrong by meeting Chinese immigrants as they arrived and laying down a foundation of Christianity upon which they could construct temperance principles.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Seventh Annual Meeting* (1880), 62–64.

<sup>77</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1885), civ-cv.

The women who worked on behalf of the WCTU among Chinese immigrants were usually also full-time missionaries to Chinatowns in California. Mary S. Carey, Nellie Blessing Eyster, and E. Edith Morris Stubbs—who all served as superintendents of Chinese Work during the 1880s and 1890s—had been members of the San Jose, California, Woman’s Board of Missions (SJ-WBM). The SJ-WBM, which was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, carried out missionary work in San Jose’s Market Street Chinatown during the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>78</sup> As scholar Barbara Voss has documented, the group worked primarily with Chinese laborers and their families, most of whom had arrived before the Exclusion era. They witnessed intense anti-Chinese discrimination and violence. When an 1887 arson fire destroyed the Market Street Chinatown, many of the city’s white inhabitants greeted it with celebration and described it as “a blessing.”<sup>79</sup> The female missionaries were especially concerned with helping the working-class Chinese women they encountered.

As in other missionary settings, the WCTU’s foreign workers did not view the women they sought to save as their equals. Their reports are laden with stereotypes, and their work rested on their foundational belief in the superiority of their own culture and religion. They identified and sympathized with Chinese women to a greater degree than members of their own demographic who did not have such close contact, however. Some of them, including Mary Carey, were able to recognize in the experiences of Chinese women some of the same problems that the WCTU was committed to solving for white, native-born women. Chinese women also

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<sup>78</sup> Voss, “Every Element of Womanhood.”

<sup>79</sup> Voss, “Every Element of Womanhood,” 109.

suffered from spousal neglect and abuse and a lack of political power, both within the home and outside of it. As Carey commented in 1878, “the poor Chinese women of San Jose possess in common with ourselves every element of womanhood with which to make life a curse or a blessing.”<sup>80</sup>

Temperance work was a natural addition for these missionaries. In the case of Chinese immigrants, the WCTU understood the drink and drug problem as closely connected to other highly publicized issues of vice: the forced prostitution of Chinese women and the use of opium. As historians like Peggy Pascoe have documented, female missionaries understood their work as a chance to deploy a uniquely female moral reform culture to correct the sexual exploitation, drug abuse, and poverty made possible by male authorities and male-dominated cultures—both Western and Chinese. Chinese arrivals, by dint of the federal and local discrimination levied against them, appeared as victims whom the WCTU should assist and uplift—similar to the way “heathen” native populations appeared to World’s WCTU missionaries.

The Foreign Work department’s work among Spanish-speakers had many similarities to work among the Chinese. This was despite the fact that its targets were not immigrants, but Hispanos whose territory the US had annexed from Mexico. Though the WCTU cooperated with existing Protestant missionary networks in the Southwest, those missionaries faced strong opposition in heavily Catholic communities. Frances Willard strove for ecumenicism within the WCTU and formally cooperated with Catholic temperance groups in the 1880s. In the Southwest context, however, the WCTU’s association with distrusted Protestant missionaries proved a

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<sup>80</sup> Voss, ““Every Element of Womanhood,”” 114.

significant barrier.<sup>81</sup> Bettie C. Forsyth, a California WCTU member who took charge of the “Spanish Department,” reported that her union did not dare to pass out the Spanish-language evangelical tracts that local church societies published for fear of offending Catholics and ruining any chance for the WCTU to build relationships.<sup>82</sup>

A similar balance between sympathy and condescension characterizes white WCTU members’ approach to those they sought to convert. Mrs. E. J. Harwood, an assistant for Spanish Work, attested that in at least a few places, the WCTU had persuaded Spanish-speakers to give up drinking wine at weddings and baptisms. She noted that, while some colleagues doubted they would make any progress, as far as she could tell they had kept the temperance pledge “as well as the same number of Americans under the same circumstances would have done.”<sup>83</sup> Harwood also observed that the leaflets Grubb had had translated into Spanish aimed at women were not particularly helpful. Few women could read; as heads of household, men tended to exert control over this area.<sup>84</sup> Like Mary Carey and Edith Morris, Harwood had been serving as a “home missionary” for many years before she started WCTU work. Also like them, her perspective is more sympathetic than reports given by WCTU women who rarely had actual contact with immigrants.

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<sup>81</sup> Bordin discusses Willard’s ecumenicism and push to cooperate with Catholic temperance organizations in *Woman and Temperance*, 87–88. But this push was controversial within the WCTU, where many temperance women did not welcome Catholic participation.

<sup>82</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirteenth Annual Meeting* (1886), xc.

<sup>83</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Seventeenth Annual Meeting* (1890), 236.

<sup>84</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Nineteenth Annual Meeting* (1892), 280–81.

### **“Difficult and Destitute”: Struggles of the Foreign Work Department**

Despite the fact that most WCTU members seemed to consider immigrants a significant factor in the success or failure of their cause, Sophie Grubb consistently reported that Foreign Work was underfunded. Translating and printing tracts and hiring lecturers was time-consuming and expensive. In 1884 Grubb complained that the Foreign Work department should “have after it D.D., (difficult and destitute).”<sup>85</sup> A few years later she skipped traveling to the national convention so she could save her seventy-five dollars of travel expenses for the department’s work.<sup>86</sup> She frequently reminded native-born readers that they could not expect to make any progress with immigrant voters if they did not put money toward outreach, but her urgings do not seem to have made much of an impact.

In addition, foreign-born lecturers did not always find themselves welcomed and supported. In 1884, Henrietta Skelton conducted extensive work among Germans in California while in the state as a delegate to the Prohibition Party convention. Over two months, she held several large temperance meetings and organized two German unions, seven non-German unions, and eighteen “Prohibition Clubs.” She wrote several temperance tracts herself and published and distributed them, spending twenty-seven dollars in the process. However, Grubb observed that Skelton “complains bitterly that her work was weakened because she was not endorsed by the principal workers.” It is not clear why these workers (presumably native-born WCTU and Prohibition Party leaders in California) resisted her, but the lack of full-throated

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<sup>85</sup> Sophie Grubb, “A New Degree,” *Union Signal*, April 24, 1884, 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Fifteenth Annual Meeting* (1888), 26.



support for the linguistic and organizational ability she brought was an obvious source of frustration for Skelton personally and an obstacle to Grubb's goals.<sup>87</sup>

Even when Foreign Work organizers did have support, the enormity of the task they faced pointed to the need both for more funds and personnel that the WCTU could likely ill afford. Grubb saw this up close several times in her home state of Missouri. As of June 1884, the state boasted one state and six local superintendents of Foreign Work, mostly aiming to reach Missouri's large German population. On the recommendation of Frances Willard, they brought in one of Skelton's German-born assistants, a Miss Mann, to do "missionary work" in St. Louis. Mann spent two weeks in the field there, making personal visits to German clergymen and families, passing out tracts, and holding meetings. With the help of Grubb and a few other native-born officers, her efforts led to the formation of a "promising Union" among German women, who "took hold of the work with interest."

Shortly thereafter, however, Grubb and Mann both fell ill from "overwork." Another helper left the city, with disastrous consequences. "The little fire that had burst into flame," Grubb wrote, "languished and went out for lack of nourishing care, and the work that had cost nearly forty dollars and weeks of unremitting labor, seems null." Grubb was not ready to give up—"somewhere, sometime, some seed may spring, and bear its fruit of love," she insisted—but she was discouraged. She lamented that the work was like "trying to make bricks without straw and decried the "apathy" of WCTU women.<sup>88</sup> "If it were not such grim humor to suggest the

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<sup>87</sup> Sophie Grubb, "Report of Work Among Foreigners," *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), xliii-xliv; "California," *Union Signal*, October 2, 1884, 11.

<sup>88</sup> Grubb, "Report of Work Among Foreigners," xliii.

thoughts ... I might entertain the idea that this not a fashionable department," she wrote acidly in her annual report. "No one will deny that our foreign population forms the greatest bulwark against the advance of the Temperance reform." Their votes, temperance women generally assumed, were decisive in elections on Sabbath observance, prohibition and enforcement, and scientific temperance. "Being voters, they stand side by side with our husbands, sons and brothers, and cancel by their influences all we have brought to bear on these. Are we pouring water into sieves when we work for the one class and not for the other?" Grubb lamented that the missionary spirit sent women to minister abroad rather than pushing them to "carry the blessed gospel of clean souls and pure bodies to those whom God hath sent to our doors, many of whom are our equals and peers in all that pertains to intellectual ability." Persuasion and assimilation were possible, Grubb insisted. What was more, if WCTU members failed to work as hard to persuade foreign-born men as they did to reach the native-born, the whole persuasive enterprise was wasted effort.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the failure of the German union in St. Louis, Grubb and other temperance women more inclined to give up on Foreign Work could identify several other setbacks. Foreign Work proponents had been using election results to tout the influence of temperance activism in persuading foreign-born voters. In Iowa, for example, Grubb pointed to the "5,000 German votes" that had been cast in an 1882 prohibition amendment campaign as evidence that Henrietta Skelton and Adolph Schmidt's work there had paid off and deserved more investment. By the early 1890s, however, election losses that could be blamed on immigrant voters were stacking

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<sup>89</sup> Sophie Grubb, "Report of Foreign Work," *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1885), xcvi.

up. In the same way that some WCTU leaders blamed losses in the South on Black voters, they began to use these results as evidence that persuasion was impossible. As was the case in South, blaming losses on immigrant voters scapegoated them and drew attention away from a difficult truth: many native-born white voters remained opposed to temperance.

### **Conclusion**

As discussed earlier, there were always women in the WCTU who were skeptical that moral suasion methods would have any effect on immigrants. They subscribed to stereotypes about immigrants as disproportionately criminal, and they favored immigration and voting restrictions as the only way to combat these influences and secure a temperate nation. The voting behavior of immigrant men, who due to variations in state laws were often eligible to vote within a few years or even a few months of arrival, provoked white temperance women's anxiety. In 1884, WCTU Corresponding Secretary Caroline Buell warned that "the tide of immigration" continued to rise. Its most dangerous effect was that new arrivals "do not for long occupy a neutral position, but in a few short months are enlisted in the army of our opponents and the weapon of the ballot placed in their hands." For Buell, this was an injustice, especially when "our own boys whom the mothers of this land have trained in the principles which tend to the making of our best citizenship" couldn't vote until the age of twenty-one.<sup>90</sup>

This language is similar to the arguments suffragists would make more frequently in the late 1880s and 1890s—that immigrant and Black men should not vote when native-born white women could not—but it remains couched in a maternalist metaphor about women's influence

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<sup>90</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), cxl.

on politics through their children. “In some of the States,” Buell concluded, “already the native-born are almost outvoted by the foreign-born population and in a larger number the balance of power is held by these same newcomers. Whatever is to be the solution of this vexatious question should be brought to bear quickly.”<sup>91</sup>

As the lack of investment into Foreign Work continued, the status of foreign-born voters as a “threat” to temperance seemed to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Where Frances Willard had once expressed her belief in the power of persuasion and the assimilability of European immigrants, as early as 1887 her emphasis had changed. In her president’s address to that year’s convention, she recommended that the WCTU come out in favor of immigration restrictions. While she claimed that solidarity with the white working classes who had begun to demand restrictions was her main motivation, the truer reason came out shortly afterward: she no longer believed that most immigrants could be persuaded and assimilated. “The undigested mass of unenlightened opinion renders sluggish the nation’s brain and conscience in respect of those reforms which we most desire,” she said. That “mass” could not be digested quickly enough for the WCTU’s goals to be accomplished, Willard believed, and those goals were essential to transforming the country into “the working-man’s and working-woman’s paradise.”<sup>92</sup>

In an 1890 interview that would launch an international controversy over the WCTU’s racial politics (discussed in the next chapter), Willard reinforced the idea that the whole nation suffered from a shared problem: large numbers of uneducated voters, mainly immigrants and

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<sup>91</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), cxl.

<sup>92</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Fourteenth Annual Meeting* (1887), 97.

Black men, whose participation in elections endangered the republic. “Alien illiterates ... rule our cities to-day, the saloon is their palace, and the toddy stick their scepter,” she insisted. “It is not fair that they should vote, nor is it fair that a plantation Negro, who can neither read nor write, whose ideas are bounded by the fence of his own field and the price of his own mule, should be entrusted with the ballot.”<sup>93</sup> Willard’s solution was an educational test for voting, which she argued would both protect democracy from “whiskey-logged roughs” and give those excluded an incentive to pursue education.<sup>94</sup> The consequences of this position would follow the Foreign Work department, and the WCTU as a whole, into the twentieth century.

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<sup>93</sup> “The Race Problem: Miss Willard on the Political Puzzle of the South,” *The Voice* (New York, NY), October 23, 1890.

<sup>94</sup> “The Race Problem.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### “THE SHACKLES OF INTEMPERANCE”

#### RACIAL POLITICS AND BLACK WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN THE WCTU, 1880–1895

In 1880, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union launched a “Department of Work Among Colored People” to win Black support for the cause of temperance. Initially, the new department seemed like a leadership opportunity for the small number of Black women who were already members. The WCTU’s president, Frances Willard, declared in 1881 that it would be best to have a Black woman in charge of the department. “As a rule,” Willard said, referring to both Colored Work and Foreign Work, “we can all accomplish most among people of our own class—especially of our own nationality.” At the same convention, a young Michigan woman named Lucy Simpson, who was Black, addressed the assembled delegates “in the interest of the colored race.” By several accounts, Simpson had been one of the first Black women to join the WCTU and possibly the first to organize a local union. Yet it was not Simpson, but a white Michigan woman named Jane M. Kinney who received the job of department leader.<sup>1</sup> We do not

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Willard, “President’s Address,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), lxix; *Minutes of the WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 42–43. Biographical detail on Simpson (later Lucy Thurman) is from Maureen Elgersman Lee, “Biographical Sketch of Lucy Thurman, 1849-1918,” Biographical Database of Black Woman Suffragists, 2017, [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cbibliographic\\_details%7C3567719](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3567719).

know Simpson's reaction to this snub, but she did not give up on the WCTU. Born Lucy Smith in Canada in 1849, Simpson grew up as a free Black woman in an educated, religious Ottawa family. She watched the demise of American slavery from across the border. Just after the end of the Civil War, she moved to the United States and took a job as a teacher in Maryland. In the US, she met renowned Black leaders like Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown. They introduced her to their reform circles. Around the 1870s, she moved to Jackson, Michigan, and became an early member of the WCTU. At first, she organized white women into unions, but the WCTU soon deployed her as an organizer for the "Colored Work" department throughout the Midwest, West, and South. Her first short marriage, about which little is known, ended around this time. She remarried in 1883 and was from then on known as Lucy Thurman. She remained a WCTU member until her death in 1908.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Thurman's education and her early life on both sides of the border had made her feel comfortable working in collaboration with white people. In any case, she clearly believed both in temperance and in the potential for interracial collaboration to achieve it.

Like other Black women in the WCTU, however, Thurman had to navigate complicated racial politics to participate in the organization. Many of her colleagues treated the "Colored Work" department as a field for missionary organizing that would allow WCTU members to "uplift" a backward people. Others saw Black Americans as uneducated, undisciplined, and potentially violent drinkers. They argued for voting restrictions and other controls as the only way to achieve a temperate society. By the early 1890s, these tensions had erupted into the open

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, "Biographical Sketch of Lucy Thurman." Little is known about her first marriage.

in the form of an acrimonious conflict between Frances Willard and Black journalist and activist Ida B. Wells. In an 1890 interview, Willard made a series of racist comments, calling for educational restrictions on voting and promoting the myth that mobs lynched Black men because they had raped white women. “The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt,” she said. “The grog shop is its centre of power. The safety of women, of childhood, of the home, is menaced at a thousand localities at this moment.”<sup>3</sup> Wells publicized the interview a few years later and called Willard to account for the impact of her words. Willard reacted defensively and launched personal attacks on Wells that sparked an international controversy. Black WCTU leaders like Thurman were caught in the crossfire. Thurman in particular received heavy criticism from the Black press for displaying symbolic support for Willard during the height of the controversy.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than respond to the external attacks, Thurman directed her efforts inward—once again “in the interest of the colored race.” At a tense WCTU meeting in 1893, Thurman waited until just before a routine vote on the list of departments the organization would sponsor in the upcoming year. Then she seized her moment and stood up to object. The WCTU had discontinued “Colored Work” few years earlier, and Thurman charged that the organization overlooked and undervalued Black Americans. She demanded to know whether—as Wells charged and as Willard vehemently denied—there was in fact a “color line” in WCTU work. She remarked, according to the *Chicago Herald*, that “while all professed to work together

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<sup>3</sup> “The Race Problem: Miss Willard on the Political Puzzle of the South,” *The Voice* (New York, NY), October 23, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> “Miss Wells Lectures,” *Cleveland Gazette* 12, no. 16 (November 24, 1894): 1.



irrespective of color, the colored people were ignored in a way that seemed to indicate that the color line was rather sharply drawn.”<sup>5</sup> Thurman then moved that the “Department of Colored Work” be reestablished—with a Black woman as superintendent. The mostly white audience responded with scattered applause, and a lively debate began. Though one white WCTU leader expressed the belief that a separate department for Black Americans constituted drawing the “color line,” ultimately the convention passed Thurman’s motion and appointed her superintendent. Thurman assumed the job that she had been passed over for twelve years earlier.

While scholars have focused considerable attention on the conflict between Willard and Wells, they have not placed it in a context that explains the institutional origins of “Colored Work” in the WCTU and the national leadership of women like Lucy Thurman. Scholars like Vron Ware and Paula Giddings have shown how the conflict revealed the interpersonal and structural barriers to women’s interracial organizing in the late nineteenth century. They point out, as Wells had in the 1890s, that white women like Willard upheld a gendered, racialized propaganda campaign that portrayed Black men as violent rapists and white women as vulnerable victims. This mythology provided justification for decades of racist terror.<sup>6</sup> In addition to her criticism of Willard on the lynching question, Wells pointed out that the WCTU

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<sup>5</sup> “Color Line Visible,” *Chicago Herald*, October 22, 1893, *Temperance and Prohibition Papers* microfilm (1977), Section II, Reel 31, Scrapbook 11, Frame 303, in Thomas Dublin and Angela Scheuerer. *Why Did African-American Women Join the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1880 to 1900?* (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Wells first described this dynamic in her 1892 pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, which presented the evidence she had collected not only that many charges of rape against Black men were fabricated, but also that an allegation of rape was not even involved in two-thirds of lynching cases. Wells described this myth of the Black male rapist as an attempt to divert attention from the real horror of white men’s sexual victimization of Black women. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York: New York Age, 1892), 8, 14.

allowed segregated chapters, especially in the South. As Wells and her allies showed, this episode revealed Willard's attempt to walk a tricky political tightrope. She was trying to keep the WCTU's white Southern members happy while maintaining both a substantial Black membership and a progressive racial reputation for her organization.<sup>7</sup>

Framing the story of race in the WCTU as a conflict between these two leaders, however, obscures the dynamics of racial tension and struggle that had been playing out for years within the organization and continued after the conflict faded from the headlines. This chapter places the Willard/Wells clash in the context of the longer story of "Colored Work" in the WCTU, focusing on the 1880s and 1890s. It explores the origins of the department as a "home missionary" project led by white women who approached Black people in much the same way they did immigrants. Many of them conceptualized Black people as almost childlike objects of pity and charity. At the same time, they acknowledged and worried over Black men's new power—as citizens and voters—over the future of prohibition in America. As the white South gained increasing power within the WCTU, white temperance women began to see the power of Black voters as a threat, rather than an opportunity.

Lucy Thurman and the other Black women who joined the WCTU did not allow their white peers to define them. Like the white WCTU women whose stories are explored in chapter 1, some of them had personal experiences with alcoholism that likely inspired their activism.

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<sup>7</sup> For other accounts of the Willard/Wells conflict, see Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History* (London: Verso, 1992); Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: Amistad, 2008); Leslie Dunlap, "In the Name of the Home: Temperance Women and Southern Grass-Roots Politics, 1873–1933," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2001). See also Suzanne Marilley, "Frances Willard and the Feminism of Fear," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 123–46.

Black temperance women, as historians like Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham have demonstrated, also brought their own values and social priorities to temperance work. Their campaigns against alcohol were rooted in the desire for racial uplift, respectability, and self-protection that motivated much of Black clubwomen's work during the dangerous years following Reconstruction.<sup>8</sup> They also recognized that they had few other venues for collaborating with white women and other Black women as part of a national organization.<sup>9</sup> Despite its flaws, as Glenda Gilmore writes, many Black women perceived the WCTU as “their best hope for building strong communities and securing interracial cooperation” in the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Black women in the WCTU challenged white women's condescension, sought leadership posts within the organization for themselves, and offered their own arguments for why temperance should matter to Black people. The participation and leadership of Black women—women like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Lucy Simpson Thurman, Rosetta Lawson, Sarah Woodson Early, and many others—challenged white supremacy within the organization long before and after Wells criticized Willard. Glenda Gilmore has described white supremacy in this era as “a tightly wound tangle of individual strands.” It succeeded because it appeared to be a solid monolith, but in practice it was vulnerable to people working to “unravel” its assumptions

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<sup>8</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Woman's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 333.

<sup>10</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 32.

and practices wherever possible.<sup>11</sup> Black women in the WCTU continued this work of “unraveling” throughout the 1880s and 1890s. They eventually assumed leadership of the “Department of Work Among Colored People,” challenging its original intention as a paternalistic missionary effort. At the state level, especially in the South, they rejected white women’s attempts to supervise them, organizing into Black “No. 2” unions that affiliated directly with the National WCTU. Though this structure preserved segregation, it also allowed Black women to conduct their own work as they saw fit, without interference from white women. Black women’s insistence on remaining within the WCTU, assuming leadership positions, and challenging white supremacy ensured that their influence was meaningful within the organization.

### **Founding the Department of “Colored Work”**

In 1880, a WCTU leader named Sarah P. Morrison traveled west from her home in Indiana to begin work as head of the WCTU’s new department of “Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People.” She stopped first in Indian Territory, where she praised the temperance sentiment of the Cherokee and condemned the US government for violating the “plighted faith” of its treaties with the tribes. Arriving in San Jose, California, Morrison consulted with the missionaries ministering to Chinese populations there and then attended a WCTU reception in honor of First Lady (and staunch temperance advocate) Lucy Webb Hayes. At this function, she met the only Black attendee, an older woman named Mary Armsterd.

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<sup>11</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 32.

Armsterd's singular presence in this room full of white women made a deep impression on Morrison.

She reflected that Armsterd "doubtless often stands alone, and ... may know well the solitariness of not being understood, if indeed she escapes being misunderstood."<sup>12</sup> Some of this misunderstanding came from Armsterd's fellow congregants in her Zion M. E. Church, who had declined to join her in the WCTU. Morrison perceived, however, that the real barrier to understanding came from herself and other liberal-minded white women. They could not truly know what it was like for Armsterd when white women singled her out "as an exponent among us of her race." Black women who entered mostly white spaces, Morrison thought, must struggle not only with feelings of isolation, but also with the knowledge that, even if white colleagues treated them with a veneer of respect and kindness, they might still be feeling "a nausea of the flesh, the baleful consciousness of the negro skin ... the thin, impervious, immovable, inexorable veil, *prejudice*."<sup>13</sup>

Morrison's comments represent a rare instance of introspection on the part of a white temperance woman about the experiences of individual Black women in the largely white space of the WCTU. Such moments of empathy were unusual because the organizing assumption of the "Department of Work Among Colored People," as most white WCTU members understood it, was that Black Americans would be students of temperance principles. As with the Departments of Southern Work, Work Among Indians, and Foreign Work, the WCTU conceived

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah P. Morrison, "Report of Committee on Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People," *Minutes of the National WCTU Seventh Annual Meeting* (1880), 64.

<sup>13</sup> Morrison, "Report of Committee on Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People," 65.

of “Colored Work” as a project in which committed members would spread the good news about temperance and provide help, support, and instruction to populations in need.<sup>14</sup> While white leaders in the WCTU hoped Black women would join the organization, most of them envisioned themselves instructing Black recruits, rather than cooperating on equal terms. In this formulation, contact between white women and Black women could only be positive for Black women, who would have the opportunity to educate themselves and improve their lives and their communities. White temperance women who worked as “Colored Work” organizers rarely considered how such contact might be difficult or painful for women like Mary Armsterd, or what they might need to learn or change about themselves to be better partners to her. Neither did they deeply consider what reasons of her own Armsterd might have had for joining the WCTU.

In this approach, the WCTU mirrored that of the Department of Work Among Foreign Speaking People and of the broader home missionary movement. As discussed in chapter 2, the home missionary movement drew from evangelical Protestant church networks to fund and organize permanent church communities. Home missionaries focused on Western frontier settlements and tribal lands. After the Civil War, missionaries and Northern benevolent associations also moved into the South to proselytize, set up schools, and provide aid to newly freed people. The American Missionary Association (AMA), for example, sent hundreds of

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<sup>14</sup> The home missionary movement of the nineteenth-century United States, centered on organizations like the American Home Missionary Society and the American Missionary Association, funded evangelical Christian missionaries to travel to frontier settlements and assist them in establishing permanent churches. The AHMS relied on the fundraising and contributions of women and was drawn from the same networks as the WCTU’s base of support—white, evangelical Protestants (especially Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists), and based in the Northeast and Midwest. See David G. Horvath, “American Home Missionary Society,” Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, accessed September 15, 2019, <http://amistadresearchcenter.tulane.edu/archon/?p=collections/findingaid&id=9&q=&rootcontentid=2217>.

agents into Southern states during and after the Civil War, ultimately founding more than five hundred schools and colleges to educate the formerly enslaved. As historian Joe Martin Richardson has explained, the AMA viewed alcohol as “a major cause of poverty, idleness, and licentiousness” among Black Americans. Its missionaries denounced alcohol and tobacco use and set up dozens of temperance societies, with mixed results. White AMA missionaries sincerely believed in legal equality for Black Americans, but they also exhibited paternalistic attitudes towards those they sought to assist. These worldviews also influenced early “Colored Work” efforts in the WCTU.<sup>15</sup>

In 1880, the National WCTU established the unwieldy department of “Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People”—three groups united more by the absence of whiteness than by any similarities in their drinking behavior. The following year, “Colored Work” split off on its own and divided into a Northern branch and a Southern branch. WCTU leadership encouraged state and local unions, especially in areas with larger Black populations, to adopt it as one of their active departments. As in the WCTU’s areas of specialty, each union that chose to take on “Colored Work” named a superintendent to direct its activity. This leader arranged lectures for Black audiences, distributed literature, and organized Black women, children, and sometimes men into unions or children’s groups called “Bands of Hope.”<sup>16</sup> By the end of the decade, more than a dozen states had adopted “Colored Work” and reported on their progress to the National WCTU.

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<sup>15</sup> Joe Martin Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861–1890* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986), 240–42.

<sup>16</sup> For a representative description of this work, see Frances Harper, “Work among Colored People,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1885), lxxxii.

Black voters' political influence motivated the WCTU to establish the department. As with immigrants, white WCTU leaders understood that Black voters were now "a recognized power in our land." New prohibition laws would need their support to have a chance of passage.<sup>17</sup> Local unions were already aware of the electoral math in their own communities. In 1882, an officer from Missouri reported that the local option law for which her union was campaigning "cannot be carried except by the help of the colored people."<sup>18</sup> An 1883 dispatch from a worker in Connecticut claimed that one town had enough Black voters to "control the balance of power, showing conclusively the need of stirring effort."<sup>19</sup>

Some white organizers were optimistic about the WCTU's ability to influence these voters. In 1883 Sarah La Fetra, a WCTU leader in Washington, DC, reported on a recent local option election that June in Alexandria, Virginia.<sup>20</sup> Workers had organized mass meetings in Black neighborhoods and churches. Despite the local saloons' attempts to tempt voters away with free drinks, Black men still showed up "in droves," to the meetings—after a stint at the bar. Despite the "fumes of whiskey" emanating from these audience members, the temperance workers understood that they had an important opportunity. "They were the very men they were

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<sup>17</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Ninth Annual Meeting* (1882), 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Tenth Annual Meeting* (1883), xxi.

<sup>20</sup> This election occurred during a brief reversal in the march of disenfranchisement across Virginia. While Virginia Democrats had amended the state's constitution in 1876 to add a poll tax, disenfranchising many Black men, in 1879 a coalition of Black voters, Republicans, and a few Democrats known as the "Readjusters" took over the state legislature. In 1882 they removed the poll tax, but the reprieve was brief. The following year, Democrats regained the legislature and instituted new voting restrictions that enabled widespread election corruption and marked the beginning of a renewed and prolonged era of Jim Crow disenfranchisement. See Brent Tarter, "Disfranchisement," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, December 7, 2020, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/disfranchisement/>.



after,” La Fetra explained. “*They had the ballot.*” On election day, the DC WCTU arrived at the polls to motivate their supporters by playing a portable organ and singing hymns. The measure had passed, La Fetra concluded with satisfaction, “and the vote of the colored people did it.”<sup>21</sup> She and her colleagues hoped that they could achieve more such victories in the future.

### **White Organizers of “Colored Work”**

For the first few years, white women directed “Colored Work” at the national level. The first director of the Northern branch was Jane M. Kinney, a widowed white woman from Michigan who seemed to have no particular qualifications for the job. Kinney viewed her work as a balance between selfless charity and political caution. “Let us, while we send money to his uncivilized brother in Africa, remember our duty to these at our very doors, and let us as workers urge not only common humanity but common prudence,” she wrote in 1883. Black Americans would remain “friends or enemies to this country ... It is for the Christian Temperance people of the country to determine which.”<sup>22</sup> WCTU women, Kinney was saying, should care about the welfare of their Black neighbors and urge their abstinence from alcohol in the interest of “common humanity.” They would do well, however, not to forget “common prudence”: the more politically relevant fact that Black men’s votes carried real power to achieve, or doom, a temperate polity. It was the WCTU’s duty to make sure that Black men and women knew how to “vote right.”

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<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Charles Kinney, “Report of Work for Colored People at the North,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Tenth Annual Meeting* (1883), xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> Kinney, “Report of Work for Colored People at the North,” xxiii.

In the South, a dynamic reformer named Sallie Chapin led the Department of “Colored Work” and deeply influenced the course of racial politics in the WCTU. Born around 1830 in Charleston, South Carolina, Chapin was active in relief work during the Civil War and tended to the graves of Confederate soldiers as part of the “Ladies’ Memorial Association” after its end. Chapin was among the WCTU members with a personal connection to alcoholism, likely through both her husband and son. “You will fill a drunkard grave long before winter comes on,” she wrote to her husband Leonard in the early 1870s. “Your bloated miserable form tells the sad tale of your obsession.”<sup>23</sup> Leonard’s sudden death in 1878 left Chapin to fend for herself, like many white women in the postwar South. She discovered interest and purpose in public reform work. Chapin attended her first national WCTU convention in 1879 and met Frances Willard there, and the two women became close friends.<sup>24</sup>

As historians like David Blight and Nina Silber have detailed, the decades after the Civil War saw white Americans in the North and South prioritize sectional reunion and a sanitized Civil War memory over the imperatives of racial justice.<sup>25</sup> Scholars Leslie Dunlap and Joan Johnson have argued that, as Johnson puts it, “the WCTU served the cause of post-Civil War sectional reconciliation as well as prohibition,” partly because of Chapin’s influence and her

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<sup>23</sup> Sallie Chapin to Leonard Chapin, c. 1873, quoted in Joan Johnson, “Sallie Chapin: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and Reconciliation after the Civil War,” in *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol. 2, ed. Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 88.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, “Sallie Chapin,” 88–89.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the politics of sectional reconciliation, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

close relationship with Willard.<sup>26</sup> Chapin represented herself as a Southern woman who wanted to work on equal footing and in a spirit of sisterhood with Northern women. However, she defiantly maintained both her Southern identity and her pride in the Confederacy. Chapin and other Southern white women made their cooperation contingent on their being allowed to direct efforts to organize African Americans in the South without too much northern interference. Accordingly, Chapin took over the job of director of “Colored Work in the South” in 1881 and held the position almost continuously for a decade.<sup>27</sup> She spoke frequently to Black audiences, claiming that they looked up to and even adored her. She made no secret of her patronizing attitudes toward Black people. Like many white Southerners, she also defended slavery as benevolent and claimed that “the negro is more of a slave to the whisky seller than he ever was to an owner.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Defining Black (In)temperance**

Many white women involved in “Colored Work” based their ideas about it on a broader impression of the relationship between Black Americans and alcohol. To most of the WCTU’s white leadership, it was self-evident that Black Americans had unique needs and a particular relationship with drink that required a specialized department. They did not always agree, though, on how to characterize that relationship. Some leaders believed that Black people were innately temperate and therefore obvious allies for the WCTU. A white California WCTU leader

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, “Sallie Chapin,” 91; Dunlap, “In the Name of the Home.”

<sup>27</sup> A Black woman named Sarah Early briefly succeeded Chapin in 1888, but Chapin resumed her work after Early’s resignation. Sarah Early, “Work Among the Colored People of the Southern States,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Fifteenth Annual Meeting* (1888), 272–73.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Johnson, “Sallie Chapin,” 95.

attested that her state's Black residents were "temperate, industrious, and well-to-do in this world's goods."<sup>29</sup> WCTU Corresponding Secretary Caroline Buell agreed, writing in 1885 that "naturally, the colored race is a temperate people and my observation has yet to show me that they, as a class, are engaged in the liquor traffic in the most indirect manner. Why then do we neglect so hopeful a field?"<sup>30</sup> Black men's apparently low participation in the "liquor traffic" as an economic pursuit was important. The unscrupulous business interests that profited from human suffering were the WCTU's chief foe besides spirits themselves. If Black people were not making money from drink, then their primary relationship to it was as innocent potential victims of its corrosive power and potential supporters whom the WCTU should tap. As such, they deserved the WCTU's sympathy and help.

While hard data on rates of drunkenness in the nineteenth century is not conclusive, some evidence does exist to support Buell's characterization of African Americans as a "temperate people" during this period.<sup>31</sup> According to scholar Denise Herd, contemporary accounts from the antebellum period almost never described African Americans as drunk or going on drinking binges, compared to descriptions of whites and Native Americans during the same decades.<sup>32</sup> Although increasingly strict laws barring enslaved people from drinking took effect in the

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<sup>29</sup> Morrison, "Report of Committee on Work Among the Indians, Chinese, and Colored People," 64.

<sup>30</sup> Caroline Buell, "Corresponding Secretary's Report," *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1885), 122.

<sup>31</sup> See also William J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), xi, appendix 1. Focusing on the antebellum period, Rorabaugh detected an overall dramatic increase in Americans' drinking between 1790 and 1840.

<sup>32</sup> Denise A. Herd, "'We Cannot Stagger to Freedom': A History of Blacks and Alcohol in American Politics," in *Yearbook of Substance Use and Abuse*, vol. 3., ed. Leon Brill and Charles Winick (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1985), 144–45.

decades leading up to the Civil War, Herd finds that this pattern largely continued even after Emancipation. Federal mortality statistics from 1880 show that delirium tremens, the dangerous alcohol withdrawal syndrome, was exceedingly rare among the “colored race.” Where death records do include racial data, only 0.7 “colored” deaths per 1000 were attributed to alcoholism, compared to 2.5 per 100 for “whites” and 6.7 for “Irish.”<sup>33</sup> An 1899 statistical analysis of the “liquor problem” conducted by John Koren found low rates of “habitual drunkenness” among African Americans.

Nevertheless, other prohibitionists—including within the WCTU—insisted just as emphatically that Black Americans were largely *intemperate*. Herd identifies two main archetypes among the racist stereotypes used by Southern politicians. During the 1880s and 1890s, propaganda often portrayed Black people as stupid or naïve. Liquor interests easily duped or corrupted them into selling their votes for a glass of beer. By 1900, however, the dominant image of Black men in prohibition propaganda matched the one Southerners used to justify lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation. Spirits drove Black men crazy and made them vicious and violent, especially toward white women.<sup>34</sup> These images also appeared within the WCTU. Sallie Chapin, for example, suggested repeatedly that African Americans had been better off under the “protection” of their former owners. In a speech before the 1881 WCTU convention, she asked who was “responsible” for those who had been enslaved. “They are the wards of the nation. What is the nation doing for them? Licensing bad men to sell them burning,

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<sup>33</sup> Herd, ““We Cannot Stagger to Freedom,”” 162.

<sup>34</sup> Herd, ““We Cannot Stagger to Freedom,”” 164; Denise A. Herd, “Prohibition, Racism and Class Politics in the Post-Reconstruction South,” *Journal of Drug Issues* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 83–84.

fiery poison; that is what it is doing, and they cannot brag of enfranchising them until they do it. They ought to take care of them as they do of the Indian and the soldier.”<sup>35</sup> Characteristically, Chapin placed the blame for the supposed sorry state of African Americans on the federal government as well as on liquor sellers.

Frances Willard and the WCTU expended significant effort on welcoming white Southern women into the organization during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>36</sup> As Chapin and other women like her gained more influence within the WCTU, their definitions and explanations of Black drinking behavior made inroads among white WCTU leaders in the North.<sup>37</sup> Willard praised Chapin for her apparent success in recruiting Black Southerners’ votes. “Perhaps,” she said in 1884, “we have hardly appreciated the peculiar significance of the drink problem at the South, where an ignorant, undisciplined race, long held back from temptation by the laws that prevailed in slavery time, was suddenly left free to patronize saloons and became the prey of politicians glad to pay for their votes at so many glasses apiece.”<sup>38</sup> Like Buell and others, Willard still characterized Black Southerners as victims of unscrupulous liquor dealers and politicians in need of some intervention from the WCTU. At the same time, however, she painted them not as naturally temperate but as “ignorant” and “undisciplined.” Only the strictures of enslavement had reined in their excesses. In this context, the Department of Colored Work’s mission was less to

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<sup>35</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eighth Annual Meeting* (1881), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 76–83.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, “Sallie Chapin,” 96.

<sup>38</sup> Frances Willard, “President’s Address,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), 55–56.

take advantage of an untapped source of temperance sentiment and more to do as much as possible to control or mitigate a threat.

### **Black Women and Temperance: Political and Personal Motives**

The involvement of many Black women in the WCTU complicates the story of the “Colored Work” department tremendously. Black women participated in the WCTU in two main ways. At the local and state level, they organized into unions. While some women joined integrated unions in Northern states, in the South unions were usually segregated. White leaders often designated Black unions with the name “No. 2,” but some named themselves after Frances Willard or Black temperance leaders like Frances Harper or Lucy Thurman. Black women, of course, served as officers of these unions. When a state had both a Black and a white union, each affiliated directly with the national WCTU organization—offering opportunities for Black women to give reports and attend conventions on an equal basis with white colleagues. While these unions might cooperate with white women’s groups in their area, they often worked in their own communities and according to their own prerogatives. However, Black women also achieved national leadership as officers in the WCTU’s Department of Colored Work. In 1883, suffragist and abolitionist Frances Harper took over as superintendent of the Northern branch of “Colored Work.” In contrast to her Southern counterpart Sallie Chapin, Harper and her associates challenged stereotypes of African Americans, white women’s paternalistic attitudes, and interpersonal racism within the WCTU.

Why did Black women join the WCTU and the temperance movement in general, especially if Herd’s finding that African Americans were unlikely to binge drink is correct? In part, they were continuing longstanding Black involvement in the temperance movement both

before and after the Civil War in organizations like the International Order of Good Templars. Temperance was strongly linked to the abolition of slavery. Some of the same reformers had worked for both causes and saw progress in both as evidence that the millennium was drawing closer. Like white women, African American women also viewed temperance through the lens of their religious commitments. Black churches, as Evelyn Higginbotham writes, “historically linked social regeneration, in the specific form of racial advancement, to spiritual regeneration.”<sup>39</sup> To the extent that it advanced the race, temperance would also help to bring about a reborn society.

In addition, some Black leaders viewed intemperance as an additional obstacle to “race progress.” In 1837, for example, the New England Temperance Society of Colored People declared that “the use of intoxicating liquors in our community tends greatly to retard the progress of emancipation, by throwing weapons into the hands of our enemies.” These “enemies” would claim Black drunkenness as evidence that enslaved people were licentious and undisciplined, needing the “civilizing influence” of enslavers.<sup>40</sup> Both during and after the Civil War, Black thinkers and activists (as well as white ones) often equated intemperance and enslavement. Frederick Douglass, for example, wrote in the 1880s that “it was about as well to be a slave to master, as to be a slave to whisky and rum. When the slave was drunk the slaveholder had no fear that he would plan an insurrection . . . It was the sober, thoughtful slave who was dangerous.”<sup>41</sup> Though white Southerners like Sallie Chapin and Black reformers like

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<sup>39</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 121

<sup>40</sup> *The Liberator*, October 29, 1837, quoted in Herd, “We Cannot Stagger to Freedom,” 150.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Herd, “We Cannot Stagger to Freedom,” 148.



Frederick Douglass both described intemperance as a “second slavery” for Black Americans, they meant different things by it. For Chapin, white “protection” via enslavement had shielded Black people from their own appetites and the ill effects of alcohol. To Douglass and other Black temperance supporters, however, drunkenness represented enslavement because it prevented Black people from using the full power of their minds and capacities. In a pro-temperance article from 1892, Ida B. Wells wrote that “it is like playing with fire to take that in the mouth which steals away the brain.” Black drunkenness provided the white legal system with an “excuse” to reintroduce a racial caste system by incarcerating Black men and boys in convict labor camps.<sup>42</sup>

Historians like Paula Giddings and Glenda Gilmore have documented that after Emancipation Black women of the emerging middle classes connected the movement with their aspiration to a level of “respectability” that they hoped would increase Black self-reliance and self-respect and lessen white prejudice and discrimination.<sup>43</sup> As historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, who coined the term “respectability politics,” has shown, these women demonstrated “a bourgeois vision that vacillated between an attack on the failure of America to live up to its liberal ideals of equality and justice and an attack on the values and lifestyle of those blacks who transgressed white middle-class propriety.”<sup>44</sup> According to Higginbotham, temperance represented an essential element of this propriety. It indicated thrift and control over one’s bodily appetites. For Black men, abstention from alcohol indicated responsibility and care for one’s family.

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<sup>42</sup> Ida B. Wells, “Symposium—Temperance,” *AME Church Review* 7, no. 4 (April 1891): 2.

<sup>43</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.

<sup>44</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 15.

In Black women, temperance was part of what Higginbotham defines as a “larger discourse that often explicitly deployed manners and morals” to contest white charges of Black immorality.<sup>45</sup> As many Black feminist scholars, including Higginbotham, Hazel Carby, and Deborah Gray White, have shown, stereotypes of Black women’s supposed laziness and promiscuity formed a cornerstone of racist ideology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>46</sup> Popular representations of Black women in culture and white scholarship in the late nineteenth century depicted immoral Black women as the source of problems in Black schools, families, homes, and communities. These images served to justify and excuse white men’s widespread sexual victimization of Black women. They also prompted many Black women to resist such dehumanization by setting a standard of dignified womanhood through dress, bearing, temperance, hygiene, and sexual purity. Such self-presentation functioned as a defense against sexual harassment and aggression and an assertion of moral worth.<sup>47</sup> As Gilmore showed in her study of interracial relations in the North Carolina WCTU in the 1890s, the WCTU also offered an opportunity for Black women to gain leadership experience and skills and to advocate for themselves and their communities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 194.

<sup>46</sup> Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894–1994* (New York: Penguin, 1999). See also Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880–1920* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1990); Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 191–94

<sup>48</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 46–49.

Finally, just like white women, some Black temperance women found motivation in their personal experiences with alcohol. Two very different examples of Black women WCTU leaders with alcoholic husbands illustrate two of the possible, and fraught, paths that Black women could take in temperance work. One of them was Emma J. Ray, an evangelist and temperance activist who settled in Seattle, Washington, in the late 1880s. Ray's husband's alcoholism was an important part of the conversion story she chronicled in her 1926 autobiography *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*. Like Douglass, Ray drew on the powerful metaphor of alcohol as bondage. She framed her narrative as a powerful personal redemption arc, placing her in an older, mid-nineteenth-century tradition of religious temperance narratives as well as a lineage of Black women spiritual memoirists.<sup>49</sup>

"I was born twice, bought twice, sold twice, and set free twice," Ray's autobiography begins. "Born of woman, born of God; sold in slavery, sold to the devil; freed by Lincoln, set free by God." Born into slavery in Missouri in 1859, Ray's childhood was marked by both the joyous experience of Emancipation and the struggle of life during Reconstruction. Her father, who had secretly learned to read and write while enslaved, managed against the odds to keep his family of nine children together even after their mother's death and despite the family's poverty.<sup>50</sup> Emma left school after the fourth grade and worked for some years as a nanny for a white family before leaving for western Missouri, where she met her husband, Lloyd Ray.

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<sup>49</sup> Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Building the Old Time Religion: Women Evangelists in the Progressive Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Emma J. Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed* (Chicago: Free Methodist, 1926), 22–25.

Emma and Lloyd married in 1887 and were happy at first, but their love story quickly soured. Ray's moderate drinking habit hadn't bothered Emma when they'd met; she thought he looked "manly" with a drink and a cigar. It quickly grew more severe, however, until one day the realization was undeniable: "I found that he had become a drunkard."<sup>51</sup> Lloyd started to lie about spending his wages from stone-cutting and masonry work at the saloon. His coworkers were also his drinking buddies. Although he would periodically promise to quit, their influence was difficult to escape. For her part, Emma "had a temper equal to a tigress." Lloyd went from arguing with Emma at home to getting into fights in public. He spent the night in jail more than once. Emma coped with revelry of her own, going out to dances and parties. All the while, however, her dissatisfaction grew.

The couple moved frequently. In each new town they hoped Lloyd could start fresh, but in each new town "it would be the same old drink, the same old devil, the same old sin."<sup>52</sup> Emma was so angry and unhappy that she contemplated suicide.<sup>53</sup> Finally, the Rays ended up in Seattle, where there were few other Black people. Between Lloyd's continued drinking and her loneliness, Emma struggled. It is in this place of darkness that her conversion story begins. One day she set out for the house of a female friend with whom she would often drink beer and commiserate about their husbands. On the way, something prompted her to stop at the AME church that had just been organized in Seattle instead. Entering the church, she heard the preacher sermonizing on a passage from Revelation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and

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<sup>51</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, 38–39.

<sup>53</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, 40.

if any man open, I will come in and sup with him.” Hearing a voice calling to her, she resisted, feeling that she could not be a Christian and continue to live with her husband. Although their life together had been difficult, she loved Lloyd and did not want to have to give him up. Finally, however, “a voice seemed to say, ‘This is your last opportunity to be saved.’ I could not sit any longer. I felt as though some unseen hand had taken hold of me, and before I knew it, I ran to the altar, fell on my knees and said, ‘Yes, Lord, have mercy on me and I will serve you all my life.’”<sup>54</sup> As is common in conversion and temperance narratives, Emma’s transformation only begins when she fully surrenders her old life and commits to a new one.

After being saved, Emma regularly went to church. Her husband was supportive but reluctant to change his own behavior. She went through a period of doubt and questioning, fearing that the peace and purpose she had found might mean the end of her marriage if Lloyd remained “unsaved.” Finally, she determined that if he would not change, she would leave him and go back to work. “All right, my dear,” she told him, “I have followed you as far as I can, and if you will go to hell, you will have to go by yourself.”<sup>55</sup> Lloyd decided to join her and was saved himself. Finding a new peace and purpose in their evangelical faith, Emma and Lloyd embarked on church and reform work to share it with others. Emma found a path through the WCTU.

White organizers with the WCTU’s “Colored Work” department had visited the Rays’ church to get a Black union started. The fifteen members of the new union elected Emma president, and they began a program of prayer sessions, mothers’ meetings, and jail visitations.

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<sup>54</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, 42–43.

<sup>55</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, 43–47.

Although the original union did not last long—the church’s pastor was not supportive—Emma felt committed to the work and to the framework of the WCTU. Lloyd became an honorary member, and Emma began attending the white unions’ meetings and was eventually elected County Superintendent of Jail and Prison Work.<sup>56</sup> Along with some white WCTU members, the Rays regularly visited the county jails. To inmates who were struggling with addiction, Lloyd would tell his own story of sin and redemption. The Rays used Lloyd’s story in their evangelical work to communicate the power of being born again and the possibility of successfully leaving drinking behind, even after many failures. Ray may have felt comfortable going into detail about her husband’s struggles and the problems in her marriage because, at least according to her book, they had been resolved.

The contrasting example of Frances Joseph Gaudet, another Black WCTU leader who penned an autobiography, provides some glimpse into the perilous path Black women walked when choosing whether to speak about personal experiences with alcoholism. Like Ray, Gaudet married a man who later became an alcoholic. In her memoir, *He Leadeth Me*, she writes that she chose her husband from among “many suitors,” and they lived happily together for a decade until “drink, the curse of America, gained a hold on him and destroyed our happiness and made a legal separation necessary.” This experience must have been incredibly painful, but Joseph Gaudet gives little hint of that pain. She emphasizes instead that it was at this moment that God called

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<sup>56</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, 67–72. Ray remained within the WCTU and was connected to Black leaders higher in the organization’s structure. Her memoir describes a meeting with the evangelist and WCTU lecturer Amanda Berry Smith, as well as her experience hosting the leader of the WCTU’s “Department of Work Among Colored People,” Lucy Thurman, in her home during the organization’s 1899 convention in Seattle. (See the next chapter for details on Thurman.) Frances Joseph Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me* (New Orleans: Louisiana Printing Company, 1913), 171–76.

her to reform and missionary work. Apparently, divorce left her solely responsible for her three children, so financial necessity may also have played a role. Regardless, she writes, “in trying to cheer the broken-hearted I forgot my own troubles.”<sup>57</sup>

The remainder of the book focuses on her work, emphasizing the importance of her religious faith in guiding and motivating her but providing no other detail on how her marriage might have influenced her path. Though she may have shared them with close friends or even at private WCTU meetings, her public focus remained firmly on her reform work. For Black clubwomen like Joseph Gaudet, the pressure to avoid disclosing details that might damage one’s respectability or provide ammunition for racist stereotypes would likely have been an additional factor limiting what she chose to share. Joseph Gaudet’s choice for privacy fits into a larger trend that the historian Darlene Clark Hine described as a “culture of dissemblance” among Black women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Hine, Black women’s “secrecy” with regard to their private lives, and especially experiences of rape and domestic violence, created a “self-imposed invisibility” that protected them physically and psychologically in a culture hostile to their race and gender.<sup>58</sup> While white women might have exposed themselves and their families to humiliation by sharing details about an alcoholic husband, Black women risked not only self-exposure but also having white observers perceive their private struggles as confirmation of racist stereotypes about Black women’s immorality and the supposed weakness of the Black family.

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<sup>57</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 915–17.

### **Black Leadership in the WCTU, 1880–1890**

Jane Kinney remained secretary of the Northern branch of “Colored Work” for only two years. In 1883, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper—a prominent Black abolitionist, suffragist, poet, and novelist—succeeded her and remained perhaps the most well-respected and visible Black member of the WCTU until her death in 1911. Harper was born in 1825 in Baltimore, the only child of free Black parents. She became a published poet and novelist and one of the first Black women to speak on the traveling abolitionist lecture circuit. As Alison Parker has argued, Harper spent her long career in the WCTU committed to its potential.<sup>59</sup> To Harper, however, cooperation with white women did not mean accommodation to them. She consistently challenged the racism of the white women she worked with in the abolition, suffrage, and temperance movements. In 1866, she delivered a speech to the National Women’s Rights Convention that made an early case for the unique harms Black women suffered due to the intersection of their race and gender. “You white women speak here for rights,” she declared. “I speak of wrongs.... If there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America.”<sup>60</sup>

When Harper talked about “Colored Work” within the WCTU, she, like its white leaders, described it as “educational and missionary.”<sup>61</sup> But her reports and speeches make clear that she

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<sup>59</sup> Alison M. Parker, “Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women’s Interracial Alliances,” in *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, ed. Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 145–71.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Harper, “We Are All Bound Up Together,” in Frances Smith Foster, ed., *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist Press, 1990), 219.

<sup>61</sup> Harper, “Work Among Colored People” (1884), lxxviii.



understood “missionary” quite differently than her white counterparts. Black Americans needed help and uplift, yes, but Harper reminded white temperance women that the exploitation and violence of slavery, not Black people’s own failings, had created that need. She called on white women to leverage their own advantages to help Black people as an act of Christian duty: “to help a race who have behind them the barbarism of heathendom, and ages of the weakness, ignorance and poverty of slavery, into loving, helpful sympathy with others who have behind them ages of Christian civilization, is a work that might well fill an angel’s heart with tender love.”<sup>62</sup> Such assistance would be a true expression of the Christian “sisterhood” the WCTU claimed made women’s politics distinct.

Throughout her career with the WCTU, Harper consistently called on her white colleagues to live up to this ideal, and pointed out when they did not. Urging in 1885 that states devote more attention and resources to her department, she reminded white temperance women that, even though they might not find Colored Work “congenial,” it took hard work and endurance to do real Christian work. “It may be that to some the Northern Negro is not very attractive,” she went on. “That in many cases he is too near to be charming and not far enough to be enchanting; but the weaker and feebler he is, should not I, as one of the race, cling the closer to him?”<sup>63</sup> She specifically chided white WCTU members who had not yet “subordinate[d] the spirit of caste to the spirit of Christ” enough to work on equal terms with Black women.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Harper, “Work Among Colored People” (1884), lxxxiii.

<sup>63</sup> Frances Harper, “Work Among Colored People,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1885), cx–cxi.

<sup>64</sup> Frances Harper, “Department of Work for Colored People,” *Union Signal*, January 28, 1886, 13.

While Harper, Lucy Thurman, and Sarah Early were some of the most visible Black WCTU members thanks to their consistent presence at national conventions, they were not the only ones who found the WCTU a worthwhile institution and used its platform to argue for African American advancement. Like Harper, Naomi Bowman Talbert Anderson had participated early in the woman suffrage movement, giving a speech at the first suffrage convention held in Chicago in 1869.<sup>65</sup> She had been involved in temperance activism prior to the formation of the WCTU in 1874 and, in the mid-1880s, described her participation in the “Crusades” in Cincinnati, Ohio. Like other Black temperance activists, Anderson saw a link between the “shackles of slavery” and the “shackles of intemperance” that helped to motivate her sense of Black Americans’ especial need to avoid liquor.<sup>66</sup> In the 1880s she became one of the most prominent Black citizens in Wichita, Kansas, involving herself in charitable work for the poor Black community there. She also joined the WCTU, “affiliating with the white women as if she was one of them.”<sup>67</sup>

Anderson’s experience shows the delicate balance that Black women in her position had to strike between advocating for their own community’s needs against white prejudice and discrimination, reaching out to white women in the hopes that they would modify their own behavior, and instructing and “uplifting” other Black women about issues like temperance. Anderson objected to calls from some Black leaders for African Americans to distinguish

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<sup>65</sup> Monroe Alphas Majors, *Noted Negro Women, Their Triumphs and Activities* (Jackson, TN: M. V. Lynk Publishing House, 1893; reprinted 1986), 87.

<sup>66</sup> “W.C.T.U. Echoes,” *Wichita Beacon* (Wichita, KS), November 26, 1887, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 82–87.

themselves from whites as a “separate people.” She claimed that true “social equality” could only come from interracial interaction and cooperation. “Not until we walk side by side with the white people claiming no nationality save that of American citizens and knowing no people but God’s people, will we ever get our rights,” she wrote in the 1880s.<sup>68</sup> Anderson also refused to accept discrimination, however. As a community leader in Wichita, she protested against the building of an orphanage that refused to care for Black children, helped to coordinate Black protest against segregated schools in Kansas, and advocated for benefits for Black Civil War veterans and their families.<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, Black women within the WCTU faced increasing challenges as the 1880s wore on, largely because of the growing influence of white Southern women within the organization. One problem was the prevalence of segregation in WCTU chapters, especially in Southern states. While there was never an official policy from national WCTU leadership on segregation, Frances Willard’s embrace of the principle of “local autonomy” effectively permitted it. In the 1880s, superintendents in some states reported that, while they occasionally organized unions of mostly Black women, where the Black population was smaller they simply invited Black women to join existing white unions.<sup>70</sup> “We greatly prefer to have the colored women and children unite in our organizations, (there are so few colored people in our State),

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<sup>68</sup> Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 85.

<sup>69</sup> Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 82–87; *Wichita Star* (Wichita, KS), January 24, 1891, 8; “New Lodge Instituted,” *Wichita Eagle* (Wichita, KS), January 4, 1895, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Harper, “Work Among Colored People” (1884), lxxviii–lxxx.

than to have them in separate societies,” reported Mary Livermore, a white secretary of “Colored Work” in Massachusetts.<sup>71</sup>

In her study of North Carolina, Glenda Gilmore suggests that this setup probably reflected white women’s preference for supervising Black women rather than working alongside them, a manifestation of the hierarchical relationship similar to the one Ian Tyrrell identified between white women missionaries in the World’s WCTU and the people they targeted for help and “uplift.”<sup>72</sup> When Black women rejected white supervision, some white WCTU leaders leapt quickly to frustration and hostility. “I have been convinced that the colored people must do this work for themselves,” a white official from Illinois reported. “In the South, they yield to be taught by the whites, but in the North, they are too wise in themselves to stand by what is done for them or too indifferent to build upon what is done for them by white persons.”<sup>73</sup> She conceived of “Colored Work” as done entirely by white women for the benefit of their Black neighbors and deplored what she understood as Black ingratitude.

In the Southern states, however, unions were typically segregated from the start. The Corresponding Secretary’s Report for 1884 noted that South Carolina had documented “25 white and perhaps as many colored unions” for the entire state, while in 1885 Louisiana had only four Black unions to its twenty-nine white (a number that had risen to forty-nine white and seventeen

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<sup>71</sup> Harper, “Work Among Colored People” (1884), lxxviii.

<sup>72</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 49; Tyrrell, *Woman’s World/Woman’s Empire: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 5–8.

<sup>73</sup> Harper, “Work Among Colored People” (1884), lxxx.

Black unions by the following year).<sup>74</sup> The racial divide apparently limited the sharing of information; the white corresponding secretary from Georgia had precise statistics for the “White Unions,” but knew only that there were “several Unions among the colored people, but the membership is not easily obtained.”<sup>75</sup> Black women’s unions, often called “No. 2s,” affiliated separately with the national organization and sent their own delegates to conventions.

Black women continued to choose to join the WCTU because it allowed them a chance at national leadership and an opportunity to work in proximity to—and hopefully influence—white women in both the North and the South. Frances Harper reported the accomplishments of Black women in the WCTU that this policy had, paradoxically, made possible. The Alabama “No. 2,” for example, brought double the amount of dues into the national’s coffers as the state’s white union. Its Black president held a seat on the Executive Committee and the Committee of Resolutions of the national WCTU. Harper credited Willard with establishing the structure that made this possible, recounting how when the Black women of Georgia had formed their union and appealed to Willard to decide whether they could join the “White Ribbon Army,” Willard concluded that “the National could not make laws for a State. If the colored women of Georgia will meet and form a Woman’s Christian Temperance Union for the State, it is my opinion that their officers and delegates will have the same representation in the National.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), cxxii; *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1885), 104.

<sup>75</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1884), cxx–cxxii.

<sup>76</sup> Frances Harper, “The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman,” *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review* 4 (1888): 313–16, in Frances Smith Foster, ed., *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist Press, 1990), 283–84.

By the end of the decade, however, even Harper was disillusioned with the WCTU's accommodations to white Southern racism. Black women seem to have experienced an increase in interpersonal prejudice and disrespectful treatment from their "white sisters," the exact kind Sarah P. Morrison had warned of in 1880. At the 1889 WCTU convention, one of the recommendations Harper and Sarah Early brought forward on behalf of their department was "that in dealing with colored women that Christian courtesy be shown which is due from one woman to another."<sup>77</sup> Throughout the 1880s, the Department of Work Among Colored People was underfunded, and Harper repeatedly appealed to readers of the *Union Signal* and the convention attendees to pay more attention to the work.

In 1890, the WCTU eliminated Harper's position and the Department of Colored Work was subsumed into another division. Delegates took this decision without any record of discussion in the convention minutes. In her last report as superintendent, Harper decried the WCTU's financial neglect of her department and pushed back against the disparaging remarks of some of the white women who had reported to her. She quoted Sarah Acheson, a white leader from Texas, who had written to Harper, "God knows your people need education along this line; not that they drink more, but their vote was bought by the liquor men, and defeated prohibition in Texas." In response, Harper noted that several Northern states without large Black populations had also lost prohibition votes that year. "If it was shabby for an ignorant black man to sell his vote," she demanded, "was it not a shabbier thing if an intelligent white man bought it?"<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Sixteenth Annual Meeting* (1889), 26.

<sup>78</sup> Frances Harper, "Work Among Colored People," *Minutes of the National WCTU Seventeenth Annual Meeting* (1890), 218–19.

### **“Friend of the Southern People”: Ida B. Wells Confronts Frances Willard, 1890–1895**

Throughout the 1880s, the WCTU’s effort to recruit and accommodate conservative Southern white women increasingly conflicted with the interests of its Black members. Though not herself a member of the WCTU, journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells forced this tension out into the open by criticizing Frances Willard for her comments on lynching and perpetuation of the myth that Black men frequently raped white women in the South. Wells also criticized the WCTU’s policy of allowing local unions to be segregated in order to accommodate Southern white women. Willard reacted defensively, and the two leaders and their allies traded criticisms in newspapers and speeches for several months. The original source for Wells’s criticism was the interview Willard gave to the prohibitionist newspaper the *New York Voice* on the South’s “race problem” in October 1890, while attending the WCTU’s annual convention in Atlanta. As discussed in the previous chapter, the interview crystallizes a number of Willard’s views on issues where race, temperance, immigration, and citizenship intersected: Black and immigrant voting rights, women’s suffrage, and lynching and its justifications. When Wells challenged the interview four years later, Willard insisted that she stood by almost all of it.<sup>79</sup>

Willard’s belief that the cooperation of women across sectional lines would heal the nation’s lingering wounds guided her work in the South.<sup>80</sup> She had become convinced of white Southerners’ good intentions and truthfulness about their post-Reconstruction society. She saw

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<sup>79</sup> Frances E. Willard, “President’s Address,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-first Annual Meeting* (1894), 129–31.

<sup>80</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 76–78; James D. Ivy, “The Lone Star State Surrenders to a Lone Woman: Frances Willard’s Forgotten 1882 Texas Temperance Tour,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (1998): 44–61; Johnson, “Sallie Chapin,” 92–96.

herself as carrying their message faithfully to a Northern audience.<sup>81</sup> Of her first visit to the South, Willard wrote in her autobiography that “it ‘reconstructed’ me.”<sup>82</sup> The authority of these “best people” of the South was all she felt she needed to invoke in order to defend her sketch of the South’s “race problem.” Willard told the *Voice*, she said, what these trustworthy people had told her: “The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The grog shop is its centre of power. The safety of women, of childhood, of the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment.”<sup>83</sup> This was a direct reference to the myth, propagated to justify lynch mobs, that Black men posed a sexual threat to white women.

Willard went on to express support for educational restrictions on voting, which she argued would end the political corruption that she saw as the main obstacle to achieving prohibition in the South—corruption centered on the buying of Black and immigrant votes on the part of whiskey-sellers. These restrictions were not theoretical; Willard was commenting directly on the ongoing Mississippi Constitutional convention. White politicians had called the convention explicitly to figure out the best way to block Black men in Mississippi from political participation. No one denied that that was its goal. “Let us tell the truth if it bursts the bottom of the Universe,” one convention delegate declared in September 1890. “We came here to exclude the negro. Nothing short of this will answer.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “The Race Problem.”

<sup>82</sup> Frances Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years* (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 373.

<sup>83</sup> “The Race Problem.”

<sup>84</sup> Solomon S. Calhoun, quoted in Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 70.



In line with other white suffragists of the time who advocated the ballot for white women as a way to “balance out” Black and immigrant voters, Willard pressed the convention to enfranchise educated women. “If the convention has the wit and wisdom to adopt this measure,” Willard contended, “Mississippi will be controlled by white people, and delivered from the shot-gun policy of its political adventurers and whiskey-logged roughs.” These restrictions would ultimately be beneficial to black women in Mississippi, she concluded. They would serve as “an incentive to the young colored women of that commonwealth to store their brains with ideas, for when they reach the standard set ... they will have come into the ranks of voters, the only condition being one of merit, not complexion.”<sup>85</sup>

Wells had read Willard’s interview in 1890 and did not forget it. Like many of her peers, Wells supported temperance, knew Willard well by reputation, and understood that the WCTU was an important venue for Black women’s organizing.<sup>86</sup> Writing in 1891, she joined other Black leaders who characterized temperance as part of a larger project of racial “uplift.” Drunkenness was a particular problem for Black Americans, not because they were naturally more intemperate (as some white prohibitionists suggested), but because “by reason ... of poverty, ignorance, and consequent degradation *as a mass*, we are behind in general advancement.”<sup>87</sup> It was up to Black

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<sup>85</sup> “The Race Problem.”

<sup>86</sup> For details on Wells’s sympathy with the temperance movement, see Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 129–31.

<sup>87</sup> Ida B. Wells et. al., “Symposium—Temperance.” *A.M.E. Church Review* 7, no. 4 (April 1891): 379.

people, led by their ministers and teachers, to reject drinking in order to “remove one of the principal stumbling blocks to race progress.”<sup>88</sup>

Over the course of the next few years, however, Wells’s activism would move away from highlighting Black “self-injury” and toward emphasizing the agency and complicity of white people in racial oppression. Most famously, Wells’s journalism on lynching disproved the conventional wisdom that Willard had repeated in the *Voice* interview: that lynchings occurred in retaliation for Black men’s rapes of white women. Only in about a third of lynching cases, Wells showed, was there even an *allegation* of rape—to say nothing of its credibility.<sup>89</sup> The rape myth, however, was highly effective both at justifying lynching and in masking its true function: as a tool of systematic oppression and terrorism victimizing Black Southerners. Crucially, Wells also recognized that the rape myth was powerful enough to turn away even white people like Willard, who considered themselves “friends” of Black people.<sup>90</sup>

To pressure Willard to account for her comments, in 1893 Wells began criticizing the temperance leader in her speeches and columns in the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*. She quoted the *Voice* interview repeatedly while on an anti-lynching lecture tour in England, where Willard was well known and respected. Finding that her audiences were skeptical that a reformer like Willard was “disposed to overlook that fashionable pastime of the South,” when Wells returned to England for another tour in spring 1894, she brought along a copy of the interview and arranged

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<sup>88</sup> Wells et. al, “Symposium—Temperance,” 381.

<sup>89</sup> Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 14.

to have it published by British anti-racist magazine *Fraternity*.<sup>91</sup> Willard was also in England in spring 1894, staying with Lady Isobel Somerset, her close friend and the president of the British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA). The interview's publication provoked a furious reaction from Willard and Somerset. In a response published in the *Westminster Gazette*, Willard insisted that "that neither by voice nor pen have I ever condoned, much less defended, any injustice toward the colored people." She laughingly dismissed Wells as having misrepresented her as racist, but defended her support for educational restrictions on voting.<sup>92</sup> Wells fired back in a blistering letter to the editor, charging that "Miss Willard is no better or worse than the great bulk of white Americans on the Negro question. They are all afraid to speak out."<sup>93</sup>

Wells chose to confront Willard, not because Willard was the most racist public figure she could find, but precisely because Willard had a reputation for helping the "colored people" that she had a strong interest in preserving. That reputation also made it possible for the Black women who were members of the WCTU to put pressure on her and the organization internally, which they were already doing. By the time of Willard's *Voice* interview in 1890, Black women within the WCTU faced a less hospitable environment than they had earlier in the 1880s. The abandonment of the Department of Work Among Colored People had eliminated national leadership positions for Frances Harper and Sarah Early. It also meant that the WCTU devoted even fewer resources to the cause of persuading Black people to support temperance. At the

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<sup>91</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 111.

<sup>92</sup> "An Unwise Advocate," *Union Signal*, June 21, 1894.

<sup>93</sup> Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 208–9.

same time, white WCTU leaders—including Willard herself—increasingly vilified Black voters and blamed them for prohibition defeats.

Nevertheless, Harper, Early, and their colleagues—along with a few white allies—continued to push back against the characterization of Black men as violent drunkards and of their communities as responsible for prohibition defeats. They pointed out the disparity in circumstances between “the colored people” and their white counterparts and opposed the WCTU’s move to embrace educational tests for voting as part of its woman suffrage platform. Lucy Thurman mounted her protest against the elimination of the “Colored Work” department and got it reinstated with herself as its head. At that same convention, the WCTU also passed—apparently without controversy—a resolution condemning lynching brought forward by a white delegate named Susan Fessenden. “We denounce the lynchings, burnings and torturings of our fellow-citizens for real or supposed crimes,” it read, and “we demand, in the name of justice and humanity, that no one, however guilty, be deprived of life or liberty without due process of law.”<sup>94</sup> The resolution hedged on the essential question of whether most lynching victims were guilty of rape or other crimes. It did, however, condemn lynching as a violation of moral and human law and emphasize the barbarity of the killings, as Wells consistently did in her writings and lectures on the subject.

It is unclear whether the resolution was a direct response to Wells’s criticism of Willard and whether Thurman, Harper, or any other Black WCTU leaders were involved in bringing it forward. It did give Willard a leg to stand on in defending herself and her organization from the

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<sup>94</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twentieth Annual Meeting* (1893), 42.

charge that they had been silent on the lynching question. Unfortunately, Willard doubled down at the next WCTU convention, in November 1894. After her heated exchange with Wells in the English papers earlier that summer, the conflict between them had continued to simmer. Rather than defuse it, Willard used her president's address to reiterate her belief that "nameless outrages perpetrated upon white women and little girls" continued to terrorize the South. She also mentioned Wells—who was in the audience—by name, condescendingly referring to her as "a bright young colored woman, whose zeal for her race has ... clouded her perception as to who were her friends and well-wishers."<sup>95</sup>

The WCTU compounded the damage at the 1894 convention by failing to pass another anti-lynching resolution. A white leader, Susan Fessenden, came prepared with text similar to the one that had been passed the previous year, and even Willard called for similar language in her president's address. Things did not go as they planned, however. When Fessenden introduced her resolution, she wrote later, it "greatly excited the Southern members, and by motion was laid over until afternoon."<sup>96</sup> One of these members was Belle Kearney, the Mississippi suffragist and temperance reformer who would, ten years later, promise at a suffrage convention that women's enfranchisement "would insure immediate and durable white supremacy, honestly attained."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Frances E. Willard, "President's Address," (1894), 131. Giddings notes that Wells attended the WCTU convention representing the AME Women's Mite Society, a missionary organization. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 33.

<sup>96</sup> "The Lynching Question and the Women's Christian Temperance Union: An Interview with Miss Florence Balgarnie," *Fraternity* (London, England), October 1, 1895, 54, in Scrapbook 13, Frances E. Willard Papers, Willard Memorial Library and Archives, Evanston, IL.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 262–65.

When Fessenden returned to the meeting after lunch to try again, she heard that a similar resolution had just passed. The new text turned out to be quite different. Instead of condemning lynching, it deplored the “nameless outrages” that Black men were supposedly committing against white women.<sup>98</sup> The pernicious myth that lynching was mob justice for Black rapists had become the WCTU’s official position.

### **Black Reaction**

While most white temperance women closed ranks around Willard, she took considerable criticism from important segments of Black public opinion. Though professing respect for Willard’s past work, her critics demanded that she live up to the reputation for defending Black civil rights that she continued to tout. A particularly damaging blow came from Frederick Douglass, whose opinion was still extremely influential in reform circles (and with whom Willard was friendly). In an 1894 speech, he deplored that even Willard, “distinguished among her sisters for benevolence and Christian charity,” had added to “the crushing indictment drawn up against the Southern Negroes ... they paint him as a moral monster, ferociously invading the sacred rights of woman and endangering the home of the whites.”<sup>99</sup> Later in that summer, J. M. Townsend of the Anti-Lynching League of Chicago invited Willard to visit one of its meetings to explain herself. Though its members considered her a friend and ally, Townsend told the *Chicago Daily News*, “we want the negro spoken of to his face just as frankly as he is spoken of

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<sup>98</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-first Annual Meeting* (1894), 50.

<sup>99</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Why is the Negro Lynched?” in *The Lesson of the Hour*, 1894, reprinted in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Vol. IV: Reconstruction and After*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 491–99, 523.

behind his back—to the whites of the south or the aristocracy of England. We wish to know who are our friends and who are not.”<sup>100</sup>

Denise Herd finds that the increase of violent anti-Black rhetoric in the Southern prohibition movement after around 1900—including the kinds of images evoked by Willard in the *Voice* interview—alienated Black Americans from the movement. However, some Black women continued to remain invested in the WCTU into the twentieth century. As we will see, at least at the elite levels of Black women leaders in the WCTU, this was not an accident. Black WCTU members like Lucy Thurman and Rosetta Lawson advocated for the WCTU at early meetings of what would become the National Association of Colored Women despite the conflict between Willard and Wells.

### **The NACW and the Willard/Wells Conflict**

Among the elite Black women who belonged to both the WCTU and the nascent Black women’s club movement, however, reaction was more complex. Because Black WCTU leaders like Frances Harper and Lucy Thurman chose not to condemn Willard with the same vehemence as Wells, evidence of the ways Black women who chose to stay within the WCTU contested white supremacy has been overlooked. Attention to how Willard and the WCTU were discussed at early meetings of what would become the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) does much to illuminate the effects of the choices they made.

In the early 1890s, Boston journalist and reformer Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin founded the Woman’s Era Club, one of the first Black women’s clubs in the country. Its newspaper, the

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<sup>100</sup> “Hot After Miss Willard,” *Chicago Daily News* (Chicago, IL), July 2, 1894, in Scrapbook 13, Frances E. Willard Papers, Willard Memorial Library and Archives, Evanston, IL.

*Woman's Era*, commented on political and social issues affecting women and African Americans, especially suffrage, anti-lynching campaigns, and education. Ruffin had launched the club in the wake of a seismic anti-lynching speech Ida B. Wells gave in New York City in 1892, and the two women remained allies.<sup>101</sup> The *Woman's Era* followed Wells's lead in criticizing Willard as an "apologist for lynching" as the conflict unfolded. "It is well to give due recognition to Miss Willard's splendid work for temperance," one editorial wrote; "it is also well that she should understand that there are several million women in this country who are bitterly disappointed in her."<sup>102</sup>

Not all of the Black women who joined the new club movement expressed the same disappointment, however. At the 1894 WCTU convention, Lucy Thurman and another Black delegate from Michigan named Frances Preston got up on stage and presented Willard with flowers. Given the context of the convention, where Willard had criticized Wells during her president's address and defended segregation within the WCTU, the women faced backlash. The Black weekly the *Cleveland Gazette* blamed the failure to pass an anti-lynching resolution on "the peculiar conduct and actions" of the two delegates. The paper urged its readers to remember Preston and Thurman "as women who forsook Miss Wells, their race and its greatest cause at present to cling to a woman (*white*), Miss Willard, portions of whose annual address is an insult to the race."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 235–36.

<sup>102</sup> "Miss Willard in Boston," *Woman's Era* 1, no. 4 (July 1894): 8.

<sup>103</sup> "Miss Wells Lectures," *Cleveland Gazette* 12, no. 16 (November 24, 1894), 1.



Given that Thurman had successfully challenged the WCTU's "color line" the previous year to restore the Department of Work Among Colored People, with herself as superintendent, she may have felt frustrated by the criticism. Thurman had been working for many years within the WCTU and had seen firsthand the challenges Black women faced within it. She was nevertheless committed to the organization and to the work she felt she could do in cooperation with it. Since Willard's influence was so important to success in the WCTU, Thurman probably felt that antagonizing Willard would impede the work she hoped to achieve. As Wells's biographer Paula Giddings points out, for all its problems, the WCTU was still one of the only national organizations where Black and white women worked together and Black women had a chance to hold high-level positions, even if they were not from wealthy backgrounds.<sup>104</sup>

Frances Harper, a founding member of the NACW, also walked a fine line between the two movements. Although Harper avoided directly criticizing Willard, a few of her statements during the conflict are illustrative of the sympathy she felt for Wells's position. In spring 1894, Harper penned an editorial in Ruffin's newspaper the *Woman's Era* titled "How to Stop Lynching." She castigated the federal government for its failure to protect Black citizens. "It is an astounding proposition," Harper wrote, "that a great nation is powerful enough to stop white moonshiners from making whiskey but is unable to prevent the moonshiners or anyone else from murdering its citizens. It can protect corn but cannot protect life."<sup>105</sup> If the federal government was powerful enough to regulate alcohol and tobacco—the expansive demand that the WCTU

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<sup>104</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 361.

<sup>105</sup> Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "How to Stop Lynching," *Woman's Era* 1, no. 2 (May 1, 1894).

made of it—then its failure to use that power to stop lynching made it an accomplice in the crime.

On the last day of the contentious 1894 convention in Cleveland, Harper took the floor to report on her work that year as a “national organizer.” On its face, her message was the same as it had been for years: Black women held immense potential for temperance organizing and Black people greatly needed relief from the “liquor traffic,” but white women and the national organization needed to devote more attention and resources to the “colored work.” However, Harper also subtly responded to the claims Willard made in the *Voice* interview and repeated in her annual address: that Black men were so threatening to white women in the South that “men dare not go beyond the sight” of their own homes.<sup>106</sup> If it were true, Harper said, “that the worst things said against the negro are sad, and frightful verities; that from his presence such dangers lurk around peaceful and happy homes, as make it unsafe for fathers and husbands to go far beyond their roof tree, then I hold that the deeper the degradation of the people the louder is their call for redemption.”<sup>107</sup>

Harper clearly did not believe the “worst things said against the negro” were true, especially light of Wells’s journalism. Before her audience of largely white temperance women, however, Harper insisted that even if they were, crimes and disregard for law were just “symptoms of disease in the body politic.” The disease was “ignorance and vice,” and the only cure was for all moral Americans to recognize that “between every branch of the human race in

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<sup>106</sup> “The Race Problem.”

<sup>107</sup> “Mrs. Harper’s Report,” *New Haven Register*, November 21, 1894, 4, *Temperance and Prohibition Papers* microfilm (1977), Section II, Reel 42, Frame 5.

the Western Hemisphere there is a community of interests, and our interests all lie in one direction, and we cannot violate the one without disserving the other.” Whether Black men were committing crimes against white women or not, the mission remained the same: to reform the nation for the good of *everyone*, by rooting out the source of the disease: the liquor traffic.

In Harper’s view, removing the liquor traffic would make possible the moral improvement of African Americans and, therefore, the moral regeneration of the nation as a whole. Interracial cooperation was essential because the whole nation, Black people included, was threatened by alcohol. The drunkard was everywhere, in every “branch of the human race.” The whole community thus had an interest in seeing it eliminated, and the very act of working towards that goal could serve to make each part of the community aware of what might be achieved by working in concert.

### **Conclusion**

During the WCTU convention in 1895, Frances Harper attended a session dedicated to social purity. She was the only Black person there and was treated with respect and “marked attention.” A reporter for the *Baltimore Herald* pressed Harper on her reaction to Wells and her anti-lynching campaign. Harper “replied slowly and apparently measuring the effect of her words,” the article recounted. “I do not approve of Miss Wells’ vehemence in dealing with the subject,” she said. “I think that she is unable to discuss the matter calmly, because some of her friends were shot down in the Nashville affair and her mind has been set unduly against the whites. I look at the lynchings as the eruptions of a disease lingering in the body politic, caused by the war. The old-time prejudice still remains, but I believe that it is growing less and less day by day.”

As the reporter noted, Harper clearly considered her all-white audience as she spoke. She was no stranger to criticizing white women, however, and she chose neither to name Frances Willard nor to take it upon herself to defend the WCTU president. It is likely that Harper's enduring commitment to interracial cooperation, in addition to political considerations, informed her approach. Unlike Wells but like many Northern liberals even in the years after Reconstruction, Harper kept faith that time would do its work on the "old-time prejudice." As intemperance was a disease that poisoned the physical body as well as society, so lynchings—a symptom of another old sickness—needed to be purged from the "body politic." But the nation was headed toward progress and mutual understanding, Harper asserted: "I believe that the white man is coming to treat the opposite race more as brothers."<sup>108</sup>

Historian Leslie Dunlap has shown that rather than leave the WCTU after the anti-lynching conflict, Black women actually joined it in even greater numbers in the subsequent years.<sup>109</sup> Dunlap and Carol Mattingly suggest that leaders like Thurman and Harper valued the personal relationships that they had developed with their white counterparts over the years and were reluctant to turn against them even in the face of criticism from Wells and the *Gazette*. Despite its fraught dynamics, the WCTU remained a valuable training ground for activists of all types, including Black women; it provided experience in organization, lecturing, and

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<sup>108</sup> Document 38: "About Southern Lynchings," *Baltimore Herald*, October 20, 1895, *Temperance and Prohibition Papers* microfilm (1977), Section III, Reel 42, Scrapbook 70, Frame 153, in Dublin and Scheueur, *Why Did African-American Women Join the Woman's Christian Temperance Union*.

<sup>109</sup> Dunlap, "In the Name of the Home," 118.

campaigning that was invaluable to Black women as they pursued civil rights, education, and suffrage causes.<sup>110</sup>

What historians have not sufficiently explored is the impact women like Thurman, Lawson, Harper, and Preston—and the Black women who joined the WCTU even in segregated chapters—had on the organization by choosing to stay within it even as they also joined the NACW and other Black-women-specific organizations. Their behavior during the lynching conflict was not a betrayal of the “race,” but rather allowed them to retain an influence and a growing presence that forced the WCTU to consider their interests even as the prohibition movement overall turned more firmly to racist arguments and tactics.

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<sup>110</sup> Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “RIGID LINES OF SEPARATION”

#### BLACK WOMEN IN THE WCTU, 1895–1933

The reverberations of Ida B. Wells’s conflict with Frances Willard spilled over into the first gatherings of what would become the National Association of Colored Women, a new center of power in Black clubwomen’s organizing. In spring 1895, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin issued a call for delegates from the many independent Black women’s clubs and associations that had formed over the previous years to convene in Boston to create a national organization.<sup>1</sup> Their July meeting resulted in the creation of the National Federation of Afro-American Women (NFAAW) with Margaret Murray Washington as president.<sup>2</sup> In 1896, the NFAAW merged with two other large clubs to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Black

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<sup>1</sup> The immediate impetus for Ruffin’s call was a public letter sent by John Jacks, the president of the Missouri Press Association, to British temperance leader and Wells ally Florence Balgarnie in March 1895. The letter derided Black Americans, and Black women in particular, as “prostitutes and all are natural liars and thieves.” Balgarnie shared the letter with Wells and Ruffin, and the latter had been circulating it among Black clubwomen as evidence that it was past time for them to unite, “if only for our protection.” See Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: Amistad, 2008), 348, 359.

<sup>2</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 359–64. Wells did not attend this first convention; she was newly married and suffering from exhaustion after her strenuous recent speaking tours. Giddings suggests that Wells also wanted to avoid renewed conflict with women like Lucy Thurman and Hallie Q. Brown over the issue of the WCTU. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 360–61.

women who wanted to organize at the national level and across denominational lines now had an alternative venue to the WCTU. The NACW provided an opportunity to continue work on many of the same issues—temperance, suffrage, prison, and education reform—while avoiding the interpersonal racism many had encountered within the WCTU.

Yet Black women continued to remain part of the WCTU both in visible leadership roles and as rank-and-file union members. What accounts for Black women's continued participation in the WCTU after the rupture of the Willard/Wells conflict? Doubtless, Josephine Ruffin was right that Willard's behavior alienated some potential Black WCTU members. However, though full membership numbers for all Black unions in the WCTU are not available, the available evidence shows that Black membership in the WCTU actually *increased* following the conflict. There were several reasons for this development.<sup>3</sup> First, Wells and Ruffin's attitude toward Willard was by no means universal among their peer group of highly educated, prominent Black women leaders. Wells frequently found herself on the militant edge of elite Black public opinion during her long career. She often called for radical change that exceeded the more reformist and self-help impulses of most Black clubwomen. Her zeal and bluntness, while key to her effectiveness as a journalist and activist, alienated many other clubwomen. They worried that her reputation as an agitator offered ammunition to those who wanted to paint Black women as overly angry or undignified—as indeed Willard and her allies had.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leslie Kathrin Dunlap, "In the Name of the Home: Temperance Women and Southern Grass-Roots Politics, 1873–1933" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2001), 118–19

<sup>4</sup> See Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 361–64.

In addition, the WCTU retained support from its most prominent Black members, including Frances Harper, Lucy Thurman, Rosetta Lawson, and Margaret Murray Washington. During the lead-up to the formation of the NACW, they defended the WCTU and its value to Black clubwomen. They maneuvered to ensure that the NACW made its support for the WCTU explicit. In December 1895, Black women from twenty-five states convened for the “Atlanta Congress of Colored Women” organized by the Ladies Auxiliary to the Negro Department of the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition. Rosetta Lawson, a WCTU lecturer and organizer from Washington, DC, co-chaired the Congress of Colored Women. Frances Harper and Lucy Thurman also attended. In her opening address, Lawson emphasized the attendees’ pride in “the opportunity afforded to us by the Atlanta exposition company.” Lawson believed, she said, that the enlightenment demonstrated by the Atlanta Exposition organizers by inviting Black women would “go far toward bringing about that harmony of sections so much desired for the betterment of our race.”<sup>5</sup> With this language, Lawson echoed the emphasis on national reunion and reconciliation that WCTU leaders like Willard and Sallie Chapin promoted.

The women who attended the Atlanta Congress prioritized the WCTU’s success, but that did not mean they intended to ignore the lynching controversy and the disregard and disrespect that many of them had experienced. The Congress’s resolution regarding the WCTU reflected the influence of Lawson, Harper, Thurman, and other Black WCTU members. While insisting that the WCTU’s “attitude in regard to the lynching evil and color prejudice question generally be less equivocal,” overall the Congress “heartily” endorsed the WCTU’s work for providing “so

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<sup>5</sup> “The Negro Congress,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 28, 1895, 8.



many opportunities through which the women of our race may be enlightened and encouraged in their work for humanity.” The Black women of the WCTU would enter the “open door.”<sup>6</sup>

Thurman, Lawson, Harper, and the other Black WCTU women who attended the Congress held two goals that remained in tension with one another. They wanted to push the WCTU to make good on the “opportunities” it promised Black women. However, they also sought to defend its value to their peers who had been offended and frustrated by Willard’s behavior. As the superintendent of the newly reinstated “Department of Work Among Colored People,” Lucy Thurman in particular saw an opportunity for expanding her work that she did not want to compromise. She was about to start her first WCTU organizing tour through the South, “among her people.” Though the Congress nominated her colleague Rosetta Lawson for president of the Atlanta Congress of Colored Women, Lawson declined the honor in favor of Thurman. Lawson and Thurman likely hoped that the prestige of the title and the implication that other Black clubwomen approved of her work might lend Thurman and the WCTU credibility during her tour, “giv[ing] impetus to a cause equally dear to them both.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the deteriorating situation for African Americans in the South figured into Black WCTU members’ calculus. Southern states were beginning what would become a systematic campaign to disenfranchise Black and poor white voters (which would be successful by 1908).<sup>8</sup> White mobs threatened Black Southerners’ lives and livelihoods with acts of racial terrorism.

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<sup>6</sup> “The National Colored Woman’s Congress,” *Woman’s Era* II, no. 9.

<sup>7</sup> “Rosetta E. Lawson,” in *Lifting as They Climb*, ed. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis (Washington, DC: National Association of Colored Women, 1933), 272–74.

<sup>8</sup> See Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

The convict leasing system, which Douglas Blackmon has described as “slavery by another name,” had expanded dramatically, trapping many Black men in an inescapable cycle of forced labor.<sup>9</sup> As Paula Giddings explains in her biography of Ida B. Wells, “militant protest” had seemed to have gone nowhere—even among white Northern liberals like Frances Willard.<sup>10</sup>

Given these circumstances, the idea that Southern Black citizens should retreat from demands for social equality in exchange for industrial education and economic opportunity appealed to many people, Black as well as white.<sup>11</sup> A few months before Lawson’s speech at the Atlanta Congress, WCTU leader Margaret Murray Washington’s husband Booker T. Washington had expressed exactly these sentiments with his famous “Atlanta Compromise” speech at the Exposition. “In all things purely social we can be as separate as the fingers,” Washington had thundered to the cheering crowd, “yet as one hand, in all things essential to mutual progress.”<sup>12</sup> While not all Black WCTU members would have agreed with Washington on every point, his address and the subsequent popularity of his approach formed an important context for their decision-making at the close of the nineteenth century.

This chapter follows the Department of “Colored Work” and the Black women of the WCTU into the twentieth century. While Black participation in the WCTU rose after the Willard/Wells conflict of the mid-1890s, a widening gulf separated the Black and white members

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas M. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 365.

<sup>11</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 364–67.

<sup>12</sup> “Booker T. Washington Delivers the 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech,” *History Matters*, accessed August 3, 2021, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/>.

of the organization after the turn of the twentieth century. In part this was due to the increasingly racist rhetoric of the white prohibition movement in the South, where most Black temperance women worked. Black women increasingly operated autonomously within the larger WCTU, leading the national Department of Work Among Colored People as well as the segregated state unions known as “No. 2s.” On the surface, Black temperance women pursued similar objectives to Southern white women who remained in the WCTU, including prison work and efforts to end prostitution and combat sexual assault. They did so, however, with different goals and underlying ideologies. White women increasingly defined their prohibition and anti-rape activism in terms of controlling the imagined threat of violent, drunken Black men and preserving the “purity” of the white race. Meanwhile, Black women made greater use of the rhetoric of “protection” and aimed their efforts at the systems—liquor traffic, incarceration, sexual violence, and racist terror—that threatened Black people in general and Black women in particular.

### **Black Participation in the WCTU at the Turn of the Century**

Given these dynamics, we might expect to see a steep decline in Black support for temperance and prohibition from the late 1890s onward. Indeed, some scholars have argued that this is what happened. Denise Herd dubs the period from about 1900 to 1920 an “era of silence” and ambivalence from Black voices on the prohibition question.<sup>13</sup> Herd is right to note that Black Americans never held monolithic views either for or against prohibition, contrary to the beliefs

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<sup>13</sup> Denise Herd, “‘We Cannot Stagger to Freedom’: A History of Blacks and Alcohol in American Politics,” in *Yearbook of Substance Use and Abuse*, vol. 3, eds. Leon Brill and Charles Winick (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1985), 173–75.

and wishes of white advocates on both sides. Some explicitly organized to oppose prohibition. Others did so implicitly through the embrace of a Black saloon culture or pursuit of economic success in the liquor business.<sup>14</sup>

Herd misses, however, the considerable dry activism many Black advocates practiced during this period, including within the WCTU. While it is difficult to discern exact figures given the presence of some Black members in integrated chapters scattered around the North and West, the number of Black chapters increased, especially in the South.<sup>15</sup> In 1898, Department of Colored Work superintendent Lucy Thurman reported strong Black state organizations in Georgia and North Carolina. New Jersey and Washington, DC, boasted several “No. 2” unions. Black WCTU membership was growing rapidly in Texas and Louisiana. Even Minnesota, with its small Black population, boasted three unions under the leadership of a successful Black businesswoman in St. Paul named Amanda Lyles.<sup>16</sup> Those Black leaders who remained in the WCTU made a point of showing they bore no ill will toward Willard. At the opening session of the 1898 convention, the first following Willard’s death, Thurman spoke “for the colored

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<sup>14</sup> Herd, ““We Cannot Stagger to Freedom,”” 174–75.

<sup>15</sup> Dunlap, “In the Name of the Home,” 118–19. Dunlap suggests that the 1896 death of Sallie Chapin, the white South Carolina WCTU leader whose racist and patronizing attitudes to organizing Black temperance unions dominated that state for many years, was one reason for a subsequent surge in Black WCTU membership.

<sup>16</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting* (1898), 194–97. Lyles was a prominent businesswoman, suffragist, NACW member, and fixture in Twin Cities Black society and a founding member of the St. James AME Church in St. Paul. She owned a hair salon and took over her husband’s mortuary business after his death. As chairwoman of the John Brown Memorial Association, she spearheaded an effort to preserve his grave and erect a statue at what is now the John Brown Farm State Historic Site in Lake Placid, New York. “Amanda Lyles,” Minnesota Historical Society, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://www.mnhs.org/votesforwomen/amanda-lyles>; see also “John Brown’s Life Will Never Be Forgotten if Mrs. T. H. Lyles Can Possibly Help It,” *St. Paul Globe* (St. Paul, MN), August 2, 1896, 8.

people” in the late leader’s memory. A small choir of Black women sang a song Lyles had composed in Willard’s honor.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, Black participation in the WCTU appeared to flourish as the new century dawned. Many of the African American reform elite’s leading lights graced the WCTU’s first convention of the twentieth century, held in Washington, DC, in November and December 1900.<sup>18</sup> For a week of meetings, reports, hymns, and prayer services, delegates filled the seats of the elegant Lafayette Opera House, within sight of the White House, and the pews of churches across the city.<sup>19</sup> Prominent suffragist and educator Mary Church Terrell appeared representing the NACW. At the time, Terrell was also serving as a member of DC’s school board.<sup>20</sup> Florence Spearling Randolph, a New Jersey clubwoman who would become one of the first women ordained as a minister in the AME Zion Church, opened the Tuesday morning session with a prayer.<sup>21</sup> The Revs. Jordan Chavis, president of Bennett College in North Carolina, and Walter H. Brooks, pastor of DC’s influential Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, both appeared.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the WCTU’s Black leaders attended as well. Rosetta Lawson, a national organizer and DC resident, was on her home turf. Frances Joseph Gaudet, a prison reformer

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<sup>17</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting* (1898), 32–33.

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting* (1900); “Colored Women in Attendance,” *Colored American* (Washington, DC), December 8, 1900, 13, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/85301311/?terms=temperance%20convention&match=1>.

<sup>19</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting* (1900).

<sup>20</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting* (1900), 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting* (1900), 35, (her name is misspelled “Randall”; “Colored Women in Attendance.”)

<sup>22</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting* (1900), 34–40.

planning to open an orphanage and school for Black children in her hometown of New Orleans, represented the Black union in Louisiana. Margaret Murray Washington, “Lady Principal” of the Tuskegee Institute that her husband Booker T. Washington had made famous, also found time to lead the Black WCTU of Alabama and attend the convention. A large delegation from the North Carolina “No. 2” union appeared, led by its president Mary Lynch, a professor at Livingstone College. Several members from Livingstone, Bennett College, and Scotia Seminary—centers of higher learning for the state’s Black women—joined this group. Superintendent of “Colored Work” Lucy Thurman of Michigan and her predecessor, Frances Harper, led the delegation.<sup>23</sup> In DC, Black women had just organized a new union; among its officers was Rosetta Sprague-Douglass, daughter of Frederick Douglass. The *Colored American* praised the gathering’s “strong women” for undertaking earnest work in the service of God and fellow man.

Despite increasing segregation across the South—including in DC—it seemed that racial discrimination did not mar the WCTU convention. “There was no color line, but to the contrary all seemed to work in love and harmony, and all who came were made welcome,” commented the *Colored American*. “This is certainly a dawn of a new era when so many women of different races from all over this and other countries, can meet together, which such fraternal feelings, and such a oneness of purpose for God, and home, and native land.”<sup>24</sup> In reality, the DC convention marked the closing of an old period of interracial cooperation, not the advent of a new one. The

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<sup>23</sup> “Colored Women in Attendance,” 1. On Lynch, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> “An Interesting Convention,” *Colored American* (Washington, DC), December 15 1900, 13, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/7002413/mrs-h-c-bruce-and-definitions-of-color/>.

WCTU was becoming increasingly segregated. Not only did more Black-only unions form, but a greater gulf also appeared between the experiences and work of Black and white temperance advocates within the organization and their reasons for embracing prohibition. Especially in the South, the climate for active collaboration among Black and white women became increasingly inhospitable. The rhetoric of white prohibitionists, including white women of the WCTU, helped shape this climate. As historians have documented in studies of suffrage, prison reform, and anti-rape activism, many white Southern reformers freely expressed racist views. Further, they sought to improve the protection and position of white women within a context of a Jim Crow patriarchy that relied on the continued subjection of Black women. White women's actions erected barriers to interracial collaboration that were difficult to breach.<sup>25</sup>

### **Race and Prohibition in the South, 1900–1920**

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, the United States descended into the depths of what scholars have called the “nadir” of race relations.<sup>26</sup> The Willard/Wells conflict occurred in a broader context. Northern white Republicans retreated from Black voting rights.

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<sup>25</sup> Crystal Feimster's *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) contrasts the anti-rape activism of Rebecca Latimer Felton and Ida B. Wells. On race and racism in the suffrage movement, see Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). See also Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*.

<sup>26</sup> Historian Rayford Logan, who coined the term “nadir” in this context, identified 1901 as the lowest point in his 1954 work *The Negro in American Life and Thought*. Other scholars have chosen later dates, but the term generally refers to the combined effects of the abandonment of Black voting rights by Northern Republicans; the passage of Jim Crow laws and widespread disenfranchisement of Black citizens in the South; the rise of housing segregation and “sundown towns” in the North; and widespread white supremacist terrorism and racist violence. Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

White Southerners consolidated a Jim Crow regime of disenfranchisement and racist terror. At the same time, the cause of prohibition gathered strength across the South. As historian Joe L. Coker shows in his study of Southern white evangelicals and prohibition, the two developments were related. Historically, the South had been hostile territory for prohibition. When white prohibitionists adopted increasingly racist and violent rhetoric to advance the anti-liquor cause, they began to make headway.

When Woman's Crusaders first organized the WCTU in 1874, the battle for prohibition in the South looked like an uphill one. Temperance retained its antebellum associations with abolitionism and women's rights. Most white Southerners viewed it with deep skepticism, if not hostility. Male evangelical leaders like the powerful Methodist bishop Warren A. Candler approved of prohibition, but were not prepared to support other reforms that might help achieve it if they threatened the power structures of white Southern patriarchy. Many Southern prohibitionists believed that the only way the South would go dry was through a third-party movement that could break the Democratic Party's stranglehold—as the Prohibition Party promised to do. Candler and his contemporaries, however, opposed both the WCTU and the Prohibition Party after their national platforms adopted suffrage planks. The prospect of women voters posed too great a threat, even if these votes might help win prohibition. Candler warned that suffrage would lead women out of their proper place in church and home. He also invoked



the fear of Black women voting, writing in 1893 that “we have suffered enough from Negro suffrage already without bringing in the Negro woman.”<sup>27</sup>

Willard’s 1890 comments foreshadowed the tactic that would be the most effective in driving liquor from the South in the years before national Prohibition: race-baiting. Prohibition’s triumph in Southern states in the early twentieth century reflected how white evangelical prohibitionists, including many members of the WCTU, developed a brand of anti-liquor activism tailored to Southern whites’ concerns. Chief among these concerns was anti-Black racism.<sup>28</sup> Between 1880 and 1900, white evangelical prohibitionists both contributed to and were influenced by increasingly vitriolic and violent anti-Black rhetoric. As Marek Steedman has shown, this activism was not sufficient on its own to propel prohibition in a region historically hostile to the movement. During the events surrounding the Atlanta race riot of 1906, however, a set of politically powerful politicians and newspaper editors increasingly linked alleged Black attacks on white women, mob violence, and drinking. They used these spurious charges to justify calls for prohibition laws as an essential tool for maintaining the Jim Crow order.

White prohibitionists in the 1880s tended to be “New South” proponents whose paternalistic attitude toward Black voters reflected a belief that they could instruct and uplift African Americans out of an “inferior” condition to become productive citizens. By the 1890s, however, white Southern temperance advocates turned toward the use of a stereotype Coker calls “neo-Sambo.” This racist caricature painted African American men as temperamentally and

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<sup>27</sup> Warren A. Candler, “Endangering the Church and the Temperance Cause,” *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, May 10, 1893, 2, quoted in Joe L. Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 221.

<sup>28</sup> Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause*, 12–13.

biologically ignorant and dependent. The “neo-Sambo” could never become fit for citizenship. The federal government had erred in giving him the vote.<sup>29</sup> Coker’s research focuses on male advocates, but Frances Willard’s *Voice* interview exhibits these same stereotypes, as did the rhetoric of both Northern and Southern white WCTU members. White Southern rhetoric about African American men had deteriorated even further by the turn of the century, regularly depicting Black men as “black beasts” whose alleged sexual predation of white women motivated and justified lynch mobs.<sup>30</sup> Prohibitionists argued that cheap liquor, sold in bottles decorated with lascivious labels depicting naked white women, was fuel for the supposed epidemic of rapes. They also deplored lynching and, as Coker argues, “both capitalized on racial fears to promote their cause and used prohibition to redirect the anger of white racists in a less violent, more moral direction.”<sup>31</sup> These evangelicals claimed that prohibition, rather than lynching, would be a more durable solution to the problem.

These tensions reached a boiling point in late September 1906, when armed white mobs attacked Black residents of Atlanta. Over the previous years the city had grown rapidly. As the Black population expanded and achieved economic power, Atlanta’s white leaders tightened voting restrictions and segregation in public spaces. Both candidates in the tense 1906 Georgia gubernatorial campaign resorted to race-baiting, promising to further disenfranchise the state’s Black voters and portraying Black men’s political power as a sexual threat to white Southern women. In an editorial supporting the progressive candidate, Hoke Smith, the *Atlanta Journal*

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<sup>29</sup> Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause*, 144–46.

<sup>30</sup> Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause*, 156.

<sup>31</sup> Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause*, 158.

wrote that Black men's desire for political equality led inexorably to a desire for "social equality" between the races. Finding themselves barred from social intercourse with white people, Black men instead preyed upon the "fair young girlhood of the South."<sup>32</sup>

Atlanta's newspapers took up this theme. In late September, they printed salacious reports about Black men who had supposedly raped white women. In response, mobs rampaged through the city streets for four days. White attackers killed at least twenty-five Black Atlantans.<sup>33</sup> In the aftermath of the massacre, observers across the nation hotly debated its causes and solutions. Amid rumor that "the whole thing was caused by drinking in the low dives on Decatur Street," Atlanta's mayor, James Woodward, closed the city's saloons.<sup>34</sup> Hoke Smith won the election and used the massacre to justify the passage of literacy tests and grandfather clauses that would disenfranchise Black residents for the next six decades.

Georgia's prohibitionists also capitalized on the attacks to press their cause. They deplored the violence. They insisted, however, that it would not have happened if prohibition had been in place.<sup>35</sup> The Georgia WCTU, meeting for its annual convention at the time of the riots,

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<sup>32</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, August 1, 1906, quoted in C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 379.

<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 4–5.

<sup>34</sup> Lula Barnes Ansley, *History of the Georgia W. C. T. U., from Its Organization 1833 to 1907* (Columbus, GA: Gilbert, 1914), 261; Marek D. Steedman, "Demagogues and the Demon Drink: Newspapers and the Revival of Prohibition in Georgia, in *Statebuilding from the Margins: Between Reconstruction and the New Deal*, ed. Carol Nackenoff and Julie Novkov (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 85. The city eventually lifted the ban on saloons but instituted a new licensing system that targeted venues in Black neighborhoods and raise prices of alcohol so that it became too expensive for lower-income residents, both white and Black. Steedman, "Demagogues and the Demon Drink," 85.

<sup>35</sup> Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause*, 161

passed a resolution praising Mayor Woodward for taking swift action against what they deemed the source of the unrest. “By your act of closing the saloons,” it read, “you have declared the saloon to be a menace to peace, the hot-bed of anarchy, crime and bloodshed. Our prayers ascend for their permanent closing and for God’s protection and peace in our capital city.”<sup>36</sup> While Georgia WCTU leaders condemned the mob’s killing of “innocent negroes,” they nevertheless accepted the allegations that Black men raped white women at face value. Georgia voters had the violence on their minds in the next year. Georgia passed statewide prohibition and the dominos began to fall across the region. Five more Southern states (Oklahoma, Alabama, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Tennessee) went dry within two years.<sup>37</sup> By 1920, when the Eighteenth Amendment went into effect, every state of the Old Confederacy except Louisiana had already gone dry.

### **White Women, Prohibition, and the Politics of Race**

Coker’s book focuses on male evangelical prohibitionists, but white women participated in this rhetoric as well. White Southern WCTU members like Rebecca Latimer Felton and Belle Kearney linked the specter of the Black rapist to the alcohol problem. Felton was a complicated figure whose evolution reflected both the shifting currents of Southern politics and her own iconoclastic nature.<sup>38</sup> A former slaveholder, she was an ardent suffragist and white supremacist.

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<sup>36</sup> Ansley, *History of the Georgia W. C. T. U.*, 261.

<sup>37</sup> Jack S. Blocker Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 107.

<sup>38</sup> Felton was the first woman to serve in the US Senate, albeit for only a day; she was also the last US member of Congress to have been a slaveholder. Early scholarship focused on her formal political career. She served as her husband William Harrell Felton’s campaign manager and political advisor during his decades as a Democratic and later Populist politician. See John E. Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960). More recent scholarship has explored her leadership in women’s voluntary organizations and placed her work for suffrage, white supremacy, and prison reform in the

She is best known today for declaring that “if it needs lynching to protect woman’s dearest possession from the ravening human beasts—then I say lynch, a thousand times a week if necessary.”<sup>39</sup> Felton grew up expecting that wealth, protection, and domestic comfort would reward her obedience and submission as a planter’s wife. Instead, she suffered the destruction of her family and social world during the Civil War, followed by a period of struggle and deprivation.<sup>40</sup> Historians like LeeAnn Whites have argued that an enduring sense of betrayal at the privilege and protection she and other elite white women had lost motivated her quest for women’s empowerment.<sup>41</sup> In the absence of adequate protection from white men, they needed tools to protect themselves. While Felton often directed her ire at the elite white men whose secessionist hubris and obsession with profit she saw as the cause of white women’s vulnerability, she also frequently embodied the threat to them in the stereotype of the Black rapist.<sup>42</sup>

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context of the shifting gender and racial politics of the New South. See LeeAnn Whites, “Rebecca Latimer Felton: The Problem of Protection in the New South,” in *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol. 1, ed. Ann Short Chirhart and Betty Wood, 224–44 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); LeeAnn Whites, “Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife’s Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 354–72; Feimster, *Southern Horrors*.

<sup>39</sup> J. A. Holman, “Mrs. Felton Speaks: She Makes a Sensational Speech Before Agricultural Society,” *Weekly Star* (Wilmington, NC), August 19, 1898, 3. Black editor Alexander Manly published a rebuttal to Fenton’s speech in Wilmington, NC, newspaper *The Daily Record*. White supremacist Democrats in Wilmington used the editorial to inflame anti-Black hatred and build support for what became their violent overthrow of the city government in November 1898. See Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Whites, “Problem of Protection in the New South,” 225–29.

<sup>41</sup> Whites, “Problem of Protection in the New South,” 229.

<sup>42</sup> Whites, “Problem of Protection in the New South,” 234–35.

Other Southern WCTU leaders echoed Felton's impulses, especially Belle Kearney. A mentee of Frances Willard, Kearney was a prominent Mississippi suffragist and outspoken segregationist. Invariably described as learned, graceful, and a distinguished orator, she forcefully argued for women's suffrage as a matter of justice to women and as a blunt tool for disenfranchising African Americans. "Aside from the moral principle that women ought to be allowed to vote," she said in one 1907 lecture, "the matter also has a political aspect, for it will double our Democratic majority and render the elimination of the negro from politics an absolute certainty."<sup>43</sup> In 1911, the corresponding secretary for the white WCTU in South Carolina, Mrs. C. A. Waters, reported that the union had been focused on recovering from the shocking defeat of a prohibition candidate for governor. "The negro and foreign vote is under the control of the liquor element," she remarked bitterly. "But this one fact is arousing the southern-born white man, as no other one thing could do, to see the curse of liquor in its true light."<sup>44</sup>

### **Black Women Remain in the WCTU**

While some northern critics picked up on this racially motivated justification for temperance, some African Americans persevered in their battle for prohibition reforms for their own reasons. In the midst of the 1908 Southern temperance wave, prominent Black leader Booker T. Washington declared that he had observed the Southern prohibition movement "carefully" and detected no evidence that it was based on "a determination or desire to keep liquor away from the negroes and at the same time provide a way for the white people to get

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<sup>43</sup> "Miss Belle Kearney on 'Women in the Orient,'" *Sea Coast Echo* (Bay Saint Louis, MS), March 23, 1907, 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-eighth Annual Meeting* (1911), 143.

it.”<sup>45</sup> As we have seen, Washington aimed much of his rhetoric at white audiences as well as Black. He characteristically understated the case. His observation that prohibition support transcended racial barriers and that “the educated men and the leaders of the race” supported prohibition, however, was correct.<sup>46</sup> Washington’s belief in prohibition fit nicely with his ideology of Black uplift and self-improvement as well as with the WCTU’s definition of liquor as a threat to the home and family.<sup>47</sup> He highlighted the role of churches and women’s groups in supporting temperance, which he approved as a moral revolution brought about by “the ordinary conservative elements in the community.”<sup>48</sup> Washington pointed to statistics that he said showed a decrease in crime in Birmingham and Atlanta, two large Southern cities that were already living under prohibitory law. The numbers indicated fewer warrants for crimes like child neglect, petty theft, and rent nonpayment. Washington argued that these statistics represented a measure of the overall state of Black and poor white family life in these cities. They indicated, he concluded, “that the closing of the saloons and the breeding-places of crimes and disorders has brought a remarkable change into the homes of the poor, where, finally, the effects of crime and

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<sup>45</sup> Booker Washington, “Prohibition and the Negro,” *The Outlook* (New York, NY), March 14, 1908, 587. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106019606471&view=1up&seq=631&skin=2021>.

<sup>46</sup> Washington, “Prohibition and the Negro,” 589.

<sup>47</sup> On Washington and racial uplift ideology, see Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington, Volume 1: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington, Volume 2: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Robert J. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed. *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up From Slavery, 100 Years Later* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Washington, “Prohibition and the Negro,” 589.

disorder are always most keenly felt.”<sup>49</sup> Washington characterized the Southern prohibition movement as a cross-racial reform that would improve the economic and moral position of both races.

Meanwhile, in the early 1900s, a new generation of Black women stepped forward to take leadership of the national “Department of Work Among Colored People”; of state “No. 2,” or Black, unions; and of local chapters. Women like Frances Joseph Gaudet, Eliza Eubanks Peterson, and Rosetta Lawson carved out a place for themselves within the WCTU’s structure. Perhaps more importantly, they enabled the WCTU’s many Black members to accomplish important community work relatively independently from the white unions of the South. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper stepped back from an active role in the WCTU, retiring at some point between 1904 and 1906 and creating space for new Black leadership. Lucy Thurman attributed the rapid growth of the movement in Louisiana to Frances Joseph Gaudet, who would become well-known as an educator and prison reformer who decried the convict leasing system of the Jim Crow South. The Mississippi-born Gaudet was the granddaughter of an enslaved man named Squire Yancey. As discussed in the previous chapter, she had separated from her husband after he became an alcoholic and devoted her life to reform work.<sup>50</sup>

Another emerging Black WCTU leader was Eliza Eubanks Peterson (later Peterson Johnson) of Texarkana, a city straddling the border between Texas and Arkansas. Lucy Thurman had helped to organize a statewide union in Texas in 1898, using a State Teachers’ Association

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<sup>49</sup> Washington, “Prohibition and the Negro,” 588.

<sup>50</sup> Frances Joseph Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me* (New Orleans: Louisiana Printing Company, 1913) 12.



meeting as an opportunity to recruit some of the Black women who belonged to it. After the untimely death of the union's first president, Peterson took over.<sup>51</sup> A graduate of Bishop College and a devoted Baptist, she also spoke of the impact of drink on her family life. Her father had been an alcoholic.<sup>52</sup> Peterson ran the Texas organization for several years. She started a monthly newspaper called the *Sentinel* in 1907 and campaigned across Texas for suffrage and prohibition. Press coverage describes her as persuasive but not aggressive, speaking about prohibition "not with a Carrie Nation hatchet, but with the sword of the spirit."<sup>53</sup> In 1909, she took over from Thurman as National Superintendent of Colored Work.<sup>54</sup>

Gaudet, Peterson, and their colleagues advanced their cause in coalition with white women. They also took advantage of other opportunities that arose because of their association with the WCTU. As Carol Mattingly puts it, Black women in the WCTU "often used the union for their own benefit, making use of the organizational structure and the reputation of the WCTU to serve their own purposes."<sup>55</sup> Officers of segregated WCTU chapters and state organizations acquired leadership experience they may have been blocked from in an integrated union. Many of them traveled across the country. They spoke to both Black and white audiences at churches,

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<sup>51</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1899), 200.

<sup>52</sup> Susannah Sanford McDaniel and Marisa Thomas, "Johnson, Eliza Eubanks Peterson," *Handbook of Texas Online*, August 5, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/johnson-eliza-eubanks-peterson>.

<sup>53</sup> "Baptists of Lagrange," *Austin American-Statesmen* (Austin, TX), August 5, 1905, 2.

<sup>54</sup> McDaniel and Thomas, "Johnson, Eliza Eubanks Peterson."

<sup>55</sup> Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 95

schools, and public halls.<sup>56</sup> In 1900, Willard's successor Lillian Stevens appointed Frances Joseph Gaudet, Rosetta Lawson, and Mary Lynch to the National WCTU's delegation to the 1900 World's WCTU Convention in Edinburgh, Scotland.<sup>57</sup> "The trip was so helpful and beneficial," Lawson reported, "and is another of the many bright spots the W. C. T. U. has shed along my path in life."<sup>58</sup> As Paula Giddings has noted, the availability of such opportunities for elite Black women in white or interracial spaces indicated to many National Association of Colored Women leaders that some forward progress was happening—even as lynching and disenfranchisement continued apace.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, scholars have doubly marginalized these women in the literature on early-twentieth-century prohibition. Minimal attention to the WCTU after Willard's death in 1898 and near-absent consideration of Black women's activities after the dramatic Willard/Wells conflict overlooks an important story from the "nadir" of American racial politics. These leaders remained involved in the struggle for total abstinence despite internal discrimination within the WCTU and the extraordinary burdens placed on their organizing by Jim Crow conditions. They made their temperance advocacy responsive to their own specific concerns.

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<sup>56</sup> Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, 93–94.

<sup>57</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 59

<sup>58</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting* (1900), 187.

<sup>59</sup> Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 362. Giddings quotes Rosa D. Bowser from an article in the *Woman's Era* as an exemplar of this view: "Race progress is the direct outgrowth of individual success in life ... the race rises as the individuals rise ... and individuals rise with the race." Other examples of this apparent progress included the 1895 decision of the Chicago Woman's Club, after a very long debate, to admit Fannie Barrier Williams to membership, and the appointment the same year of Mary Church Terrell to the DC Board of Education. Giddings, *Ida A Sword Among Lions*, 363.

### Jim Crow Violence and Temperance Organizing

The racial tensions of the outside world continued to intrude on Black women's participation in the WCTU—albeit not as explosively as they had during the Wells/Willard conflict. Black and white unions shared many of the same challenges of organizing in the early twentieth century: long-distance travel, lack of funds, and enduring skepticism of women as political activists. The Black unions, however, faced problems unique to the Jim Crow society they inhabited. Meanwhile, many Southern white WCTU members actively supported segregation and disenfranchisement. In 1899, for example, Lucy Thurman alluded to horrors she had encountered on visits to Southern plantations, where thousands of Black people now labored as sharecroppers in conditions not so different from enslavement.<sup>60</sup> “I dare not trust myself to write of some of the cruel things I have seen,” Thurman reported, perhaps censoring herself for the benefit of her mostly white audience.

While Black women leaders continued to work with the WCTU despite their segregation into “No. 2” state unions, some of them announced that there were limits to what they would tolerate. In 1901—the year after the DC convention that had seemed so promising for interracial cooperation—the WCTU decided to hold its convention in Fort Worth, Texas. Rosetta Lawson refused to attend, citing the state's Jim Crow regime. She protested “the rigid lines of separation everywhere present in the South between the races in Christian and all other lines of work.”<sup>61</sup> Lawson's absence rebuked the WCTU for subjecting its Black members to the disrespect of

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<sup>60</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1899), 201.

<sup>61</sup> “The Women's World,” *Colored American* (Washington, DC), October 26, 1901, 3.

segregation by holding a convention in the South. She echoed Frances Harper's charge that racism formed a barrier to any aspirations white temperance women had of "Christian sisterhood."

Of course, disrespect was only one feature of Jim Crow. The violence inherent to the regime also made its way into official WCTU records when it disrupted Black temperance organizing. In 1906, for example, Eliza Peterson reported that membership in the Texas union—fast-growing for a number of years—had fallen off. Peterson attributed the decline to the "terrible race riots" that had scarred Texas in the aftermath of the Brownsville affair, when white townspeople in Brownsville, Texas, accused the members of a unit of Buffalo Soldiers of murdering a local bartender. Despite testimony to their innocence and a lack of evidence, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered all 167 soldiers in the regiment to be dishonorably discharged. The episode provoked outrage across the nation and drew attention to segregation in Texas.<sup>62</sup>

Sometimes racial violence directly touched WCTU members. Frances Joseph Gaudet wrote just a month before the 1900 convention that unrest in her city of New Orleans had dashed her hopes for increasing WCTU membership. One hot July evening, three white police officers approached two Black men sitting on the porch of a house whom they deemed "suspicious." They interrogated them and eventually assaulted one, Robert Charles. In the ensuing struggle, both Charles and one of the police officers drew guns and began shooting. Charles escaped and

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<sup>62</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-third Annual Meeting* (1906), 209. On the Brownsville Affair, see Ann J. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair: National Crisis and Black Reaction* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971).

remained a fugitive for several days despite an intensive manhunt undertaken both by the New Orleans police and by large groups of white male vigilantes. The episode eventually culminated in a standoff, and Charles killed at least four white police officers before a member of a volunteer New Orleans militia shot and killed him. While this was going on, white mobs rioted throughout the city. They waylaid Black New Orleanians who were passing by or pulled them from streetcars, shooting or beating them to death. Most estimates place the number of Black people killed during the violence at around a dozen, with more than fifty people wounded.<sup>63</sup>

Gaudet wrote that the white mob had killed the aunt of a colleague, the corresponding secretary for the Louisiana No. 2 union. “They lived alone in a little cottage fronting the street,” she explained, “the mob chased the girl out and killed the old woman.” Gaudet did not name those involved. The details, however, line up with the murder of Hanna Mabry, a grandmother who lived with her husband, son, and daughter-in-law on Rousseau Street in a predominantly white neighborhood of New Orleans.<sup>64</sup> In the middle of the night while the family slept, several members of a white mob pulled the wooden shutters off the home’s doors and windows and fired what Mabry’s daughter-in-law called “a regular fusillade” of bullets inside.<sup>65</sup> Although the couple managed to escape with their baby, a bullet struck Mabry in the chest, and she died within

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<sup>63</sup> Ida B. Wells wrote about the Charles case in a pamphlet entitled *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death*. See also William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); K. Stephen Prince, *The Ballad of Robert Charles: Searching for the 1900 New Orleans Riot* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

<sup>64</sup> Prince, *Ballad of Robert Charles*, 99; Ida B. Wells, *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death, the Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, Other Lynching Statistics* (1900), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14976/14976-h/14976-h.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> “Mabry Murder Trial,” *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, October 26, 1900, 7.

hours.<sup>66</sup> The police noted that the attackers “seemed to sink into the earth, so completely and quickly did they disappear after they had completed their work,” suggesting that at least some of them had been neighbors of the Mabrys’.<sup>67</sup>

The shock and horror of the violence for Black New Orleanians had wide-reaching repercussions. Gaudet had lost track of her colleague, Hanna Mabry’s niece. “I do not know where the Cor. Secretary is,” she reported. “I hear she left the state that night. I am very much afraid I will have to do my work over again, so many of the women have left the state in disgust.”<sup>68</sup> The WCTU appropriated ten dollars for Joseph Gaudet’s work but otherwise neglected to comment on either the horror of this story or what it indicated about the heavy burdens Black organizers faced in an atmosphere of continuously threatening racial violence.

### **Sexual Assault and Prison Reform Activism**

Both Black and white women in the WCTU linked alcoholism and sexual assault. Whereas white Southern temperance women typically advanced the myth of Black assaults on white women, Black women battled the pervasive problem of white sexual violence against Black women. A robust body of historical scholarship has illuminated the ways that sexual violence against Black women lay at the heart of the Jim Crow regime.<sup>69</sup> As discussed in the

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<sup>66</sup> Wells, *Mob Rule in New Orleans*; “Woman Shot While She Slept,” *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, July 27, 1900, 6, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/140248854>.

<sup>67</sup> “Women Shot While She Slept.”

<sup>68</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-seventh Annual* (1900) 172–73.

<sup>69</sup> Giddings, *Where and When I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984); Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “‘The Mind That Burns in Each Body’: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, 328–49 (New York: New York University Press, 1972);

previous chapter, Black women's supposed promiscuity fueled powerful racist stereotypes and served as premature justification for sexual violence against them. In contrast, activism to guard Black women from "sexual immorality" was one way for reformers to include themselves within the bounds of femininity and therefore defend themselves as women.<sup>70</sup> Black women's temperance activism could therefore be read as one marker of a respectable image, communicating a sense of self-control and moral rectitude that contrasted with racist stereotypes labeling Black women deviant and promiscuous. However, Black clubwomen—including leaders in the WCTU—also directly challenged the government authorities who enabled racialized sexual violence. An obvious locus of such violence was the carceral system, which expanded and took on new forms in the post-Reconstruction period that some historians have likened to "slavery by another name."<sup>71</sup> The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) campaigned against the practice of convict leasing. As Sarah Haley shows, NACW leaders, like Selena Sloan Butler and Mary Church Terrell, and the WCTU's Lucy Thurman combined a

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Feimster, *Southern Horrors*; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage, 2010); Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*.

<sup>70</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*. See also Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894–1994* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008). Other works on Jim Crow and the carceral state include Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996); Karen Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion: The Battle Against Convict Labor in the Tennessee Coalfields, 1871–1896* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Talitha L. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

politics of respectability with “an intense confrontation with the state, whose violence against poor black women they would not tolerate.”<sup>72</sup>

In the early 1900s, Frances Joseph Gaudet was making one of her regular visits to a city workhouse when she witnessed a troubling sight: the institution’s superintendent patting a young female inmate familiarly on the shoulder as she flinched away. Gaudet had heard “ugly” rumors about the man. She knew that he and the other jailers had unfettered access to the female prisoners, particularly overnight when no police matrons circulated. After the superintendent left, Gaudet approached the girl, a young German immigrant who had been working as a domestic servant for a local family. She asked if the superintendent was “kind.” The girl scoffed. “No, unless he can do as he likes with you,” she replied; when Gaudet pressed, she added that what he liked was for her to “say nothing when he comes in the ward at night.”<sup>73</sup>

Gaudet asked if the girl would be willing to report the superintendent’s sexual abuse, but she refused. She feared punishment for talking. Another opportunity quickly arrived, however. Returning to the jail on another occasion, Gaudet saw another inmate, “a pretty young mulatress of fifteen years,” lying with a baby on a bare bunk in a room full of dozens of prisoners. Gaudet recognized her and realized with a jolt that this was the girl’s second stay in the jail under the superintendent’s authority and that “the baby was the fruit of that first imprisonment.”<sup>74</sup> The man’s brazenness seemed to have no limits. Before Gaudet’s eyes, he “stopped and caressing one

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<sup>72</sup> Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 123.

<sup>73</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 39–40.

<sup>74</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 40–41.



of the women lying on the shelf, told her he would be back ... and spend a while with her. The words he used were too vile to record.”<sup>75</sup> Outraged, but now possessing eyewitness proof of the superintendent’s abuse, Gaudet was determined to put a stop to it.

Gaudet’s efforts were part of a broader push by African American clubwomen to protect vulnerable Black women from sexual violence and to address the racist abuses of the Jim Crow carceral system. The protection that Gaudet desired also encompassed other vulnerable women, like the German immigrant girl she had first spoken to about the superintendent’s violations. As the reformers well knew, these scourges were intertwined. Gaudet was aware that as a Black woman in the Jim Crow South, she faced steep obstacles by raising a complaint of sexual abuse on behalf of a Black prisoner—especially against a white man in a position of power. She also had powerful allies among the white leadership of New Orleans that included ties to the city’s mayor, however. He helped her get the superintendent suspended, charged, and eventually—due to the storm of negative press attention to the case—removed. In the aftermath, the city hired female police matrons to monitor the inmates at night. The members of a local association of white women, the Era Club, invited Gaudet to speak about her prison reform work and began lending her their own support and advocacy, eventually pushing to institute a Juvenile Court for the city in 1903.<sup>76</sup>

What does Gaudet’s advocacy tell us about Black women’s temperance activism in the early twentieth century? First, it is part of a larger story of Black women mobilizing against the

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<sup>75</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 40–41.

<sup>76</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 43.

sexual abuse of other Black women, especially at the hands of white men.<sup>77</sup> At the prison, Gaudet wrote, “there were no matrons, and those men, made careless and vicious by drink, were in charge of those weak and unfortunate women fourteen hours out of twenty-four. Instead of the city reforming these unfortunates, they were being degraded by the city’s employees.”<sup>78</sup> In Gaudet’s analysis, the prison staff’s drinking fed their appetite for cruelty and exploitation, but their power and impunity were the true source of the abuse. Through her work with the WCTU, Gaudet attacked drinking, and she decried Black Americans’ choice to indulge in “the white man’s beer and liquor.”<sup>79</sup> Unlike many white women in the WCTU by this point, however, she saw alcohol not as source of most social problems, but as a complicating factor in a world already marked by injustice and power imbalance.

### **Black Women and the WCTU during National Prohibition**

Scholars who document the Prohibition-era WCTU have shown that female anti-alcohol activists struggled for effective rhetoric to defend temperance as cultural mores changed around them.<sup>80</sup> After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the arguments of suffragists and women moral reformers who had promised that that women’s presence in the public sphere would purify and uplift society held less power. Female voting behavior turned out to look a lot

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<sup>77</sup> See Feimster, *Southern Horrors*; Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>78</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 41.

<sup>79</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 52.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth D. Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

like male behavior; society remained unredeemed.<sup>81</sup> Changes to leisure culture saw alcohol consumption move out of the male-dominated saloon and into mixed-gender lounges and cocktail parties where female drinking was not only socially acceptable, but fashionable. Female anti-Prohibition activists challenged the WCTU's authority to define the relationship between womanhood and alcohol. Pauline Sabin and the Women's League for National Prohibition Reform savvily emphasized the youth and elegance of their supporters and portrayed WCTU members as dowdy, shrill, and out of touch with modern life.<sup>82</sup>

The politics of Black women's temperance support also shifted during national Prohibition in ways that tracked larger changes even as they contained important distinctions. Within the WCTU, Black participation declined. In 1919, only four Black state unions—in DC, Maryland, Florida, and South Carolina—remained, down from twelve just two years earlier.<sup>83</sup> By 1923, the WCTU had renamed the department of Colored Work to “Work Among Negroes.” A white superintendent from Georgia, Mamie Emma Wood Williams, led it. Although it is impossible to know how many Black women joined integrated unions, this pattern seems to have continued at the local level. In Georgia, Leslie Dunlap has found that the number of local Black WCTUs in Georgia declined sharply, from forty-seven unions in 1924 to only four in 1928.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> J. Kevin Corder and Christina Wolbrecht, *Counting Women's Ballots: Female Voters from Suffrage through the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>82</sup> Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition*.

<sup>83</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Forty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1919), 9; *Minutes of the National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 144–45.

<sup>84</sup> Dunlap, “In the Name of the Home,” 176.

Few Black women leaders remained visible in national WCTU leadership during the years of national Prohibition. The most prominent Black WCTU leaders of the previous two decades had retired or left the WCTU by the time Wood took over. Frances Joseph Gaudet last reported to the national WCTU in 1916, when she noted that a destructive fire at the Colored Industrial Home and School she had founded had distracted her attention from WCTU organizing.<sup>85</sup> A few years later she donated the school to the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana and then moved to Chicago, where she lived until her death in 1934.<sup>86</sup> Eliza Eubanks Peterson married a wealthy insurance agent in August 1919 and moved from Texarkana to Mobile, Alabama. She largely retired from public work.<sup>87</sup> Rosetta Lawson served as a WCTU national organizer through at least 1919, likely stepping back in the early 1920s after nearly forty years as a white-ribbon woman.<sup>88</sup>

The loss of institutional knowledge of about temperance and African Americans was profound. Wood reported that she had spent most of her first year as superintendent “spying out the land” in preparation for developing a plan of work in all states with large Black populations. She noted that she had been reading African American newspapers and books to help her

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<sup>85</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Forty-third Annual Meeting* (1916), 181.

<sup>86</sup> Sources differ on whether the donation was in 1919 or 1921. She served as principal of the school into 1921. “Frances Joseph Yancey Gaudet,” Find a Grave, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/149047565/frances-joseph-gaudet>.

<sup>87</sup> McDaniel and Thomas, “Johnson, Eliza Eubanks Peterson.”

<sup>88</sup> Lawson is listed as “national organizer,” her longtime position, in the *Minutes of the National WCTU Forty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1919), 9. As of March 2022, I do not have access to convention minutes from 1920 to 1922. In the 1923 minutes Lawson’s name does not appear, but a 1923 article describing a speech she gave to students at a high school in Delaware described her as “one of the national directors of the W. C. T. U.” “Mrs. Lawson at School,” *Evening Journal* (Wilmington, DE), April 26, 1923, 60.

understand “the standpoint of the race on all questions,” including temperance, and to form a basis for tracts featuring “strong temperance expressions from Negro writers.”<sup>89</sup> Considering that Black members of the WCTU had led the Department of Colored Work for the previous thirty years—organizing unions, penning and distributing tracts, giving speeches, and reporting much of their efforts to the national organization—this sense of starting from scratch is somewhat shocking.

We can speculate on a few reasons why Black women may have left the WCTU around this time. First, membership in the WCTU as a whole was declining. The Union had achieved its two major goals of suffrage and national prohibition. The WCTU was never as successful in defending the Prohibition regime as it had been in securing it. Black reformers had founded several other organizations and venues, like the NAACP, to address a broad set of threats to Black life like lynching and disenfranchisement. Middle-class Black clubwomen as a whole nevertheless remained sympathetic to the anti-alcohol movement during the 1920s. They continued to characterize drinking as a harm committed primarily by Black men against the entire race and as a threat to efforts to prove African American worth through dignified and virtuous behavior.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Fifty-first Annual Meeting* (1923), 206.

<sup>90</sup> See Lisa G. Materson, “African American Women, Prohibition, and the 1928 Presidential Election,” *Journal of Women’s History* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 66–67. See also Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894–1994* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

As the backlash against Prohibition became stronger, however, Black temperance activists added a new argument to their arsenal. As the historian Lisa G. Materson has shown, many of them saw much to fear in the rise of an organized and popular movement to repeal a constitutional amendment. They warned that if lawmakers could repeal the Eighteenth Amendment, they could do the same to the Reconstruction Amendments.<sup>91</sup> In 1920, activists at the NACW's convention passed a resolution calling for the enforcement of the new Eighteenth Amendment. They added a demand for Congress to "enforce the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Federal Constitution."<sup>92</sup> NACW activists worried that Black voters were drifting away from their historical allegiance to the Republican Party. This realignment was well underway by the presidential election of 1928. Black clubwomen feared the effects of Democratic power and the loss of the influence many of them had carefully established as Republican Party activists.<sup>93</sup>

As Materson shows, Black temperance activists' concerns were rooted in reality. Southern whites had already effectively nullified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Some Prohibition opponents argued that neither the Eighteenth Amendment nor the Reconstruction Amendments represented the will of the people. It would therefore be just to disobey the Eighteenth as well as the Fourteenth and Fifteenth.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately for Black temperance activists, their constitutional argument remained coupled with a rhetoric of racial uplift, home protection, and moral rectitude that met with increasing resistance from Black

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<sup>91</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition."

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 68.

<sup>93</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 64.

<sup>94</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 69.

Americans by the 1920s. The Great Migration had created new opportunities for African American leisure in cities like Chicago and New York, as well as an escape from the racist arguments of white Southern prohibitionists.<sup>95</sup> Prohibition, however, had interrupted African Americans' ability to earn money from owning a saloon or from the informal economy that surrounded leisure. Bootlegging and increased gang activity brought violence into Black neighborhoods. The federal government's uneven enforcement efforts disproportionately targeted Black people.<sup>96</sup> Finally, many Black voters grew increasingly skeptical that the Republican Party as a whole continued to represent their interests. They rejected Black clubwomen's claims to speak for and lead "the race."<sup>97</sup> Rather than recalibrate, however, Black clubwomen doubled down on the older rhetoric of racial uplift and moral propriety.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, neither Black nor white temperance women found a way to update their stance against liquor in accord with changing cultural mores and political realities.

### Conclusion

Frances Joseph Gaudet's 1913 memoir included a parable about a Black man whose cat became sick. At first, the man's white neighbor came to his aid and offered medicine and treatments to try to help the animal. Soon the man's own cat dashed by, also sick and needing

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<sup>95</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 75–77.

<sup>96</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 77. See also Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 78.

<sup>98</sup> Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition," 78–79. See also White, *Too Heavy a Load*; Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

help. With a cursory apology, the white neighbor ran after his own pet—leaving the Black man on his own. The story, Gaudet said, described the help that Black Americans had received from some of “our white friends” after Emancipation until their own concerns began to distract them. “There are thousands of aliens flocking to America,” she wrote, “bringing their untrained, vicious youth to our shores to become the wards of our wealthy white Americans, who are spending their money to give them the opportunity to embrace the civilizing influence of a Christian education. The Negro must take care of his own cat.”<sup>99</sup>

Gaudet’s anecdote illustrates the diverging paths of the WCTU’s “Colored Work” and “Foreign Work” efforts during this period. As she noted, Northern white reformers had become increasingly concerned about immigration, especially “new” immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Gaudet’s story captures the same tension expressed in many white, native-born WCTU leaders’ statements about what they increasingly described as an immigration “problem.” They feared many of the new arrivals were “untrained” and “vicious,” but they also felt an urgent responsibility to share with them the enlightenment of a Christian education and an appreciation for democracy and sobriety. As white WCTU leaders increasingly left Black women to fend for themselves in temperance work, they trained their attention more fully on immigrants and sought to define “Americanism” as sober and Christian.

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<sup>99</sup> Gaudet, *He Leadeth Me*, 54.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISARMING DRINK, DEFINING AMERICANISM

#### PATRIOTISM, NATIVISM, AND AMERICANIZATION IN THE WCTU, 1900–1933

At the WCTU's convention in 1909, president Lillian Stevens emphasized the duty and responsibility of all members toward all immigrants. "If individual life is worth anything we should welcome these people who come from over the sea, for they should be of great value to our nation," she urged. Stevens added, however, that how valuable these new arrivals would be "depends somewhat upon the way they are treated."<sup>1</sup> She pointed out the role of the existing American environment and society in molding the destinies of new arrivals. Authorities could deport an immigrant from Ellis Island if they deemed him "likely to become a public charge," for example. Perfectly legal saloons, however, could immediately reduce him to the same condition once admitted.

In Stevens's view, the WCTU had a role to play in easing immigrants' suffering and instructing them in morals and good citizenship according to the WCTU's standards. More broadly, the WCTU needed to reform society to eliminate saloons and other forces that

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<sup>1</sup> Lillian Stevens, "President's Address," *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1909), 113.

threatened individual fates and social cohesion. Stevens and other leaders took it for granted that immigrants should assimilate. “When they come to live with us they should be regarded as Americans and no longer strangers or foreigners,” she explained. She expected that this regard would go both ways. Newcomers should see *themselves* as Americans. They should do whatever it would take to become “desirable citizens” of their new country.<sup>2</sup> While most native-born white Americans agreed that “desirable” immigrants would embrace democracy and capitalism, the WCTU’s vision for them also included sobriety.

This chapter follows the WCTU’s relationship with immigrants into the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1933, the US experienced a peak in immigration from Europe and implemented a near-total ban on migration. This period also witnessed the triumph of Prohibition in 1919 and its repeal in 1933. Examination of the WCTU’s work among immigrants during this period fills a void in the scholarship, providing important insights into the history of progressivism, evangelical Christian reform, and nativism in the early twentieth century. Most importantly, it serves as a useful lens on the ambitions, shortcomings, and ultimate failure of the WCTU’s larger project to remake America into a sober country. The WCTU mounted a sincere, if at times ambivalent, effort to educate and instruct both new immigrants and native-born Americans in temperance principles. It participated in a broad cultural conversation in the early twentieth century over the meaning of “Americanism,” seeking to define it as both sober and Christian.

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<sup>2</sup> Stevens, “President’s Address” (1909), 113.

The WCTU achieved the long-sought goal of Prohibition with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919. The prohibition movement, however, had not succeeded in building a durable, popular consensus that the nation should go dry among either naturalized or native-born Americans. As the consequences of that failure became clearer during the Prohibition years, the WCTU shifted to an increasingly defensive posture. Leaders at the national level pleaded with Americans to “give Prohibition its chance.” They berated politicians, law enforcement, and regular citizens for neglecting their duty to uphold the law of the land. At the grassroots level, a nativist urge that had long animated some members of the WCTU increasingly bubbled to the surface. Some WCTU women found an outlet for their frustration in the resurgent Ku Klux Klan, which took on Prohibition enforcement as one of its major rallying cries.

The WCTU’s work with immigrants between 1900 and 1933 occurred in three overlapping phases. The first, from the turn of the century to roughly the mid-1910s, tracks with the nation’s last period of high and nearly unrestricted immigration. During this period, the “Foreign Work” department continued some of its activities from the previous two decades. It encouraged unions to distribute foreign-language temperance literature, coordinate lectures, and hold “mothers’ meetings” for immigrant women and children. More importantly, the department shifted a considerable amount of its effort and money to missionary work at the nation’s ports of entry. “Port of entry work” reflected the WCTU’s urgency to meet and make an impression on immigrants as soon they stepped through the “open door.” WCTU missionaries provided practical assistance to arriving immigrants and shared temperance literature. On a larger scale, they sought to ensure that their version of sober, Christian Americanism would prevail in the highly symbolic and increasingly contested spaces of the ports.

The WCTU was far from the only element of American society that felt this urgency around the “immigration problem.” The second phase of its immigration work reflects one of the major responses that emerged: the assimilationist “Americanization” movement of the World War I era.<sup>3</sup> As restrictive legislation and the advent of World War I in Europe in 1914 slowed the flow of European immigration, the WCTU turned more of its attention to reaching foreign-born residents already settled throughout the country. Along with a multitude of government agencies, social welfare organizations, and business groups, the national WCTU adopted a professionalized program of “Americanization” during the mid-1910s. The goal was, as WCTU leader Mary Wilson had put it a few years earlier, to solve “the most difficult race problem ever confronting a nation—that of assimilating at least sixty nationalities or races.”<sup>4</sup> Though the WCTU’s version of Americanization emphasized sobriety and Christianity, some of the program’s literature and leaders’ rhetoric reveals a surprising sensitivity to the unique talents and histories that each nationality might contribute to an American whole.

As in the 1880s and 1890s, this more welcoming and tolerant posture towards immigrants coexisted uneasily with impulses towards nativism and restriction within the WCTU. The organization’s leadership did not indulge in the kind of overt anti-German sentiment that became widespread during World War I. However, the advent of national Prohibition in 1919, leading to the third phase of WCTU immigration work, augured a more difficult test of the commitment to tolerance and welcome that Stevens had expressed ten years earlier. As violence and violations

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Mary B. Wilson, “Department of Work Among Foreign-Speaking People,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1907), 215.

of Prohibition law spiked, and public opinion began to turn against the Eighteenth Amendment, some WCTU members and other dries increasingly turned towards extreme rhetoric. They cast opposition to Prohibition as unpatriotic—even treasonous—and blamed immigrants and Catholics for its failure. As the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s mobilized around Prohibition enforcement and white Protestant grievance, some WCTU members joined its ranks.

### **Background: Prohibition and Immigration in the Early Twentieth Century**

Around 1900, the male-dominated Anti-Saloon League (ASL) became the dominant player in the prohibition movement. Under its dynamic leader Wayne Wheeler, the ASL pioneered modern pressure politics and employed many of the techniques of contemporary public relations.<sup>5</sup> It focused on electing legislators in the states and in Congress who promised to vote for prohibition measures, and it organized money and constituent power to ensure they kept those promises, or else lose their seats. ASL organizers lobbied for laws restricting sales of alcohol from the local to the federal level. They sought to sway public opinion in favor of dry measures. Unlike the WCTU, the ASL did not worry about its allies' own drinking behavior as long as their votes stayed dry. As scholars of the political history of Prohibition, including K. Austin Kerr and Thomas Pegram, have noted, the ASL's success with its chosen methods wrought a remarkable victory. A cascade of Midwestern and Southern states passed dry laws in the first years of the twentieth century. Buoyed by these successes, in 1913 the ASL decided to

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<sup>5</sup> K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Thomas Pegram, "Hoodwinked: The Anti-Saloon League and the Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Prohibition Enforcement," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 7, no. 1 (January 2008): 89–119; Jack S. Blocker Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne, 1989); Ann-Marie Szymanski, *Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates, and Social Movement Outcomes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.)

launch a constitutional amendment campaign. It proceeded at a blistering pace that surprised even some of the ASL's top leaders.<sup>6</sup> Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment in 1917, and the states ratified it two years later.

However, it quickly became clear that a political coalition powerful enough to achieve legal prohibition did not equate to an enduring cultural consensus in favor of sobriety. Both native-born and immigrant residents opposed Prohibition. As the WCTU knew well, and as historians have since documented, immigrants to the United States had always been among the demographics least likely to support prohibition.<sup>7</sup> Many new immigrants, especially from Eastern and Southern Europe, brought with them drinking customs and cultural practices that connected them to their countries of origin and helped to knit them into new communities in “wet” US cities. Certain groups, particularly Germans, were overrepresented in the brewing industry. As explained in chapter 2, critiques of the greed and disregard for social welfare supposedly displayed by the “liquor traffic” sometimes strayed into anti-German territory. Some evidence shows that immigrant households reduced their spending on alcohol as they assimilated into American society.<sup>8</sup> As Sabine N. Meyer has argued, however, opposition to prohibition and resentment of the nativist and anti-Catholic tenor of much dry campaigning also helped to

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<sup>6</sup> Pegram, “Hoodwinked,” 100.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> For the evidence on immigrants' drinking budgets, see Blocker, *American Temperance Movements*, 109–10.

fashion a shared political identity across immigrant ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the WCTU had been trying to build a pro-dry consensus for decades.

Outreach to immigrants was part of that project. Though former superintendent Sophie Grubb had retired from leading “Foreign Work” at the turn of the century, the department continued many of its previous activities: leafleting, mothers’ meetings, and lecture tours. It also aimed to identify class divisions that might dissuade working-class immigrant women from being receptive to a temperance message. Culla J. Vayhinger, an Indiana WCTU leader, warned against following the example of an unnamed “woman’s society” that had decided to reach local immigrant women by driving through their neighborhood in carriages driven by their Black servants and passing out tracts “with gloved hand” to every woman they saw. “In many cases the leaflet was torn to shreds before their eyes and the committees returned discouraged and pronounced these women ‘unappreciative of the Gospel message.’”<sup>10</sup> In its work at the nation’s ports of entry, WCTU members sought to present a sympathetic and welcoming face to new arrivals and to speak to them in their own languages as much as they could.

### **“The Greeting of the Saloon”: Welcoming, Instructing, and Inspecting Immigrants**

On a 1912 visit to the Ellis Island immigration station, WCTU Foreign Work Superintendent Mary Wilson gazed at the “great stream” of people coming up the stairway to the

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<sup>9</sup> Sabine N. Meyer, *We Are What We Drink: The Temperance Battle in Minnesota* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Culla J. Vayhinger, “The Two Ways,” undated pamphlet, Box 1, Folder “Americanization,” WCTU Leaflets by Topic, WCTU Archives, Evanston, Illinois.

processing center. She felt her “heart nearly [stand] still with perplexity and wonderment.”<sup>11</sup> The number of immigrants entering the United States grew rapidly in the early nineteenth century. In response, the WCTU’s Foreign Work department increasingly invested in temperance work as close to the source as it could get: the nation’s immigration inspection stations. As chapter 2 explained, the department assigned at least one WCTU missionary to the New York State immigration station at Castle Garden beginning in 1886. When the federal government took over immigration processing and established a new facility at Ellis Island in 1892, a WCTU worker named Mary L. Orr was ready. She would serve on the island for most of the next twenty years, witnessing an average of five thousand people a day pass through its gates.<sup>12</sup>

The WCTU’s work at the ports of entry reflected its ambivalent attitude toward immigration. On the one hand, WCTU missionaries provided practical assistance to new arrivals. They helped them locate relatives and purchase train tickets, and they soothed the sick in station hospitals and the detained awaiting deportation. On the other hand, ports of entry were also a site for the WCTU to exert as much influence as possible over the machinery of an expanding immigration bureaucracy and the decisions of individual immigrants. WCTU missionaries helped and comforted, but they also evangelized and inspected. Meanwhile, the organization’s

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<sup>11</sup> Mary B. Wilson, “Department of Work Among Foreign-Speaking People,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting* (1912), 193.

<sup>12</sup> “Overview and History,” Ellis Island Foundation, accessed January 4, 2021, <https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/overview-history/>. In 1903, Orr was reported to have been working at Ellis Island for about twelve years. The last year she was reported as missionary was 1912. See Annie G. Darley, “Work Among Foreign Speaking People,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirtieth Annual Meeting* (1903), 194–96; *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting* (1912), 191.



larger lobbying arms targeted the business and policy of the immigration stations with their anti-alcohol advocacy.

By the turn of the century, WCTU missionaries operated as part of a thriving network of religious and benevolent organizations that collaborated to provide immigrant aid at ports of entry. The majority of workers represented Protestant Christian churches and organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the American Tract Society. Jewish and Catholic organizations and secular groups serving particular nationalities also maintained a strong presence at the ports.<sup>13</sup> By 1914, the WCTU had missionaries in Boston, Providence, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Tampa, San Diego, San Francisco, and Portland, Maine.<sup>14</sup> Many of the ports were busy. During 1916, for example, Philadelphia WCTU missionary Mary Gruninger met ninety ships and distributed 40,000 pages of temperance literature.<sup>15</sup> But Ellis Island remained the focus of the network, with ninety percent of all arrivals between 1892 and 1924 passing through its gates.<sup>16</sup>

Mary Orr and most of these missionaries had been born in the United States, but there were exceptions. Athena Marmaroff, who took over from Orr as the WCTU's main missionary at Ellis Island in 1913, grew up in the city of Monastir in the Ottoman Empire. She reportedly

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<sup>13</sup> Joint Committee of Six, *Ports of Entry Missionary Herald* (New York: The Joint Committee of Six, 1916), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/55955/55955-h/55955-h.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Mary B. Wilson, "Work Among Foreign Speaking People," *Minutes of the National WCTU Forty-First Annual Meeting* (1914), 139–40.

<sup>15</sup> Joint Committee of Six, *Ports of Entry*.

<sup>16</sup> Alan M. Kraut, introduction to *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 3: Ellis Island, 1900-1933* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America), vii, [http://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/academic/upa\\_cis/1735\\_recsinsserapt3.pdf](http://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/academic/upa_cis/1735_recsinsserapt3.pdf).

spoke nine languages.<sup>17</sup> Mary Balmaceda, a Spanish-speaking missionary based in Tampa, Florida, interpreted for immigrants arriving from Spain and Cuba.<sup>18</sup> Both women were enmeshed in evangelical Protestant missionary and social reform networks beyond their WCTU membership. Marmaroff had attended a Congregational mission school in Monastir, and she served on a committee on detained immigrants for the ecumenical Home Missions Council and Council of Women for Home Missions.<sup>19</sup> After leaving her role with the WCTU sometime in the late 1910s, Balmaceda took a job as matron of a day nursery at the Methodist Episcopal Wolff Street Settlement in Tampa. The nursery provided daycare for the children of working immigrant mothers as part of the settlement's "Cuban Work." Balmaceda valued the "splendid opportunity to train the little ones for God."<sup>20</sup>

The missionaries dealt almost exclusively with steerage passengers who arrived at the ports. In New York, inspectors visited first- and second-class travelers aboard ship. If immigrants passed the checks, they could land directly in the city. Everyone else went to Ellis Island, where they disembarked with their luggage and entered the main building to face medical and legal inspections. Immigration staff admitted five of every six of the new arrivals, and they could proceed to the "Railroad Room" to make travel arrangements. WCTU missionaries gave them

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<sup>17</sup> Joint Committee of Six, *Ports of Entry*; Mary B. Wilson, "Work Among Foreign Speaking People," *Minutes of the National WCTU Fortieth Annual Meeting* (1913), 204–5. Monastir is now called Bitola and is located in North Macedonia.

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Fortieth Annual Meeting* (1913), 205.

<sup>19</sup> Joint Committee of Six, *Ports of Entry*.

<sup>20</sup> *Tenth Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for 1919–1920* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1920). [https://archive.org/stream/tenthannualrepor1920meth/tenthannualrepor1920meth\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/tenthannualrepor1920meth/tenthannualrepor1920meth_djvu.txt).

tracts warning them away from the nearby saloons. The missionaries' main work, however, was practical: helping newcomers purchase train tickets, send letters to relatives already in the country, exchange currency, and obtain new "American-style" clothing. State unions collected money, used clothing, toys, and books and sent them to the ports for missionaries to distribute.<sup>21</sup> Immigrants diagnosed with medical conditions or deemed "likely to become a public charge"—either due to physical or "moral" deficiency or lack of funds—were sent to the hospital, detained, or deported.<sup>22</sup> This group was the most in need; ministering to the sick, detained, and dying occupied much of the missionaries' energy. These dramatic experiences notwithstanding, most new arrivals only spent a few hours at the ports before they left. WCTU missionaries sought to make the most of this crucial opportunity for contact. Orr and her Philadelphia counterpart, Mary Gruninger, passed out "traveling cards" to new immigrants with the temperance pledge, contact information for a WCTU member at their destination, and a reply card addressed to the missionary.<sup>23</sup> They hoped that the friendly face and help of a missionary worker would leave a lasting positive impression on new arrivals who might yearn for a reference point to hold on to.

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<sup>21</sup> Mary B. Wilson, "Work Among Foreign Speaking People," *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-Fifth Annual Meeting* (1908), 228.

<sup>22</sup> The "public charge rule" was first introduced in the Immigration Act of 1882, excluding from immigration "any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of him or herself without becoming a public charge." Later laws broadened the category of excludable persons and gave immigration inspectors more power in determining who was "likely to become a public charge." On disability and immigration restriction, see Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-Fifth Annual Meeting* (1908), 229.

### **Exerting Authority at Ellis Island: Saloons, Inspections, and Proselytizing**

The WCTU viewed Ellis Island and other immigration inspection stations as fruitful fields for encountering new immigrants and hopefully converting them to temperance. These locations were also highly symbolic, however. Much as the Statue of Liberty became an emblem of freedom and promise to immigrants arriving in New York Harbor, so too did the iconic “golden door” beneath serve as a symbolic stand-in for the overall reception the United States offered. For many interest groups, it was important that the processes at Ellis Island be humane, not only for their own sake, but also for what they communicated about the nation’s identity and attitude toward new residents. For the WCTU, legal alcohol sales on Ellis Island stained the country’s reputation. While the Republican administration of Benjamin Harrison had restricted such sales, Harrison’s Democratic successor Grover Cleveland reinstated them after taking office in 1893. WCTU President Frances Willard noted acerbically that the order was “in keeping with the record” of the historically wet Democratic Party.<sup>24</sup> Willard and other leaders characterized the ban on alcohol as a measure that protected immigrants, part of the federal government’s larger duty to shield new arrivals from harm.

Perhaps more potently for WCTU missionaries, the presence of saloons on Ellis Island also seemed to make their efforts futile and even absurd. “How I wish something might be done to stop the sale of beer at the Barge Office,” Ellis Island missionary Mary Orr wrote to Sophie Grubb in 1898. “I often give out tracts to people who will hold the tract in one hand while they

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<sup>24</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Eleventh Annual Meeting* (1894), 138.

drink beer out of a bottle from the other.”<sup>25</sup> The ban on beer sales had not necessarily made any individual immigrant more receptive to the temperance message. Alcohol’s presence did, however, illustrate the gulf between the dry nation the WCTU tried to present to newcomers and the reality of the damp country they lived in.

In 1895, Sophie Grubb launched a lobby and petition campaign to prevent concessionaries on Ellis Island from selling alcohol. Local and state unions and members of the Christian Endeavor Society, a youth organization, showered New York’s Congressional delegation with petitions claiming that the sales made the WCTU’s work on the station impossible.<sup>26</sup> “The American flag still floats over the saloon at our chief port of entry,” summarized WCTU leader Mary Lovell, “and immigrants are welcomed with the greeting of the saloon.”<sup>27</sup> It was an uphill battle. New York Senator David B. Hill, begrudgingly presenting the petitions in Congress, professed that he could not think of a single reason not to sell beer to immigrants. (Hill also disparaged the petition process itself, a dig at one of the chief tools available to voteless women to make political demands and therefore a gendered insult that the WCTU did not overlook.)

Commissioner-General of Immigration Herman Stump backed Hill. He explained that the WCTU should not call these stores “saloons” because they sold only beer, not liquor. According to Stump, newly arriving immigrants had initially thought the sodas and ginger ales for sale were

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<sup>25</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting* (1898), 189.

<sup>26</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1895), 49, 201; *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirteenth Annual Meeting* (1896), 173; “Immigrants Can Only Get Beer,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1895, 7; “W. C. T. U. Convention,” *New York Times*, November 13, 1896, 8.

<sup>27</sup> “W. C. T. U. Convention,” *New York Times*.

American beers. On first taste, the apparently low quality of New World “lager” had appalled them. On realizing their error, however, they demanded actual beer.<sup>28</sup> For Hill and Stump, it was nonsensical for the government to try to “protect” immigrant consumers from the products they specifically demanded. The WCTU attributed this reaction to politicians in thrall to liquor interests and called Stump (who had been born in Maryland) a “beer-loving” German.<sup>29</sup> All the relevant officials were Democrats. In the late 1890s, they had little meaningful temperance constituency.

In addition to offering help and succor to newly arriving immigrants, the WCTU also pushed to exert some authority over the immigration enforcement machinery that had evolved during this period. Sometimes, missionaries advocated on behalf of immigrants whom they believed the authorities had unfairly barred from entry, writing appeals or petitions on their behalf.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, missionaries sometimes served as de facto immigration enforcers. At the port of Tampa, for example, Mary Balmaceda worked with port officials to “detect undesirable immigrants” on ships arriving from Spain and Cuba.<sup>31</sup> As we have seen, the WCTU considered many groups of immigrants to be potentially “undesirable” due to disease, disability, political beliefs, and class status. They seemed most concerned, however, with immigrants whom they deemed undesirable because of sexual immorality.

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<sup>28</sup> “Immigrants Can Get Only Beer,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1895, 7, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1895/11/17/102481056.html?pageNumber=7>.

<sup>29</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twelfth Annual Meeting* (1895), 201.

<sup>30</sup> Joint Committee of Six, *Ports of Entry*.

<sup>31</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Fortieth Annual Meeting* (1913), 205.

While the WCTU invested considerable time and money in missionary work, leaders also wanted more official roles for women at the ports of entry who could take on this problem. In 1894, Sophie Grubb and the Foreign Work Department recommended that the WCTU petition the federal government to appoint a female official at Ellis Island. She would share literature on “good citizenship” and offer caring assistance to women and children immigrants and the “distressed and friendless.”<sup>32</sup> The following year, New Jersey WCTU leader Margaret Dye Ellis became superintendent of the WCTU’s Legislative Department. She was the union’s main lobbyist, spending winters with her husband in Washington, DC, and leveraging her considerable connections to advance the WCTU’s priorities.<sup>33</sup>

Ellis took up the cause of female immigration inspectors. Her campaign sits at the intersection of several of the WCTU’s chief concerns at the turn of the century: immigration, sexual immorality and prostitution, and public roles for women. Ellis connected the appointment of women inspectors to the prevention of prostitution and sex trafficking, often salaciously called “white slavery.”<sup>34</sup> In fall 1902, newspapers printed of lurid accounts of police raids on twenty brothels in Philadelphia. Young women, mostly Jewish immigrants, filled these “disorderly houses.” An organized ring of sex traffickers had brought them into the country, apparently

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<sup>32</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-first Annual Meeting* (1894), 262.

<sup>33</sup> “Margaret Dye Ellis,” in Mrs. John A. Logan, *The Part Taken by Women in American History* (Philadelphia: Perry-Nalle, 1912), 666–67; Jessica Pliley, “The Petticoat Inspectors: Women Boarding Inspectors and the Gendered Exercise of Federal Authority,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 12, no. 1 (2013): 100-1.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Francesco Cordasco and Thomas M. Pitkin, *The White Slave Trade and the Immigrants: A Chapter in American Social History* (Detroit, MI: Blaine-Ethridge, 1981); Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887–1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

under the noses of American immigration inspectors.<sup>35</sup> Ellis identified the problem as lax inspection of first- and second-class passengers, who were spared the more intensive surveillance conducted on Ellis Island itself. “White slavers” evaded detection by booking passage with women purported to be their wives or daughters. They counted on male boarding inspectors not to look too closely at their privileged “family” groups or ask too many questions if they did notice something amiss. Ellis and other anti-white slavery activists also raised fears of what might happen to unaccompanied immigrant girls. They warned that sex traffickers could easily deceive young women who had few friends or contacts in the new country into prostitution. More commonly, men who promised to marry them could seduce and abandon them.<sup>36</sup> The reformers charged that the federal government failed in its paternal duty to safeguard arriving immigrants, particularly vulnerable young women who most needed protection.<sup>37</sup>

In 1903, Ellis and a representative from the American Purity Alliance took their concerns to a meeting with then-President Theodore Roosevelt. They offered him a solution: appoint female boarding inspectors. They argued that, while male officials might be able to observe passengers and ask detailed questions to discern their relationships to one another, they lacked the intuition and nurturing instincts that women inspectors would bring to the task of protecting

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<sup>35</sup> Pliley, “Petticoat Inspectors,” 95–96.

<sup>36</sup> Pliley, “Petticoat Inspectors,” 100, 114.

<sup>37</sup> Pliley, “Petticoat Inspectors,” 97. Ellis specifically cited Section 22 of the Immigration Act of 1903, which charged the Commissioner-General of Immigration with authority over the implementation and administration of immigration laws and with “protecting the United States and aliens migration thereto from fraud and loss.” Immigration Act of 1903, Pub. L. 57–162, 32 Stat. 1213 (1903), <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=32&page=1213#>. See Margaret Dye Ellis, “Statement Concerning Women Immigration Inspectors,” National Archives, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/16476448>.



other women. While women missionaries and aid workers could bring these instincts to bear, they did not have the authority to report and detain at-risk women without an inspector's badge. As Jessica Pliley notes in her examination of this episode, Ellis drew on the language of maternalism common to progressive women reformers to argue that women should wield the paternalistic power of the federal government to protect, police, and—if necessary—punish arriving immigrants.<sup>38</sup>

Roosevelt agreed with Ellis and ordered a three-month trial of women boarding inspectors. Despite the objections of William Williams, the official in charge of Ellis Island, the Bureau hired four women with middle-class backgrounds and reform work experience.<sup>39</sup> They quickly made use of their new powers. In many cases, they used them to police the sexual behavior of immigrant women whose “immorality” was clearly consensual. One unmarried immigrant woman planned to leave the dock with a man she had met during the crossing. A male immigration official allowed her to go, deeming her “old enough to take care of herself.” A female boarding inspector intervened and detained her until an acceptable relative came to pick her up. The woman was twenty-eight years old.<sup>40</sup>

In other cases, women inspectors clearly did save immigrant women from harm. “A young woman was traveling with a man who was the adopted son of her parents; she was to be his housekeeper in the United States,” Ellis wrote. “The man was intoxicated, abusive, and had used up nearly all their joint funds.” The woman knew no one in the United States, but she

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<sup>38</sup> Pliley, “Petticoat Inspectors,” 116.

<sup>39</sup> Pliley, “Petticoat Inspectors,” 104–6.

<sup>40</sup> Ellis, “Statement Concerning Women Immigration Inspectors,” 3.

trusted one of the women inspectors enough to confide in her and beg for help to get away from him, which the inspector was able to provide.<sup>41</sup> In other cases, female inspectors used their powers to detain young women whom they reasonably suspected were vulnerable to being preyed upon by unscrupulous men. One young woman intended to join family in Minnesota but had missed her train. An official found her about to leave the dock with six men who had told her they would take her to a hotel for the night. The female boarding inspector used her powers of detention to keep the woman on board her ship until the next morning. They next day, some of her friends arrived to collect her. The inspector determined that they were respectable guardians and released her to them.<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately for Ellis and her allies, male immigration officials' resistance to the experiment was so strong that Williams canceled it after just four weeks. The women inspectors reported that their colleagues undermined, dismissed, and mocked them. Despite vociferous protests from Ellis and her allies, including reformers Florence Kelley, Josiah Strong, and Sadie American, Ellis did not succeed in getting the program reinstated. Williams downgraded the women from inspectors with the power to question and detain to "Boarding Matrons" empowered only to support their male bosses. The title reinforced the gendered nature of their roles. After leaving his position and then returning to it in 1909, William Williams managed to cancel even that lesser program over the WCTU's objections.<sup>43</sup> As Pliley shows, Progressive

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<sup>41</sup> Ellis, "Statement Concerning Women Immigration Inspectors," 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ellis, "Statement Concerning Women Immigration Inspectors," 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Thirty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1909), 201; Pliley, "Petticoat Inspectors," 124.

women reformers' attempts to professionalize their work—as with Ellis and the female immigration inspectors—proved uneven and subject to tremendous resistance.

In the case of Ellis Island, the WCTU was fighting on two fronts. The first was to get male inspectors and immigrants treat women officials as legitimate. The second was to have their longstanding concerns over “social purity” and “white slavery” taken seriously. At the same time, WCTU missionaries also sought to bring another of their priorities, religious proselytizing, into ports of entry. They passed out Bibles and religious tracts, as well as temperance literature, to arriving immigrants. They also engaged in an ultimately failed campaign to prevent ships from docking on Sundays. WCTU leaders consistently expressed a preoccupation with maintaining a Christian identity they believed was central to “true Americanism.” At times, they clashed with secular authorities who were facing new demands to accommodate and respect religious pluralism as government authority extended into more areas of American life.

The WCTU viewed Christian evangelism and temperance evangelism as twin objectives. The Foreign Work Department proudly tallied the totals of converts and temperance pledge-signers that missionaries persuaded. Workers distributed temperance leaflets and Bibles in various languages, frequently reporting that immigrants received them “gladly,” enjoyed reading them, and asked for more for friends and family.<sup>44</sup> Superintendent Annie Darley praised the “tact” of Mary Orr, the Ellis Island missionary, in knowing when to move beyond material assistance to offer spiritual sustenance. “She is rewarded by many a one coming back to her as

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, *Report of the National WCTU Fortieth Annual Meeting* (1913), 204–5.

did an old Jew and telling her he had read what she gave him about her Jesus and he would like to know more,” Darley enthused.<sup>45</sup>

This particular man may have been interested in Orr’s tracts, but many more were not. As usual, these sunny reports downplayed the resistance WCTU workers received from immigrants and their allies who were uninterested in Christianity, sobriety, or both. Some of this resistance becomes visible through the actions of immigration authorities who admonished the Christian evangelists. In 1908, for example, Ellis Island commissioner Robert Watchorn issued a stern warning to the WCTU and other Christian missionary groups: stop proselytizing to Jews. Watchorn had received numerous complaints from the Hebrew Societies working at the port about overzealous Protestant missionaries. His message indicated that this was not the first time he had warned them to stop. Watchorn cautioned that he would not leave the government open to the kind of “turmoil and controversy” that would result from seeming to favor one religion over another at a government station. He knew that the public closely scrutinized activities at Ellis Island, as supporters and opponents of immigration searched for fodder to use in their arguments. At the same time, the expanding administrative state that developed through the immigration bureaucracy encountered new conflicts between government authority and religious liberty.<sup>46</sup>

Mary Wilson and her advisors in the WCTU’s Foreign Work Department conceded that Watchorn’s order “was a just one, and should be strictly obeyed.” Like Watchorn, they recognized the ports of entry as a significant and contested space for their work. Likely, it was

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<sup>45</sup> Annie G. Darley, “Work Among Foreign Speaking People,” *Minutes of the National WCTU Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting* (1900), 196.

<sup>46</sup> Kraut, introduction to *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. for reference to administrative state

not worth the consequences of disobeying and potentially being barred from the station.<sup>47</sup> A pamphlet issued in 1916 by the Home Missions Council, an umbrella organization for Protestant missionaries, reflected this reality. It called for tracts to be “interdenominational and not of a proselytizing nature,” and noted that federal immigration officials praised immigrant aid workers for the “*social and humanitarian* side of the work” but downplayed the “spiritual” side as more problematic.<sup>48</sup> While Wilson and her colleagues acquiesced to Watchorn’s order in this case, they shared a larger unease that liberal Protestant Christianity—which for decades had enjoyed such centrality to American society and culture—had been losing its favored place.

**“The Path to Patriotism is the Path to Prohibition”: Americanization and World War I**

In 1907, when nearly 1.3 million people entered the United States in what would turn out to be the peak of European immigration, WCTU Superintendent of Foreign Work Mary Wilson pondered what seemed to her and many other native-born Americans to be a crisis. “The influence of the foreigner is strongly felt now in labor, in politics, in education, in finance, in citizenship, and in moral and religious life,” she wrote in her annual report. “We are face to face with the most difficult race problem ever confronting a nation—that of assimilating at least sixty nationalities or races.”<sup>49</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, Wilson and other WCTU leaders also worried about the future of the average American adult, whom the emerging science of heredity suggested would inherit at least some of the “physical, mental, and moral” traits of their parents

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<sup>47</sup> *Report of the National WCTU Thirty-fifth Annual Meeting* (1908), 229.

<sup>48</sup> Joint Committee of Six, *Ports of Entry*.

<sup>49</sup> Mary B. Wilson, “Department of Work Among Foreign-Speaking People,” *Report of the National WCTU Thirty-Fourth Annual Convention* (1907), 215.

and grandparents. Perhaps even more strongly, Wilson feared what new religious, cultural, and racial influences would do to the country. Would it retain the Protestant Christian character she saw as essential to its flourishing? Or would the United States become “a nation of whom it shall be said ‘God is not in all their thoughts?’”<sup>50</sup>

Wilson’s concerns echoed those of many Americans. As the numbers of people immigrating each year continued to climb throughout the 1900s, members of the Immigration Restriction League and their allies used their growing influence to implement new anti-immigrant laws and policies. In 1907, Congress passed and President Theodore Roosevelt signed into law an Immigration Act that introduced new restrictions on migration related to illness and disability. Foreign Work Superintendent Mary Wilson praised it as acting to “sift out more thoroughly the undesirable classes of immigrants.”<sup>51</sup> The law also created the United States Immigration Commission, popularly known as the Dillingham Commission, to examine the driving forces and outcomes of the surge in migration. As historians like Robert Zeidel and Katherine Benton-Cohen have shown, its 1911 report would lay the foundation for the severe immigration restrictions of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act.<sup>52</sup>

These early restrictions, coupled with the outbreak of World War I in Europe, accelerated the decline of European immigration to the United States. As the numbers of new arrivals ticked

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<sup>50</sup> Wilson, “Department of Work Among Foreign-Speaking People,” (1907), 215.

<sup>51</sup> Wilson, “Department of Work Among Foreign-Speaking People,” (1907), 216.

<sup>52</sup> The Commission’s forty-one-volume 1911 report would lay the foundation for the coming restrictionist regime. On the Dillingham Commission, see especially Robert F. Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900–1927* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004); Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and Its Legacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

downward, the WCTU shifted its resources away from ports of entry and toward the foreign-born who had already arrived.<sup>53</sup> Mary Wilson began to talk less about the danger of American ideals being “lowered” and institutions “destroyed” by foreign influence and more about the opportunity to transform newcomers into “useful citizens” according to the WCTU’s values.<sup>54</sup> The WCTU was not alone in this pivot, but part of a broad and popular movement to assimilate millions of recently arrived immigrants that quickly took on the name “Americanization.” While many groups enacted the ideology of “100 Percent Americanism” via patriotic parades, loyalty oaths, and literacy tests, others used the terminology of the Americanization movement to pursue less coercive pathways to assimilation.<sup>55</sup>

As John McClymer has argued, the significance of the Americanization movement lies less in its success in its chosen objectives and more in its nature as “a campaign to fix the public meaning of Americanism.”<sup>56</sup> Under the umbrella of the National Americanization Committee, founded in May 1915 and directed by Progressive lawyer and settlement worker Frances Kellor, groups across the nation organized English classes, prepared curricula on American history and

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<sup>53</sup> Foreign Work superintendent Mary Wilson reported, for example, that only 20,000 immigrants arrived in September 1914 compared to 100,000 a year earlier. *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-first Annual Meeting* (1914), 139. By 1918, the WCTU’s Ellis Island missionary Athena Marmaroff had stopped her work and the organization asked members to stop sending donations for it. *Union Signal*, January 24, 1918, 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting* (1910), 199; *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-second Annual Meeting* (1915), 164.

<sup>55</sup> On 100 percent Americanism, see Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s–1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 232–36; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 236–53.

<sup>56</sup> John F. McClymer, “Gender and the ‘American Way of Life’: Women in the Americanization Movement.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 3 (1991): 8.

citizenship, and hosted patriotic pageants.<sup>57</sup> Organizations as diverse as the Ford Motor Company, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the National Council of Jewish Women participated. Each wielded their own slightly different interpretation of Americanization.<sup>58</sup>

The WCTU eagerly aligned with the new effort, changing the name of the “Department of Work Among Foreign Speaking People” to the more succinct “Department of Americanization” in 1917.<sup>59</sup> The WCTU invested significant money and effort into training Americanization instructors and setting up Americanization centers in immigrant neighborhoods. In the summer of 1919, the WCTU sponsored a six-week “training school” at the Chautauqua Institute in upstate New York.<sup>60</sup> Students, many of them preparing to start salaried jobs in the Americanization programs proliferating across the country, paid ninety dollars to attend. The

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<sup>57</sup> McClymer, “Gender and the ‘American Way of Life,’” 3. For more on Americanization, see Christina A. Ziegler-McPherson, *Americanization in the States: Immigrant Social Welfare Policy, Citizenship, and National Identity in the United States, 1908–1929* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880–1930,” *Journal of American History* 79, no.3 (1992): 996–1020.

<sup>58</sup> Even Americanization leaders acknowledged that there were multiple, even conflicting, definitions of the term. One person, wrote Frances Kellor in 1919, might think that Americanization “is summed up in learning the English language; another thinks it is achieved by becoming an American citizen; a third, that it is adopting American clothes and manners and associating with native Americans; and a fourth, that it means that everybody should be able to sing ‘the Star Spangled Banner.’” For Kellor, these were potential *means* of Americanization, but its “essence” was the fusion of diverse native-born and immigrant groups, all treated as equals to one another, into one society that would be both indivisible and more than the sum of its parts. Frances Kellor, “What is Americanization,” in *Immigration and Americanization: Selected Readings*, ed. Philip Davis (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1920), 625, [https://archive.org/stream/immigrationameri00daviuoft/immigrationameri00daviuoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/immigrationameri00daviuoft/immigrationameri00daviuoft_djvu.txt).

<sup>59</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting* (1916), 83.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Clark Barnes, “Six Weeks’ Americanization Training School,” *Union Signal*, May 29, 1919, 5.



following year, WCTU established a permanent “Americanization Center” in New York City, in cooperation with the renowned Teachers College at Columbia University.<sup>61</sup>

The WCTU labored to persuade both foreign-born and native-born Americans to accept its own dry and Christian version of Americanism. According to Christina McPherson, Americanizers occupied a spectrum from conservative to progressive. Conservatives understood “true Americanism” as Protestant and Anglo-American. The nation was formed and finished: a beacon to the world. New inhabitants should accept the country and its cultures uncritically. Progressives, on the other hand, applied the core beliefs of their cohort to the project of helping and assimilating new immigrants. They stressed the importance of environmental forces in shaping human destiny and demanded an expanded role for the state in social welfare.<sup>62</sup>

As in many areas, the WCTU exhibited both conservative and progressive elements in its approach to Americanization. On the one hand, much of its literature celebrated the unique talents and “gifts” immigrants brought to the United States. Other progressive Americanizers used similar language.<sup>63</sup> The WCTU’s Americanization department produced leaflets that reminded WCTU workers to appreciate the talents of the foreign women they were trying to help and guide. They might be able to cook or sew with “a perfection unknown to the average American woman.”<sup>64</sup> Different ethnic groups brought unique abilities with them. Italian

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<sup>61</sup> “The Case of Jacob—One of Thousands of America’s Children Born of Non-English Speaking Parents,” *Union Signal*, December 4, 1919, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ziegler-McPherson, *Americanization in the States*, 3–10.

<sup>63</sup> Ziegler-McPherson, *Americanization in the States*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Culla Vayhinger, “The Neighbor-Teacher,” n.d., 3, in “Americanization” Pamphlet Collection, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL.

immigrants, even those “from the poorer classes,” supposedly had great knowledge and appreciation for classical music, while East Asians boasted “immense powers of concentration and great respect for authority.”

Drawing on the image of the “melting pot” becoming popular during this period, the author of one pamphlet urged that during the process of fusing, “we must see to it that not one atom of precious metal be lost.”<sup>65</sup> The department urged local unions to organize exhibits displaying local immigrant women’s handicrafts and cooking. WCTU women should display “a sincere desire to learn more about the countries from which our new citizens come.” Despite these hints at an appreciation for multiculturalism, assimilation remained the goal. The department suggested that this event conclude with an “All-American Night,” which would feature patriotic music and encourage immigrants to talk about why they had chosen to become Americans.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, many women in the WCTU who were involved with Americanization revealed their continuing anxiety about the impact of immigration and their desire to deracinate new arrivals from their origins. One pamphlet warned that foreign-born residents might appear Americanized but that they could easily be concealing their “foreign ideals.” The author insisted that “the colonists and their descendants” deserved “priority rights” to determine the institutions and principles that would guide the nation—particularly Prohibition. To truly be “worthy” of American citizenship, new immigrants would have to undergo a “rebirth” akin to the evangelical

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<sup>65</sup> Katharine Lent Stevenson, “The Blessedness of Receiving,” n.d., c. 1921-1925, 5, in “Americanization” Pamphlet Collection, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL.

<sup>66</sup> Lucy A. Poole, “Americanization Exhibit,” n.d., in “Americanization” Pamphlet Collection, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL.

conversion experience.<sup>67</sup> Another author complained that amid high immigration native-born Christians had not worked hard enough to maintain Christian and American culture. She pointed to Catholic parochial schools, declining church attendance rates, and Sunday baseball as portents of decline.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, like other women's organizations involved in Americanization work, the WCTU homed in on the immigrant family as the crux of the assimilation problem and the appropriate field for its work. "The real dreadnaughts of a nation are not armored cruisers, but stable firesides," proclaimed Superintendent of Americanization Mary Clark Barnes at the 1919 convention.<sup>69</sup> The militaristic imagery fit the World War I-era context, but the message that a successful society grew from successful families had long been part of the WCTU's arguments. Barnes argued that the language barrier dividing immigrant parents, especially mothers, from their Americanizing children and wider society was a grave threat to family stability and thus children's success.

### **World War I and Prohibition**

The outbreak of World War I in Europe and the lead-up to American involvement provoked a rise in domestic nativism that too frequently turned violent. Anti-German xenophobia was particularly strong. German immigrant communities faced bans on the German language and

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<sup>67</sup> Rose A. Davison, "One Hundred Per Cent Americanism," n.d., 3-4, in "Americanization" Pamphlet Collection, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL.

<sup>68</sup> Mrs. C. S. Danks, "An American Problem," n.d., in "Americanization" Pamphlet Collection, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL.

<sup>69</sup> Barnes, "The Case of Jacob."

press, attacks on their homes and businesses, and even a lynching.<sup>70</sup> The 1916 presidential campaign relied heavily on a nationalistic invocation of “Americanism” that became strongly identified with support for the war. Reformers like Carrie Chapman Catt, the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), calculated that they should ease their commitments to pacifism or internationalism if they wanted to make progress in other arenas.

In the context of World War I, native-born Americans expressed worry that immigrants’ loyalties might remain with their mother countries rather than their adopted government. American entry into the war in spring 1917 seemed to demand a united, patriotic public. WCTU President Anna Gordon urged local WCTUs already living under prohibition to make Americanization their top priority. She warned that “the urgent need of national solidarity and of the extension of the principles of brotherhood among the 8,000,000 foreign-speaking people in the United States cannot be over-stated.”<sup>71</sup> The wartime WCTU also adopted the slogan “the Path to Patriotism is the Path of Prohibition” and emphasized it at every opportunity.<sup>72</sup> The organization had long been part of the international women’s peace movement. Like other moral reform organizations, it contained some members who felt ambivalent about American

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<sup>70</sup> Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 232–33; Flanagan cites Kennedy, *Over Here*, 67–68. The most notorious attack was the lynching of Robert Prager, a German immigrant coal miner in Collinsville, Illinois. A mob harassed and beat him and wrapped him in an American flag before hanging him. See E. A. Schwartz, “The Lynching of Robert Prager, the United Mine Workers, and the Problems of Patriotism in 1918,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 95, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 414–37.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Gordon, “President’s Address,” *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 99.

<sup>72</sup> Most notably, this phrase was the title of WCTU president Anna Adams Gordon’s speech at the convention of 1917. *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 28.

intervention.<sup>73</sup> Like the suffrage movement, however, the WCTU quickly worked to direct general patriotic fervor toward its chosen cause. After American entry into the war, the WCTU characterized brewing and distilling as an unacceptable waste of grain. “In the interest of efficiency, conservation of manhood and material resources,” proclaimed President Anna Gordon in her 1917 president’s address, it was “the duty of every citizen to abstain from alcoholic liquors during the period of the war.”<sup>74</sup> The WCTU demanded that the military not provide alcohol to American soldiers abroad and exulted in the signing of wartime prohibition.

The official statements of the national WCTU mostly confined themselves to criticisms of the German government and army, avoiding the ugliest of the anti-German nativism that helped fuel the prohibition movement during the war. In her 1917 convention speech, for example, Anna Gordon acknowledged that the WCTU had once praised Kaiser Wilhelm II for advising his soldiers not to drink (Willard had called him the “redoubtable young Emperor” in 1887).<sup>75</sup> Gordon cited anti-German propaganda circulated by the British government, however, to claim that things had changed. With little evidence, the propaganda asserted that drunken German soldiers had raped and tortured women and children during the 1914 invasion of Belgium. Drunkenness and sexual assault, it suggested, were now permissible in Germany.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Woman’s World/Woman’s Empire: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 186–88.

<sup>74</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 29.

<sup>75</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 45; *Minutes of National WCTU Twenty-second Annual Meeting* (1897), 110.

<sup>76</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 45. The propaganda in question was the Bryce Report, officially the Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, detailed sensationalist stories of supposed rapes and tortures by the German army that probably did not occur as described. Nevertheless, the report was a major British propaganda effort and was widely reprinted in the US in May-

Equating the country's "autocracy" with drunkenness, Gordon and the WCTU defined the democracy for which the U.S. would "make the world safe" as sober.

The WCTU trumpeted examples of non-Anglo-American voters approving prohibition as signs of their patriotism and essential Americanism. For example, the 1917 Jones-Shafroth Act granted Puerto Ricans US citizenship and some governing autonomy. It also set up a referendum on prohibition for the island that Puerto Rican voters—to many observers' surprise—approved.<sup>77</sup> After the vote, Anna Gordon praised Puerto Rican voters for preferring "the milk in the coconut to the poison in the bottle." She proclaimed that the island had proved "her fitness for American citizenship by outlawing the most deadly enemy of civic virtue." Gordon suggested that the result should prompt the congressmen who had approved prohibition for the territory—but rejected it for the "parent country"—to reconsider.<sup>78</sup> She also credited the "warm-hearted, responsive" voters of New Mexico for a decisive prohibition victory in that state. Noting that "Spanish-Americans" constituted 70 percent of New Mexico's population, Gordon argued that the result "demonstrated their unswerving patriotism to their adopted country."<sup>79</sup>

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June 1915. Antoine Rivière, "Rape," *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, updated November 2, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10757>.

<sup>77</sup> See Truman R. Clark, "Prohibition in Puerto Rico, 1917–1933," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 1 (1995): 77–97.

<sup>78</sup> Gordon, "President's Address," (1917), 72. Gordon's rhetoric here is similar to that used by other suffragists; see Alison Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870–1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-fourth Annual Meeting* (1917), 72.

### **“Give Prohibition Its Chance”: Enforcement, Coercion, and Nativism, 1919–1933**

The year 1920 was a watershed year for the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. On January 17, Prohibition became the law of the land. That August, Tennessee ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, clearing the way for women across the nation to vote in that fall’s elections. The WCTU celebrated the victories of World War I, suffrage, and Prohibition at its 1919 convention. Anna Gordon made it clear that she viewed the Prohibition victory as a triumph for the WCTU’s version of Americanism. “The Eighteenth Amendment to the national constitution, to go into effect in January, 1920, will free our twentieth century civilization from its greatest enemy—the un-American liquor traffic,” she proclaimed. “From the beginning the liquor traffic in this country has been of alien and autocratic origin. Our Victory year, 1919, signalizes the triumph over alcohol and autocracy.”<sup>80</sup> Led by the aggressive tactics of the Anti-Saloon League, this triumph had happened faster than expected. Even some prohibition leaders felt surprise and unease about whether the country was “ready” for Prohibition. ASL leader Ernest Cherrington, for example, had advocated a long-term education campaign aimed at convincing new immigrants to accept dry reform. He had expected the amendment campaign to take twenty years; it took six.<sup>81</sup> These fears came to fruition once national Prohibition became law in 1919. Multiple factors contributed to the widespread evasion, corruption, and violence that characterized the Prohibition era in the public mind, including a weak and underfunded enforcement apparatus. On a basic level, however, dry leaders found themselves struggling to

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<sup>80</sup> *Minutes of National WCTU Forty-sixth Annual Meeting* (1919), 68.

<sup>81</sup> Pegram, “Hoodwinked,” 101–2.

build and maintain genuine support for Prohibition. Cherrington told an ASL convention in 1925 that “we got Prohibition in the United States before the public sentiment of the United States was ready for Prohibition.”<sup>82</sup>

Though the WCTU had begun advocating for prohibition early in its history, had worked closely with the ASL in many places, and had jubilantly celebrated the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment, its vision of a dry America went beyond protecting people from predatory liquor traffic and their own appetites via legislation. The central instrument of WCTU recruitment had always been the temperance pledge, an individual commitment to total abstinence. Ideally, the pledge represented a person’s sincere and inner-directed motivation to live temperately. Taking the pledge was not like making a commitment to vote for a local option law or to donate to the dry candidate. It signified a transformed life. Unfortunately, the WCTU was not able to orchestrate enough individual transformations to sustain the top-down changes imposed by the Eighteenth Amendment.

As the problems with Prohibition enforcement became more apparent, the WCTU struggled to find rhetoric that would convey what it saw as the essential link between Prohibition and Americanism. It framed its defense of the Eighteenth Amendment, in increasingly strident terms, as the action of loyal Americans against un-American enemies. In stump speeches she delivered across Missouri in 1924, WCTU leader Nelle G. Burger charged the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment (AAPA), a leading Repeal organization, with being “a traitor under the flag.” The AAPA, she said, sought to destroy Americans’ respect for the law

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Pegram, “Hoodwinked,” 101.



and therefore the foundation of good government itself. “If its mandates prevailed, the flag of our fathers would be trailed in the dust.” Against this foe, the WCTU formed a “great patriotic army of defense” that would support for office only “true blue Americans” who promised to defend Prohibition.<sup>83</sup>

The advent of national Prohibition coincided with an increase in the WCTU’s Americanization work, rather than a slackening. In 1920, the Baltimore WCTU bought a house in an immigrant neighborhood in the city for use as an Americanization center.<sup>84</sup> A Pittsburgh union coordinated with an existing settlement house to use some of their space.<sup>85</sup> As part of its “Jubilee Fund,” a goal to raise a million dollars to support the WCTU in time for its hundredth anniversary in 1924, the WCTU aimed to allocate two hundred thousand dollars for Americanization work, a sign that it remained a high priority.<sup>86</sup> As with the WCTU’s overall outlook during Prohibition, however, the posture of the Americanization department shifted in a defensive direction. The goal of the WCTU Americanization worker was still to assist and instruct her immigrant neighbors, but now with an immediate objective: persuade them to obey the law and recognize the Constitution as the true source of authority on what counted as Americanism. “She must lead this woman to appreciate the Christian institutions of America, whose perpetuity depends upon holding intact the Constitution upon which the nation is built,” one pamphlet read. “To disregard or set at naught one article in that sacred document means the

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<sup>83</sup> Nelle G. Burger, “Will You Join?” *Union Signal*, October 28, 1924, 9.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Clark Barnes, “Concerning Americanization Centers,” *Union Signal*, July 29, 1920, 6.

<sup>85</sup> Barnes, “Concerning Americanization Centers.”

<sup>86</sup> *Union Signal*, January 1, 1920, 7.

ruin of our whole National structure.” The subsequent advice hinted at the doubts that were appearing in the WCTU’s own ranks about Prohibition as implemented by the amendment. In order to effectively teach immigrants, WCTU women must be prepared to defend Prohibition to themselves, with no “whining cry about ‘the lawless spirit bred and fed by prohibition.’”<sup>87</sup>

Visible throughout these materials is the concern that the WCTU’s longstanding approach of “extensive educational campaign[s]” might not work quickly enough to save the Prohibition regime.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, some WCTU women began to take enforcement of Americanization into their own hands at the local level. In 1924, Mattie Kechthorn, school superintendent for McPherson County, Kansas, and a WCTU Americanization official, wrote to the national department to report that she had been having some trouble getting children in her district to salute the American flag. Laws mandating that public-school students start each day by saluting the flag and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance had proliferated during World War I. While opponents did not mount serious legal challenges to this practice until the 1930s, some students in Kechthorn’s district refused, with their parents’ support.<sup>89</sup> So Kechthorn had one of the fathers arrested. “I enforce all law to the letter,” she reported with satisfaction, “and now the children in my county all salute the American flag, and the American’s creed is in every school

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<sup>87</sup> Vayhinger, “The Neighbor-Teacher,” 1–2.

<sup>88</sup> Culla Vayhinger, “The Why of Americanization Work,” n.d., 1, in “Americanization” Pamphlet Collection, WCTU Archives.

<sup>89</sup> It’s not clear on what basis Kechthorn’s students or their parents objected. In 1923, the Americanism Commission of the American Legion recommended a change to the text of the Pledge, from “I pledge allegiance to my Flag” to “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States.” The rationale was that the original text could allow immigrants to declare fealty to any flag they might consider theirs. Schools adopted the new text fairly quickly.

room.”<sup>90</sup> Kechthorn’s commitment to law enforcement, the rallying cry of the WCTU during the Prohibition era, was consistent with this action. Nevertheless, it reads as extreme. It also reveals the conflicts between an Americanism defined as obedience to the rule of law and to a shared set of symbols and practices and an Americanism characterized by freedom of speech and conscience. Public schools have long been a battleground for this type of conflict, but the WCTU increasingly faced it during the 1920s as it sought an effective defense of the increasingly unpopular Prohibition regime.

The relationship between the resurgent Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the dry movement is another important part of the story of the WCTU’s approach to immigration, prohibition, and the definition of “Americanism.” Historians of the Klan of the 1920s, including Nancy MacLean, Leonard J. Moore, Kathleen Blee, and Linda Gordon, have demonstrated that it drew from the American demographics most likely to be sympathetic to prohibition: native-born white, devoutly Protestant, nationalistic, and prone to nativism, racism, and anti-Catholicism.<sup>91</sup> As the problems with prohibition enforcement—underfunded, corrupt, and often violent—became more apparent in the 1920s, some frustrated dry supporters turned toward the Klan to coordinate vigilante raids on local bootleggers and speakeasies. Others found in the open nativism and racism sanctioned by the Klan an outlet for sentiments that were too extreme for the WCTU.

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<sup>90</sup> Charlotte Fraser, “The Foreign Mother Who is My Neighbor,” *Union Signal*, November 13, 1924, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansman: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921–1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

The historian Thomas Pegram argues in a study of the Anti-Saloon League's ties to the Klan that a "complicated, provisional relationship" existed between the two organizations and the prohibition movement as a whole.<sup>92</sup> Pegram establishes that the ASL wavered between official denunciations of the Klan and dismissals of its officials with Klan ties, and evasive statements that emphasized the ASL's single-issue identity but tacitly approved the Klan's law enforcement efforts. More comprehensive research into the specific ties between the WCTU and the Klan is needed, but it seems likely that Pegram's characterization applies to the WCTU as well. Historians Nancy MacLean and Kathleen Blee have documented instances of Klan support for WCTU projects, and vice versa, from across the country. MacLean describes the ties between the Klan and the WCTU in her case study location of Athens, Georgia, as "mutually reinforcing." The organizations backed each other on Prohibition enforcement and social purity efforts.<sup>93</sup> In her case study of Klanswomen in Indiana, Blee goes further, finding considerable overlap between the WCTU and the Klan auxiliary known as the Women of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKK).

When the WKKK was organized in 1923, its initial areas of work included "Americanism, education, public amusements, legislation, child welfare and delinquency, citizenship, civics, law enforcement, disarmament, peace, and politics."<sup>94</sup> This list could have been copied verbatim from the WCTU's priorities at that time. Perhaps the person to do so was

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<sup>92</sup> Pegram, "Hoodwinked," 91.

<sup>93</sup> MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 116. See also Sarah Doherty, "Aliens Found in Waiting: Women of the Ku Klux Klan in Suburban Chicago, 1870–1930" (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2012).

<sup>94</sup> Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 28.

Lulu Markwell, the first Imperial Commander of the WKKK. Markwell was a suffragist, Democratic party activist, and longtime WCTU lecturer and official in Arkansas.<sup>95</sup> Just as women trained in the WCTU had taken their organizing talents to the suffrage campaign a generation earlier, Markwell seems to have brought the methods she learned in the WCTU and her other civic involvement to the Klan. During her yearlong tenure with the WKKK, she spearheaded a recruitment drive, hired female field agents, and doubled the WKKK's membership in just four months.<sup>96</sup>

The national leadership of the WCTU as well as its outlet, the *Union Signal*, talked little if at all about the Klan. They were certainly aware of links between the two organizations, however. One such link, in the person of Myrtle Cook, dramatically burst into the open in 1925. Cook, the leader of the WCTU in Vinton, Iowa, was gunned down in her home on a quiet September evening, apparently while she was writing a temperance speech.<sup>97</sup> Though the police never solved the murder, Cook's allies in the dry movement quickly blamed her death on violent bootleggers who saw her work as a threat to their profits. The *Union Signal* mourned Cook as "our martyred comrade."<sup>98</sup> Anna Gordon, former president of the WCTU and then-president of the World's WCTU, traveled to Vinton to give Cook's eulogy. "If was a bootlegger's bullet which snuffed out her life," Gordon said, its reverberations would be "heard around the world."

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<sup>95</sup> Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 29.

<sup>96</sup> Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 29–30.

<sup>97</sup> "Iowa White Ribboner Believed to Have Been Victim of Bootleggers," *Union Signal*, September 19, 1925, 2.

<sup>98</sup> "Our Martyred Comrade!" *Union Signal*, September 19, 1925, 8.

She urged her hearers to join the WCTU in its ongoing project to “educate the public conscience on the liquor question.”<sup>99</sup>

The *Union Signal* coverage left out a salient fact about Cook’s life and death: she was a Klanswoman. It was no secret. At the funeral that Anna Gordon attended, Klansmen and at least twenty Klanswomen, “garbed in pure white and masked,” followed the hearse from the service to the cemetery. A “Klan pastor,” A. A. Wright, led the funeral service. He denounced Prohibition opponents and praised Cook for her militant work organizing enforcement efforts. Afterward, members of the “hooded order” burned a cross outside the church. It was “one of the most dramatic funerals this town ever witnessed,” reported the *New York Times*. Vinton residents who were not members of the Klan were apparently so dismayed by the display that their outrage dealt a serious blow to Klan recruitment in the town.<sup>100</sup>

As the stories of Lulu Markwell and Myrtle Cook show, temperance activism with the WCTU was one possible route into the Klan.<sup>101</sup> The WCTU’s leadership did not inculcate the open bigotry represented by the Klan, but neither had it offered what seemed to these women to be an effective means to defend Prohibition. Markwell and Cook apparently felt that the work of Americanization through education and moral suasion would not preserve the dry, Protestant, native-born society they sought to defend. They took matters into their own hands.

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<sup>99</sup> “Mrs. Cook is Buried With Ku Klux Rites,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1925.

<sup>100</sup> “Time Machine: History of the Klan in Iowa,” *The Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, IA), updated October 7, 2017, <https://www.thegazette.com/history/time-machine-history-of-the-klan-in-iowa/>.

<sup>101</sup> Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 103–4.

## Conclusion

The WCTU's place in the political firmament had changed significantly by the 1930s. In the 1880s and 1890s, Frances Willard and her allies in the Prohibition Party had tried to use the temperance issue to bring about a national political realignment. Willard argued that women's ballots would make the difference in accomplishing it. By the 1930s, that had happened—but not in the way Willard had hoped. The 1928 election, which pitted dry Republican Herbert Hoover against wet (and Catholic) Democrat Al Smith, brought the alcohol issue to the forefront and presaged the shifting conditions that would sweep Roosevelt into the White House four years later. Immigrant women in the Northeast turned out in large numbers to support Smith, and their influence undergirded Democratic strength. Women in traditionally Republican states showed up to vote for Hoover. Women voters in the “solid” Democratic South, however—including white WCTU members who agonized over the decision—shifted decisively toward Republicans, motivated by a rejection of Smith rather than an embrace of the party.<sup>102</sup> Their influence contributed to Hoover's win, but, unfortunately for Prohibition and for the prospects of Willard's vision, Hoover's victory represented the last gasp of Republican dominance rather than a new dry coalition.

Historians have often read these election results as confirmation that immigrant populations were firmly against Prohibition, and that the WCTU's inability to persuade immigrant women in particular reflected a dramatic loss of their moral authority. The real story

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<sup>102</sup> J. Kevin Corder and Christina Wolbrecht, “Female Voters and the ‘Rum and Religion’ Election of 1928,” in *Counting Women's Ballots: Female Voters from Suffrage through the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 190–91.

is more complex. Just as with Crusade that started the WCTU movement, it is tied to the realities of alcohol use and abuse. As Michael Willrich has shown, some historians have overstated working-class Americans' support for Prohibition in ways that minimize the complexity of women's perspectives.<sup>103</sup> Willrich draws on a rich archive of poor women's petitions to William Dever, mayor of Chicago from 1923 to 1927. The petitions reveal the continued social harm that alcohol caused in their lives. Based on the home addresses and last names of the petitioners, Willrich surmises that most of them were from immigrant communities that other historians have portrayed as unified against Prohibition.<sup>104</sup>

Petitioners demanded that the city enforce Prohibition, often identifying the addresses and proprietors' names of specific illegal saloons and bars in their neighborhoods. One woman, identifying herself as the mother of eight children and her husband as a "big drunker," pleaded with the mayor to close a saloon on the city's West Side. "He spends all his money there and at time my poor children have nothing to eat and I have to work so hard and he takes all my money away from me and spends it for that moonshine in that hell of a place at 750 N. Ada St.," she wrote. "And when my husband comes home Drunk he wants to shoot me and my children so I

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<sup>103</sup> Michael Willrich, "'Close that Place of Hell': Poor Women and the Cultural Politics of Prohibition," *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 5 (July 2003): 555–74. Willrich cites Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Lerner, *Dry Manhattan* as among this group. Willrich, "'Close that Place of Hell,'" 562.

<sup>104</sup> Willrich, "'Close that Place of Hell,'" 557.



just have to take all my children and leave the house he takes and throws everything after us all my dishes and pots and pans are all broke.”<sup>105</sup>

This petitioner’s language and imagery—the husband spending his last pennies at the neighborhood saloon, the desperate wife, the hungry children—were familiar from temperance narratives of nearly a century earlier. As Willrich argues, working-class women’s use of these tropes reflects the continuation of a longstanding tradition of women making claims on the state by invoking their authority as wives and mothers.<sup>106</sup> It also demonstrates the success of the WCTU in establishing the tropes of the temperance narrative so firmly in the discourse around women and prohibition. As with the narratives explored in chapter 1, these petitioners recorded truths about their lives. They did so in a way that would make them “legible” in the discourse surrounding Prohibition, whose terms were set by reformers and politicians.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Willrich, ““Close that Place of Hell,”” 558–59; original from Anonymous, Chicago, to William E. Dever, September 25, 1924, Folder 27, Box 4, William E. Dever Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL. Spelling in original.

<sup>106</sup> Willrich, ““Close that Place of Hell,”” 563.

<sup>107</sup> Willrich, ““Close that Place of Hell,”” 559.

## CONCLUSION

National Prohibition passed into history in the United States on the evening of December 5, 1933. Supporters of Repeal celebrated with parties and toasts across the country. Pierre du Pont, a leading Repeal advocate and donor, and his colleagues at the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment clinked cocktail glasses. Pauline Sabin and the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, who had challenged the WCTU's claim to represent all women on the alcohol issue, chose to abstain at their own celebratory dinner.<sup>1</sup> Within the WCTU, the mood wavered between somber and accusatory.

Few observers argued that Prohibition as implemented had been a success. That did not mean, however, that all Americans agreed that there had been no reason to try it. President Franklin Roosevelt had campaigned on a platform of Repeal. Two quotations attributed to him—"I think this would be a good time for a beer." and "What America needs now is a drink."—seem to encapsulate the dismissive attitude of Americans in the 1930s and beyond towards Prohibition.<sup>2</sup> In Roosevelt's proclamation announcing the passage of the Twenty-First

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 354.

<sup>2</sup> It is quite possible that both of these quotes are apocryphal. Various internet sources attribute one or both to Roosevelt on the occasion of Repeal, the signing of the Cullen-Harrison Act legalizing low-alcohol wine and beer in March 1933, or both.

Amendment, however, he urged Americans to only buy newly legal liquor from reputable dealers and to drink responsibly. He asked them to ensure that this “return of individual freedom shall not be accompanied by the repugnant conditions that obtained prior to the adoption of the 18th Amendment and those that have existed since its adoption.”<sup>3</sup> In many ways, American society fulfilled Roosevelt’s request. The male-dominated saloon, a symbol of social disorder and political corruption as well as a locus of real dissipation and violence, did not return. Though the supposed debauchery of the Prohibition years lives on in popular memory, in the 1930s Americans’ drinking had declined by a third from 1919 levels. It remained below pre-Prohibition rates until the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

### **The WCTU After Repeal**

Research on the WCTU after Repeal is almost non-existent. While it is beyond the scope of this project, hopefully future scholars will address this topic. The broad outlines reveal several political and cultural shifts that spelled the end of the WCTU’s national influence. First, the Repeal campaign weakened the WCTU’s longstanding claim to represent a unified feminine front against alcohol. Pauline Sabin and the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform had projected a respectable—even fashionable—image of women opposing Prohibition. They appropriated some of the WCTU’s own imagery to argue that Repeal meant protecting the home against the gang violence and police corruption of the period.<sup>5</sup> Large women’s

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<sup>3</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Proclamation 2065—Date of Repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment,” American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-2065-date-repeal-the-eighteenth-amendment>.

<sup>4</sup> William J. Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 110–12.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); David E. Kyvig, *Repealing National Prohibition*, 2nd ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press,

organizations that had traditionally supported temperance, like the General Federation of Women's Clubs, moved away from the issue as more of their members demanded Repeal.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, loosening sexual mores, a freer leisure culture, and loopholes in the Volstead Act destigmatized women's drinking. Scholars of urban leisure like Kathy Peiss, Lewis Erenberg, Roy Rosenzweig, and Michael Lerner document the rise of lounges, beer gardens, and restaurants in early-twentieth-century cities. These venues displaced the rowdy all-male saloon and allowed men and women to mingle in public.<sup>7</sup> As Joanne Meyerowitz's work has shown, a new generation of wage-earning, urban, single women challenged Victorian standards of femininity and morality. Through work and leisure choices, they rejected Progressive-era reformers' claims that they required supervision and "protection."<sup>8</sup> Meyerowitz focuses primarily on sexual morality, but these women reshaped public drinking culture as well. Alcohol use also moved inside the domestic space. The Volstead Act had permitted homebrewing and private drinking. Fashionable men and women gathered in homes for a new ritual called the

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2000); Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 124; Kyvig, *Repealing National Prohibition*, 126.

<sup>7</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 72–79.

<sup>8</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

“cocktail party.” Many working-class women began brewing beer and cider at home.<sup>9</sup> Given that this practice was legal, WCTU members struggled to convince homebrewers that they should stop.<sup>10</sup> According to Catherine Murdock, these changes in women’s drinking patterns represented a “domestication of male behavior” that rendered alcohol culture less threatening overall.<sup>11</sup> Women’s public and private drinking thus diluted the WCTU’s powerful image of the home’s battle against the saloon.

Women’s voting behavior also undermined the WCTU’s claims to moral authority. The WCTU cheered the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. The long-sought woman’s ballot, however, did not transform and purify American politics the way suffragists had promised. J. Kevin Corder and Christina Wolbrecht have found that women tended to vote similarly to men who shared their race, class, religion, and partisan leanings.<sup>12</sup> The women’s movement as a whole also fractured. Some former suffragists campaigned for an Equal Rights Amendment that would ban sex discrimination. Other “social feminists” maintained that legal equality would undermine hard-won protective legislation for women.<sup>13</sup> Overall, as Nancy F.

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<sup>9</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 88–92.

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Fraser, “The Foreign Mother Who is My Neighbor,” *Union Signal*, November 13, 1924, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> J. Kevin Corder and Charlotte Wolbrecht, *Counting Women’s Ballots: Female Voters from Suffrage through the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 276.

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Cott has shown, the nineteenth-century promise of a singular “woman movement” gave way to a more heterogenous “feminism” that rejected the idea that women shared an essential nature.<sup>14</sup>

Repeal dealt a major blow to the WCTU’s strength. The organization was cagey about exact membership numbers after around 1900. It is clear, however, that it never again attained the totals seen during the 1880s and early 1890s, when the WCTU could claim to be the largest voluntary organization in American history. During the 1920s, the revenue from dues—one of the only available measures of membership totals during this period—trended downward.<sup>15</sup> Some women who might otherwise have joined the WCTU instead stuck to church and charitable work. By then they could also have chosen from any number of other voluntary or political organizations. Other members, deeply discouraged by the loss of the Eighteenth Amendment, dropped out of the movement altogether.

Despite these challenges, the WCTU did not disappear. In 1949, its official historian claimed that membership was at its highest “since pre-prohibition days” with about 10,000 local unions.<sup>16</sup> Members knew that the chances of regaining national Prohibition were slim. Nevertheless, the organization maintained its campaigns of alcohol education, scientific temperance instruction, charitable giving, and “clean” programming on radio and in film.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 3–4.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks to archivist Janet Olson at the WCTU archives for pointing out the loss of precise membership numbers after 1900 and the suggestion to focus on dues as a stand-in. The downward trend is based on dues figures from WCTU annual reports from 1925 to 1931.

<sup>16</sup> Helen E. Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet: The WCTU Story, 1874–1949* (Evanston, IL: Signal Press, 1949), 261.

<sup>17</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet*, 251–55. On the “pro-censorship” activities of the WCTU, see Alison Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873–1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

WCTU and its international sister organization, the World's WCTU, also remained committed to the peace movement.<sup>18</sup> President D. Leigh Colvin avowed that the WCTU of the 1940s aimed to build Americans' "character," preserve the health and happiness of their homes, and eliminate one of the country's "most serious health problems" in the form of alcohol consumption.

Of course, the WCTU maintained its Christian identity. Colvin declared that the WCTU would "redouble its efforts to help build the Kingdom of God and His righteousness upon this Earth."<sup>19</sup> During the second half of the twentieth century, the WCTU's political development aligned more closely with the religious right than with the progressive movement of its maturity. Continuing to advocate chiefly for the prohibition of alcohol and against tobacco and other drugs, the organization has also lined up against abortion and gay marriage. As scholars like Michelle Nickerson, Lisa McGirr, and Catherine Rymph have shown, conservative Christian women in postwar America seized upon the powerful language and symbols of "home protection" for a new era. They mobilized against a range of perceived threats that included communism, government overreach, and racial integration.<sup>20</sup> McGirr argues that the dry activists who worked for Prohibition enforcement represented "the first incarnation of the twentieth-century religious right."<sup>21</sup> However, historians need more inquiry into the WCTU's post-Repeal

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<sup>18</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 189.

<sup>19</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet*, 257.

<sup>20</sup> Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Catherine Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), xx.

activity to evaluate this contention. A clear picture of its trajectory during a crucial time of political realignment and religious controversy between evangelical Modernists and Fundamentalists would contribute to a better understanding of women in the Christian right.

What happened to Black membership in the WCTU and to the organization's work with immigrants after Repeal? By 1933, immigration restrictions had fundamentally altered "Americanization" work. Efforts to organize English classes and instruct immigrants in the "ideals of American democracy" continued under the rubric of "Christian Citizenship." However, the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 almost completely banned immigration to the United States and made WCTU leaders feel that "the times demand less" of Americanization work.<sup>22</sup> Though unions remained involved, the prospect of immigrant drinking and voting behavior no longer inspired the anxiety it had two decades earlier.<sup>23</sup>

As discussed in chapter 4, the departure of long-tenured Black leaders in the WCTU by the late 1910s seriously hampered the efforts of the "Colored Work" department (renamed "Work Among Negroes" by 1923).<sup>24</sup> Larger forces also eroded the Black temperance constituency. As Lisa McGirr has found, Prohibition enforcement agents disproportionately targeted Black Americans and immigrants.<sup>25</sup> Disillusionment with Prohibition and with

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<sup>22</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet*, 251.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, researchers have identified immigration to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s as a contributing factor to the decline in per capita alcohol consumption that occurred during those decades. More immigrants now come from Central America and Asia, regions with lower drinking rates than those found among white Americans and Europeans. See Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*, 113–14.

<sup>24</sup> *Minutes of the National WCTU Fifty-first Annual Meeting* (1923), 206–8.

<sup>25</sup> McGirr, *War on Alcohol*, xix.



Republicans' larger failure to protect civil rights pushed Black voters into the New Deal coalition. According to Lisa Materson, these trends chipped away at the power that temperance-supporting Black women had managed to accrue. Their argument for temperance as a key pillar of a larger strategy of racial uplift no longer persuaded many Black voters.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, some Black women remained active in the WCTU into midcentury. In the 1940s, the national leadership launched an official effort to organize "Negroes" into "Sojourner Truth" unions.<sup>27</sup> Though Black unions primarily operated in the South in the 1940s, traces of Black women's continued organizing with the WCTU after Repeal appear elsewhere. A small Black union named after Frances Harper existed in Des Moines, Iowa, until at least 1966.<sup>28</sup> The WCTU's director of "Work Among Negroes" during the 1940s, longtime WCTU member Violet Hill Whyte, is best known today as the first Black officer in the Baltimore Police Department. Whyte used her knowledge of Baltimore and the authority of her position to enact the kind of "protection" for her community that her predecessors like Frances Joseph Gaudet had sought.<sup>29</sup>

### **Alcohol Policy, Gender, and Culture in the Twenty-first Century**

Prohibition will not return. Harm from alcohol, however, has risen in recent years in the United States. A 2020 study found that alcohol-related deaths doubled between 1999 and 2019.

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<sup>26</sup> Lisa G. Materson, "African American Women, Prohibition, and the 1928 Presidential Election," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 64–66.

<sup>27</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet*, 261.

<sup>28</sup> "Polk, 1906–1991" folder, Box 22, WCTU Collection, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa.

<sup>29</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet*, 173; Fred Rasumussen, "Lady Law Did More than just Her Duty Officer," *Baltimore Sun*, February 2, 1997, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1997-02-02-1997033091-story.html>; "Funeral Program for Lieutenant Violet Hill Whyte," Digital Maryland, <https://collections.digitalmaryland.org/digital/collection/acfp/id/4121>.

As of the early 2020s, they average about 95,000 per year.<sup>30</sup> The opioid crisis has justly attracted public attention and media coverage, yet drug overdose deaths did not even approach the level of alcohol deaths until 2020.<sup>31</sup> Neither policymakers nor the public evince much appetite for evidence-based policy tools that could reduce alcohol deaths, like raising beverage taxes and limiting the number of liquor stores. A strong alcohol lobby opposes these kinds of changes. More broadly, the legality of alcohol and the public's perception of Prohibition as "failed" have fostered public complacency around alcohol-related mortality.<sup>32</sup>

When jurisdictions do attempt to pass new alcohol regulation, rhetorical and political dynamics from an earlier era often crop up. For example, in 2017 the state of Utah passed a law reducing the blood alcohol level for legal driving to .05% from .08%. The lobby group American Beverage Institute (ABI) claimed that the bill would not reduce traffic deaths. The ABI warned that the law would criminalize "moderate and responsible social drinkers" and damage the state's hospitality and tourism industries. A Utah Democrat opposed to the law blamed the state's Mormon population for its passage. The lawmaker disparaged the bill, saying it was "created by people who are proud of never having had a sip of alcohol in their life." This language directly

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<sup>30</sup> Vanessa Romo and Allison Aubrey, "U.S. Alcohol-Related Deaths Have Doubled, Study Says," NPR, January 8, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/08/794772148/alcohol-related-deaths-have-doubled-study-says/>.

<sup>31</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, "Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts," US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>; Division of Population Health, "Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use in the United States," US . Tobacco is many times deadlier than either drugs or alcohol, causing closer to half a million deaths every year. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/features/excessive-alcohol-deaths.html>. Tobacco is many times deadlier than either drugs or alcohol, causing closer to half a million deaths every year.

<sup>32</sup> German Lopez, "The Deadlier Drug Crises that We Don't Consider Public Health Emergencies," Vox, October 27, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/27/16557550/alcohol-tobacco-opioids-epidemic-emergency>.

echoes the political arguments and mocking tone that “wets” employed during the long temperance movement. Despite this opposition, a federal study found that road deaths in Utah fell by nearly twenty percent in the three years following the bill’s passage—compared to a decline of only five percent nationwide.<sup>33</sup> It remains unclear whether other states will follow Utah’s lead.

Some of the resistance to alcohol regulation is related to the legacy of the “war on drugs,” and for good reason. Scholars like Michelle Alexander have documented how harsh new sentencing laws for drug crimes drove an immense racial disparity in imprisonment beginning in the 1980s. A government-supported publicity campaign to demonize Black drug users and crack cocaine contributed to mass incarceration. Alexander and other scholars have shown that rates of drug use and sales are fairly consistent across racial groups. However, police arrest many more Black and Latino men on drug charges. Often, members of law enforcement conduct raids using violent tactics with little or no oversight. Once arrested, men of color receive worse legal representation and stay in jail longer before trial. Juries convict them more often, and judges hand them longer sentences—leading to devastating consequences for the rest of their lives.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Laris, “Utah Bucked Alcohol Industry with its Tougher DUI Law. A New Study Shows it Made Roads Safer,” *Washington Post*, February 19, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/02/19/utah-dui-law-driving/>. The Utah legislator, Jim Dabakis, arrived for one hearing on the law and bragged that he had drunk several mimosas before driving over. A study on the law’s effects found that arrests did not rise sharply after the law’s implementation and speculated that, as intended, it led to a change in behavior, encouraging potentially impaired drivers to stay off the roads.

<sup>34</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

Alexander and other researchers and activists describe the “war on drugs” as a pretext for the creation of a new “racial caste system” in the form of mass incarceration.

The prohibition scholar William Rorabaugh has identified a cyclical pattern in America’s relationship to drinking. At periods when cultural norms encourage heavy consumption and restrictions are minimal, people see and experience greater harm from alcohol. They demand action to address it. When governments enact regulations and successfully bring down alcohol abuse, the need for such laws seems to disappear. People understandably chafe against government interference in their leisure choices.<sup>35</sup> In 2022, highly charged political debates continue to swirl around public health measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Similar tensions over the balance between personal liberty and social well-being will no doubt endure.

However, a cultural reaction against pervasive drinking culture may be beginning, representing a swing of the pendulum Rorabaugh identified. First, the nonalcoholic beverage industry is booming. Teetotalers, pregnant women, and those observing “Dry January” or “Sober October” can choose from a variety of alcohol-removed wines, booze-free beers, and zero-proof spirits. Manufacturers market these products to consumers concerned about their health and aiming for a more “mindful” approach to alcohol consumption. While most consumers of these products also purchase alcohol, their success indicates that abstinence from drinking has become part of modern “wellness” culture. This twenty-first-century temperance echoes some nineteenth-century discourses linking bodily purity and health, mental well-being, and virtue.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Daniela Blei, “The False Promises of Wellness Culture,” JSTOR Daily, January 4, 2017, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-false-promises-of-wellness-culture/>.

Second, women are intervening in the debate about alcohol in new ways. Sober writers like Holly Whitaker have launched critiques of sexism in alcohol recovery culture and described the choice to abstain as “radical.”<sup>37</sup> Debates about the safety of light drinking during pregnancy raise thorny issues regarding women’s bodily autonomy, accusations of patriarchy in medicine and public health, and the limits of scientific evidence.<sup>38</sup> Finally, new evidence is mounting showing a gender disparity in alcohol’s harms. While men remain more likely to experience alcoholism and to die from excessive drinking, data shows that alcohol abuse by women is increasing. Women are likely to suffer health effects more quickly from drinking the same amount as men.

The coronavirus pandemic has drawn more public attention to the narrowing gender gap in alcohol abuse. Rising numbers of women report that they drink to cope with stress rather than for fun or to socialize.<sup>39</sup> While it will take more time for the effects of this trend to become clear, women’s problematic drinking behavior occurs in a broader context of gender discrimination and female disempowerment. Many American women continue to bear the brunt of family caregiving and domestic labor. At the same time, they hold down paying jobs and receive little help from the state. Women are also more than twice as likely as men to suffer from depression and anxiety, conditions linked to substance abuse. While the Woman’s Christian Temperance

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<sup>37</sup> See Holly Whitaker, *Quit Like a Woman: The Radical Choice to Not Drink in a Culture Obsessed with Alcohol* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Jen Gunter, “Drinking While Pregnant: An Inconvenient Truth,” *New York Times*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/style/drinking-while-pregnant.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

<sup>39</sup> Aneri Pattani, “Women Now Drink as Much as Men — Not So Much for Pleasure, But to Cope,” NPR, June 9, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/06/09/1003980966/women-now-drink-as-much-as-men-and-suffer-health-effects-more-quickly>.

Union belongs to the past, the conversations it initiated—about drinking, gender, health, and social well-being—are very much alive.

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## VITA

Dr. Ella Wagner was born in Maryland and raised in Ohio and Delaware. She attended Columbia University in the City of New York and earned a Bachelor's Degree in American Studies with a Concentration in History in 2013, with the distinction cum laude. While at Loyola University Chicago, Dr. Wagner was the recipient of the Crown Fellowship in the Humanities and was inducted into the Alpha Sigma Nu Honor Society. She served as President of the History Graduate Student Association during the 2017-2018 academic year and on the Organizing Committee of the Loyola Graduate Workers' Union between 2016 and 2020. She earned her Ph.D. in History and Public History in 2022.

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Since 2020, Dr. Wagner has worked for the Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education of the National Park Service. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.