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Diversity and Woman Suffrage:

A Case Study of the Dayton Woman Suffrage Association in the 1912 Referendum Campaign

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"That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure unto themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton penned these famous words in 1848, little did she imagine that she would not live long enough to see the battle won. Nor would most of the three hundred women and men who had gathered in Seneca Falls, New York, for the nation's first national woman's rights convention. In preparation for the convention, Cady Stanton, considered the mother of American feminism, rewrote Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. But unlike Jefferson's list of grievances against the British, Cady Stanton's Declaration of Sentiments documented the unequal treatment of women in nineteenth-century America. The list was long and included such points as women's limited access to education and lack of property rights. The most radical demand that emerged, however, was women's right to vote. The convention was nearly undone by this radical proposal, and if it were not for a speech given by the abolitionist and champion of women's equality, Frederick Douglass, all might have been lost. Instead, out of that gathering came a seventy-two-year struggle for American women to obtain the franchise and the other privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.[1]

The decades-long struggle for woman suffrage frequently saw more defeats than victories before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. In the intervening years, American suffragists developed considerable political acumen as they transformed a once marginal movement into a mass political campaign. Deprived of the most obvious means of exerting political pressure, the franchise, suffragists devised their own tactics and strategies to convince the American public that woman suffrage was both necessary and positive. Although white, middle-class, native-born women dominated the movement, especially at the national level, black, working-class, and immigrant supporters played a meaningful part in the eventual victory. Within the cities and states where suffragists fought daily and eventually won, issues of race, class, and ethnicity were not easily ignored.[2]

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1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls, N.Y., 1848.
2. The literature of the woman suffrage movement is vast, and actual activists within the movement produced

For the most part, however, the woman suffrage movement has traditionally been characterized as a white, middle-class movement. In her study of the national movement, for example, suffrage historian Aileen Kraditor argues that "Although working-class, Negro, and foreign-born women received the vote along with the rest, the suffrage movement was essentially from beginning to end a struggle of white, middle-class, native-born women for the right to participate more fully in the public affairs of a society the basic structure of which they accepted." Later studies, such as those by Nancy Cott, Steven Buechler, and Sara Hunter Graham, portrayed class, race, and ethnic relationships as more complex than previously thought but did little to challenge Kraditor's basic description of the woman suffrage movement.[3] The discussion expanded during the 1980s as scholars like Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Ellen Carol Dubois considered the implications of race and class in the struggle for suffrage and its aftermath.[4] The 1990s continued this trend and also brought a tide of articles and books about the suffrage movement at the state and local level, especially in the American South. Recent works have explored the suffrage movement and its relationship to Liberal Feminism and have even given voice to those women who opposed woman suffrage.[5]

This case study of the 1912 woman suffrage referendum campaign in Dayton, Ohio, continues the efforts to explore the woman suffrage movement beyond the national level. It

some of the earliest works on woman suffrage; these "participant histories" include such classics as: Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols. (Rochester, 1899–1922); Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (New York, 1923); Inez Haynes Irwin, *The Story of the Woman's Party* (New York, 1921); and Doris Steven, *Jailed For Freedom* (New York, 1976). Some of the most influential academic studies on woman suffrage include: Ellen Carol Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978); Ellen Carol Dubois, *Harriet Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (New Haven, 1999); Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: the Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (New York, 1959); Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman's Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York, 1965); William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave: A History of Feminism in America* (Chicago, 1969); and Anne and Andrew Scott, *"One Half the People": The Fight for Woman Suffrage* (New York, 1975).

3. Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, xiv; Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1987); Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States* (New Brunswick, 1990); Sara Hunter Graham, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy* (New Haven, 1996).

4. For studies that incorporate an analytical framework or that do consider issues of class, race, and ethnicity, please see: Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discontented Black Feminists: Prelude and Postscript to the Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920–1940*, eds. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport, Conn., 1983), 261–78; Ellen Carol Dubois, "Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894–1909," *Journal of American History*, 74 (June, 1987): 34–58; Elinor Lerner, "Jewish Involvement in the New York City Woman Suffrage Movement," *American Jewish History*, 70 (June, 1981), 442–61.

5. There are far too many of these studies to list here; however, a complete list is located in an excellent bibliography on woman's suffrage. See "Bibliography, Woman's Suffrage," *Journal of Women's History*, 3 (Winter, 1991), 165–73. For more recent works see: Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997); Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison, Wis., 1997); Sylvia Strauss, "The Passage of Woman Suffrage in New Jersey," *New Jersey History*, 111 (Winter, 1993), 18–39; Barbara Stuhler, "Organizing for the Vote: Leaders of the Minnesota's Woman Suffrage Movement," *Minnesota History*, 54 (Fall, 1995), 290–303; Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York, 1993); Mary Martha Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1890–1920* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1992).

also furthers our understanding of the complex intersection of race, class, and ethnicity in local suffrage organizations as I argue that the white, middle-class, native-born women who dominated the movement actively sought support from the working-class, immigrant, and black segments of Dayton's population. Unlike their counterparts at the national level, Dayton suffragists realized that a broad base of support would be necessary for the suffrage amendment to pass and viewed cross-race, class, and ethnic support as an advantage and not a liability. The 1912 campaign provides an excellent focus because it represented the high point of community mobilization and outreach for Dayton suffragists.

In 1912, Ohio voters confronted two referenda for altering the state's constitutional voting requirements. Amendment 23 to the Ohio Constitution would have eliminated the word "male" from the description of eligible voters in the constitution, and Amendment 24 proposed the same for the word "white." Actually, black men had been able to vote in Ohio since Reconstruction, and the term "white" in the state's voting requirements violated Federal guidelines and laws regarding suffrage. Nonetheless, the term white remained on the books, although Ohio took no deliberate actions such as poll taxes or grandfather clauses to disenfranchise black men. Reformers had originally proposed one amendment that would eliminate both requirements, but opponents deliberately divided them into two separate amendments in an effort to discourage any possible suffragist/black alliance.[6]

Dayton provides an excellent site for such a study because of its rapidly expanding and diverse population in the early twentieth century and because of the local Woman Suffrage Association's (DWSA) efforts to mobilize the black, working-class, and foreign-born communities. By 1910, the city's population had reached 116,577, of which 12 percent was foreign-born. Dayton's black population, although only 4.2 percent of the city's populace in 1910, was a growing and active community.[7] The DWSA actively sought working-class and ethnic support and alliances in its struggle for woman suffrage. In addition, its members not only courted black support of the movement but in fact included some of the city's most prominent black citizens.

Dayton suffragists spent the majority of their time trying to convince the city's largest enfranchised group, white males, that woman suffrage was a desirable goal. They also devoted a significant amount of time to persuading white women, the city's largest disenfranchised group, that woman suffrage deserved passage. Nonetheless, suffragists in Dayton did not limit their appeal merely to these two groups; they also attempted to mobilize and ally themselves with possible supporters outside of the "mainstream" of Dayton society. Perhaps political expediency was their only motivation, but even if so, their actions were unique because national suffrage leaders often saw working-class, immigrant, and especially black support as a disadvantage. Dayton's suffragists, in contrast, viewed any support as an asset and moved to court such groups.

Origins of the DWSA

Dayton, like many communities at the turn of the century, had a thriving woman's club movement that was united in 1907 by an umbrella

6. Anthony, Stanton, Gage and Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 6, 510.

7. United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910*. Vol. 3., *Population, 1910, Reports by States, Nebraska-Wyoming* (Washington, D.C., 1913 [reprinting]), 412.

organization called the Dayton Federation of Clubs. This network of women activists provided the infrastructure for the 1912 campaign, but the struggle for woman suffrage in Dayton began long before the 1912 campaign.[8] As early as 1869 some of Dayton's leading citizens, both men and women, participated in the short-lived Woman's Suffrage Association of Dayton, Ohio (1869–71). That association had aimed "to procure the right of suffrage for women, and to effect such changes in the laws as shall place women in all respects on an equal footing with men."[9] The Dayton Equal Rights Association, which lasted only from September 1887 to May 1888, formed to secure for "every properly qualified woman in the state the right to the ballot."[10] The Dayton Woman's Suffrage Association of Montgomery County, founded originally as an ad hoc group in the 1912 referendum campaign, continued the struggle for woman's suffrage until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Following that victory, it became Dayton's first chapter of the League of Women Voters.

The autumn of 1912 was a busy time for suffragists. Five states, including Ohio, had placed woman suffrage initiatives on the ballot. The battle in Ohio, however, attained special prominence because its September 3 election date represented the earliest referendum vote that year. "If Ohio, the pivotal state, votes for equal suffrage," claimed New York suffragist Mrs. Raymond Brown, "Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois will follow in her footsteps."[11] Ohio was to be a test case, and Dayton women responded by rapidly organizing a woman's suffrage association.

They held an organizational meeting on May 21, 1912, and an estimated three hundred supporters crowded the East Room of Dayton's Memorial Hall. More than twenty-seven organizations sent representatives, including the Plumber's Union Number 162, the Painter's Union Number 249, and the Socialist Party of Dayton.[12] The leadership came largely from Dayton's highest socioeconomic class. All members of the Executive Committee were white, middle- or upper-class women whose husbands were lawyers, physicians, or highly regarded business leaders.[13] By June they had arranged to rent three rooms in the Victoria Theater building, and by July the DWSA was in full swing, with a scant ten weeks to spread its message.[14]

The suffragists quickly divided the city into districts, established various committees, launched a speaking campaign, and attempted to mobilize particular segments of the community. At first they managed three or four speeches each week, but near the campaign's end they were delivering fifteen to twenty speeches per week.[15] The Committee of Cooperation undertook the task of contacting all other organizations in the city (except church groups which another committee contacted) and attempted to secure from them an endorsement for woman suffrage. The DWSA also convinced three different theater owners to show a "suffrage slide presentation" before each feature film, and

8. Charlotte Reeve Conover, *Dayton, Ohio: An Intimate History* (New York, 1932), 230–38.
9. Articles of Association, Woman's Suffrage Association of Dayton, Ohio, Box 1, Folder 1, Records of the Woman's Suffrage Association and the League of Women Voters of Ohio, Dayton Collection, Manuscript Section, Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library, Dayton, Ohio. Hereinafter cited as DWSA Records.
10. Dayton Equal Rights Association Constitution, September 1887, Box 1, Folder 2, DWSA Records.
11. "Dayton in Midst of Hot Campaign by Suffragists," *Dayton Journal*, 6 June 1912.
12. "Confidence of the Men of Ohio Sought by the Women," *Dayton Daily News*, 22 March 1912.
13. John Williams, *Dayton Directory for 1912–1913* (Cincinnati, 1913).
14. "Suffragists to Open Office," *Dayton Daily News*, 18 June 1912.
15. Secretary's Report, June 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.

they also performed at a local high school, to attract "younger supporters," a "suffrage play" entitled "How the Vote Was Won."[16]

Members of the DWSA also focused their attention on certain groups within Dayton society. A Mrs. Welliver, for example, "volunteered to work with the Hungarians," and Rose Schneiderman, the famous union activist who had come to the state to help organize the campaign, "addressed factory workers." Mrs. Thresher spoke before the "colored WCA" and the "NCR [National Cash Register] girls," and Frau Von Klenze disappointed the suffragists by being "unable to deliver her speech in German."[17] Some of the city's more prominent black women citizens, such as Mrs. Jewelia Higgins and Miss Hallie Q. Brown, conducted much of the work in Dayton's small but vocal black community. Both Brown and Higgins were fascinating women. Higgins, among other accomplishments, was the nation's first black Red Cross nurse and helped to found Dayton's first YWCA for black women. Brown was a world-renowned advocate of civil rights and woman's suffrage, as well as having taught at the Tuskegee Institute and being a professor of elocution at Wilberforce University.[18]

Since Dayton suffragists did not draft a formal constitution until 1914, the group's ideology is difficult to ascertain during the 1912 campaign. Even in 1914, the stated objective of the organization was so simple and all encompassing—"[T]he object of this organization is Equal Suffrage"—that close analysis is difficult. However, the suffragists' energetic and time-consuming efforts to contact all different segments of Dayton's population indicated a willingness to reach out and an openmindedness that studies of the national suffrage movement have not identified. The tactics and strategies of the DWSA reveal most clearly the complex race, class, and ethnic dynamics within the organization. In their efforts to recruit, mobilize, and arrange alliances with various organizations and communities, Dayton suffragists exhibited a willingness to transcend traditional female gender roles and to seek support from any possible allies. Such activities will be explored below in further detail.

The DWSA and Immigrants

Of all the groups that the DWSA attempted to mobilize, immigrants received the least attention. Although 12 percent of Dayton's population was foreign-born in 1910, the city's suffragists put far more energy into recruitment and mobilization of Dayton's black and working-class communities. The DWSA apparently concentrated most of its energy on the Hungarian and German population, the only groups specifically mentioned in the organization's records. Even then such entries were rare. Language was likely a barrier, because the suffragists expressed regret on two occasions at being unable to speak or publish suffrage literature in German. Nevertheless, they made attempts. As noted previously, Mrs. Welliver worked with the Hungarians and Frau Von Klenze spoke to the Germans, even if she could not do so in the Teutonic tongue. Several "open-air street meetings" were also held in immigrant neighborhoods such as "Germantown."[19]

Perhaps Dayton suffragists were less committed to courting immigrant support because of the antis' (opponents of woman

16. DWSA Diary, 1 July 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.
17. DWSA Diary, 2 October 1912–13 June 1913, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.
18. Speakers in Equal Suffrage Campaign in Montgomery County, June-August 1912, Box 2, Folder 1, DWSA Records.
19. Speakers in Equal Suffrage Campaign in Montgomery County, 1912, June–August 1912, Box 2, Folder 1, DWSA Records.

suffrage) frequent complaint that woman suffrage would "double the foreign and ignorant vote." The suffragists' response to this accusation demonstrated ambivalence on the topic, for they argued that "not nearly as many foreign women come here as foreign men, so that the proportion of American-born voters would be considerably increased." They also claimed that "girls are considerably better educated than boys, many more of them finish school and many more go into the high schools." They went on to argue that poor and presumably foreign-born women were simply more "intelligent and responsible" than poor and foreign-born men.[20]

The relationship between suffragists and Dayton's foreign-born population also suffered from the perceived connections between woman suffrage and temperance on the one hand, and between immigrants and the liquor interests on the other. National suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony also faced this dilemma. In Iowa, Anthony stated, "politics . . . is practically controlled by the great brewing interests and the balance of power rests in the German vote. It is believed that woman suffrage would be detrimental to their interests and they will not allow it."[21] Dayton suffragists struggled to portray the DWSA as neutral on the temperance question, although they did maintain close ties to the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League. Opponents of woman suffrage, however, attempted to paint a vote for Amendment 23 as a vote for going "dry," and a statewide organization called the German-American Alliance, an association representing the brewers' interests, spent around $620,000 in campaigning to defeat the woman suffrage amendment.[22]

The local German newspaper, the *Tagliche Daytoner Volkszeitung*, also opposed the amendment. "Against No. 23—For Women," ran one banner in the paper, while another declared, "The main argument against giving women the vote is what the Christian Temperance women want to do with it. Even proponents of voting rights for women will therefore vote against Amendment 23."[23] Other references in the paper ridiculed the idea of woman suffrage and women's equality and implied that suffrage leaders lacked an understanding of women's character. The Dayton suffrage movement clearly failed in its limited efforts to court foreign-born support, and ultimately this played an important role in the initiative's defeat. For example, in those wards where the immigrant population was high, the amendment was soundly defeated, in one case by as much as 67 percent of the vote.[24]

The DWSA and Class Relations

The DWSA also actively sought inter-organizational cooperation with working-class groups and eagerly pursued working-class endorsements of woman suffrage. The DWSA denied direct ties to the Socialist Party, claiming nonpartisanship, yet it nevertheless maintained a close relationship with the Socialists. Such an approach acknowledged the sensibilities of middle-class supporters while attracting activists dedicated to political change. Ella Reeve Bloor,

20. "Women and the Ballot," *Dayton Daily News*, 13 July 1912.
21. Anthony and Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 4, xxi.
22. Meeting Minutes in DWSA Diary, 5 August 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records; Anthony and Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 6, 510–11.
23. *Tagliche Daytoner Volkszeitung*, 31 August 1912.
24. Raymond Slonieski, *Montgomery County Suffrage Campaign, 1 June–3 September, 1912*, unpublished manuscript, DWSA Records.

a member of the Socialist Party and a suffragist, made sure that the DWSA never forgot the needs of working women. Bloor had gained national prominence by organizing Connecticut working women into suffrage clubs, and would continue her commitment to working women in the Communist Party where she would become known as "Mother Bloor."[25] Even without Bloor's admonitions, however, the DWSA was unlikely to forget this group, for suffragists repeatedly argued the need for women workers to have a voice in the government. The suffragists issued broadsides that proclaimed, "[t]axpaying Women need the vote to protect their financial interests," and "[w]orking women need the vote to secure laws determining proper conditions and hours of labor."[26] The Socialists, in turn, were firm supporters of woman suffrage. Point one of the local party's proposed platform read, "[E]qual suffrage for men and women."[27]

Although Ohio had passed some of the earliest protective legislation for women workers—a ten-hour maximum-hour law in 1852 and a minimum-wage law in 1912—Dayton suffragists, as suggested above, were acutely aware of the difficult conditions that working women faced, and much of their propaganda presented woman suffrage as the answer to their plight.[28] The spirit of Progressive Era reform no doubt helped to inspire such appeals, but they were also obviously designed to attract additional support for the DWSA. In one article, suffragists proclaimed that "[N]o class has more to gain and less to lose by giving women the vote than the workers. Their cause is the same." Other articles detailed the horrors of women's working conditions and demanded woman suffrage as the only means to end their sufferings.

> In shops and factories they work long hours, often without pay for overtime, earning as low as $4 or $5 a week, often amid unsanitary and unhealthful conditions. Women must take these wages or starve. What can help these conditions? Giving women the vote to protect themselves by electing the men who make the laws.[29]

Internal memoranda indicate that suffragists commonly discussed such concerns. One diary entry read, "Dr. McGurk called, long talk on industrial conditions, department stores, and low wages to girls."[30]

Dayton suffragists also worked to obtain support from various labor unions, addressing The Building Trade Council Union, the Plumbers Union, the Painters Union, the Horseshoers Union, and the Ohio Federation of Labor; the Ohio Federation of Labor responded by passing a resolution endorsing woman suffrage. Also, at a meeting conducted by the United Trades and Labor Alliance, a pro-suffrage speaker was "greeted by much applause."[31] Overall, however, a newspaper poll indicated that support for Amendment 23 was actually rather low among male workers. According to a *Dayton Herald* poll, employees

25. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, 153.
26. "Why Women Should Vote," *Dayton Daily News*, 10 August 1912.78
27. "Platform Adopted By Recent Ohio Convention," *Miami Valley Socialist*, 10 May 1912.
28. Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 1982), 186, 196.
29. "Workers and Women," *Dayton Daily News*, 13 August 1912; "An Appeal to The Man Who Thinks," *Dayton Daily News*, 17 August 1912.
30. DWSA Diary, 2 November 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.
31. DWSA Diary, 1 July 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records; Frederic J. Haskin, "Votes For Women," *Dayton Journal*, 1 May 1912; "Minimum Wage and Suffrage Discussed," *Dayton Journal*, 31 August 1912.

at the American Cigar Company, the Kinnard Manufacturing Company, and the Home Telephone Manufacturing Company all favored defeat of the amendment.[32] Perhaps the opposition revealed in this poll indicated a split between skilled and unskilled labor, with those men who were in male-only craft unions and thus less threatened by female laborers being more supportive of woman suffrage.

Suffragists did not limit their efforts to mobilize workers merely to labor unions. They organized one meeting for employees of the National Cash Register Company, for example, where "about 700 of the women workers of the cash register company followed the suffrage arguments with the most encouraging responsiveness." On another occasion, about forty women employees of the Rikes Kummler Company, a local department store, went to DWSA headquarters to watch a suffrage slide presentation.[33] Ella Reeve Bloor also spoke at the Malleable Iron Works, and Ella Haas, a state factory inspector, presented several speeches on the necessity for working women to have the franchise.[34]

Dayton suffragists demonstrated further their willingness to use working-class support to their advantage when they organized a delegation of "working women" to march in the city's Labor Day Parade as the "representatives of the Equal Suffrage Cause." Similarly, to emphasize their solidarity with working women, Dayton's delegation to the Columbus Suffrage Parade would "dress in uniforms" and "march rather than ride in automobiles."[35] Overall, Dayton suffragists were far more successful in their efforts at gathering working-class and union support than they had been at gaining approval among the city's foreign-born population.

The DWSA and Race

Feminist historian Nancy Cott has argued that the 1910s marked an increase in the participation of blacks in woman suffrage but that most of their activities were limited to black organizations owing to racism within the suffrage movement. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn makes a similar argument, stating that "by 1916 Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the NAWSA [National American Woman Suffrage Association], concluded that the South had to be conciliated if woman suffrage was to become a reality." She further cites Alice Paul's infamous comment that "all this talking of Negro women voting in South Carolina was nonsense." National suffrage leaders, both conservative and radical, seemed quite willing to sacrifice black women in the name of political expediency, and nowhere did the disparity between Dayton suffragists and national leaders become so apparent.[36]

Perhaps since black men had held the right to vote in Ohio since Reconstruction and because the city's black population was less than 5 percent, opponents of woman suffrage did not directly address race issues. Led by liquor interests and proponents of a separate sphere for women, the Dayton antis complained frequently about increasing the "foreign" or "ignorant" vote, but they never pressed the issue for fear of boosting the black vote for woman suffrage. The suffragists themselves worked closely with black leaders and had at least four black members active in the upper echelons of the

32. "Herald Poll," *Dayton Herald*, 1 June–1 September 1912.
33. DWSA Diary, 1 July and 19 July 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.
34. Meeting Minutes in DWSA Diary, 15 July 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records; "Big Sum Raised By Suffragists To Wage Battle," *Dayton Journal*, 8 June 1912.
35. Meeting Minutes in DWSA Diary, 26 August 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.
36. Cott, *Modern Feminism*, 31–32; Terborg-Penn, "Discontented Black Feminists," 263–64.

DWSA. Also, their speeches and propaganda made clear that Dayton suffragists wanted the vote for all women. "All Women," declared one advertisement, "need the vote because it is the accepted method of self-expression in a democracy."[37]

DWSA appeals to blacks brought practical results and a close working relationship between black and white suffragists. White suffragists delivered numerous speeches before black audiences, and on at least two occasions DWSA meeting minutes noted "work among the colored people." Black women, active members of the DWSA themselves, presented both reports, and each identified positive gains. Mrs. Higgins reported on September 9, 1912, that "in spite of opposition and indifference much good had been accomplished in this field." A July 15 reference claimed that only one opponent of woman suffrage was in attendance at a meeting of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.[38] The fact that black women ran the suffrage information booth in downtown Dayton independently one day per week represents more concrete evidence of interracial cooperation on suffrage. The July 22 entry for the DWSA diary stated, "[T]he colored women, under the direction of Mrs. Higgins were requested to take charge one Monday," while on July 29 the diary reported that the colored women would work the stand every Monday. Whether black women were welcome at the stand other days remains unclear, but evidence suggests that turning them away would have been out of character for Dayton's suffragists.[39]

Perhaps an undated letter from the president of the state organization, Harriet Taylor Upton, to the head of the Dayton chapter, Mrs. Oscar Davisson, contains the most compelling evidence of Dayton suffragists' attitude towards black women. Upton's approach, more typical of the national leadership, contrasts with that of the Dayton women:

> I believe colored women should have the same rights as white women and colored men. But I do wish this crowd could have held off a little longer. There is no use of incensing Southern Senators. If they had held off we would have gotten it for all of us[;] now their pressing may make us lose it. The suffragist's row is a hard one.[40]

Although the reference to Southern Senators indicates that this letter was written after the 1912 campaign, it does imply that Dayton suffragists had continued to believe in courting all women, even if the president of the state suffrage organization was unsure of the wisdom of that approach and thus more tentative in her support.

The suffragists' interest in the black community apparently spawned no visible backlash in the larger Dayton community—the "Progressive Era," after all, was hardly progressive for blacks, and Ohioans were not immune to the heightened racial prejudices of the day.[41] The antis, of course, did not want to drive more supporters into the suffrage camp by stressing racial issues, and the Dayton

37. "Why Women Should Vote," *Dayton Daily News*, 10 August 1912.

38. Meeting Minutes contained in DWSA Diary, 15 July 1912 and 9 September 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.

39. DWSA Diary, 22 July 1912 and 25 July 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.

40. Letter from Mrs. Harriet Taylor Upton to Mrs. Oscar Davisson, undated, Box 2, Folder 5, DWSA Records. The events to which the letter refers remain a mystery as no other reference was found in the records or in newspapers. It is also interesting that this note was handwritten, for the two women conducted all other communications on official stationary. It would seem that this letter was unofficial and perhaps not intended for common viewing.

41. Although defining "Progressivism" is always a difficult task, in this work I use Richard Hofstadter's definition

newspapers did not cover any protests against the suffragists' work with and among blacks. The mobilization of blacks not only did not hurt, it certainly helped the suffrage movement. Opponents deliberately split the initiative to delete the term "white male" from the state constitution in hope of preventing a coalition between suffragist and black organizations. Voters could thus select an amendment that removed only the word "white" or one that removed the word "male" from the constitution. The men and women of Dayton's black community, however, did not go their own way and maintained an interest in the suffragists' cause.

Although a definite relationship, even an alliance, existed between white suffragists and the city's black population, evidence also suggests an independent woman suffrage movement among black activists. An August 17 *Dayton Daily News* article described an "open-air assembly" where "Negro citizens [held] a suffrage meeting." At this meeting "colored speaker" Elmon Terry declared that "the ballot needed woman more than woman needed the ballot." Furthermore, one entry in the DWSA diary read, "selected 40 cents worth of literature for Mrs. Charles Higgins for colored woman's society."[42]

As already noted, black women working independently for woman suffrage was not unusual, but the cooperation and acceptance of black members in the mostly white Dayton movement was unique, especially when contrasted to the national movement. All of the black women involved in the DWSA were highly educated and middle-class, but regardless of their status, the ability of these women to unite, even if only for political expediency, indicates a willingness to ignore racial differences, perhaps in favor of class and gender similarities. Working-class women, on the other hand, although courted for support of suffrage, were never active participants in DWSA meetings.

Although sources make it difficult to understand fully the motivations and goals of black suffragists, or even their relationship with their white counterparts, speculation is possible. Dayton resident Charles Austin, a historian and writer especially interested in black history in that city, believes that black women participated in the woman suffrage movement "primarily as a means to uplift their race."[43] However, Emma Smith and Betty Jean Dugger Ferguson, both granddaughters of Jewelia Higgins, remember their grandmother as someone who was "color blind" and as someone who "was very proud of her involvement in woman's suffrage." According to Ferguson, "[M]y grandmother believed that it was wrong to deny women the vote just because of their sex."[44] Terborg-Penn argues that "most black women who supported woman suffrage did so because they believed that political equality among the races would raise the status of blacks, both male and female."[45] For black women, it seems, supporting woman suffrage was a means for advancing both their race and their sex.

from *The Progressive Movement, 1900–1915* (New York, 1963), 2–3. "The Progressive movement, then, may be looked upon as an attempt to develop the moral will, the intellectual insight, and the political and administrative agencies to remedy the accumulated evils and negligences of a period of industrial growth...it was also an attempt to work out a strategy for orderly social change." Racial violence was not unheard of in early twentieth century Ohio, as the 1905 lynching of a black man in Springfield demonstrates.

42. "Negro Citizens Hold A Suffrage Meeting," *Dayton Daily News*, 17 August 1912; DWSA Diary, 25 November 1912, Box 1, Folder 3, DWSA Records.

43. Austin, personal conversation with author, 29 November 1991.

44. Ferguson, personal conversation with author, 5 December 1991 and 18 January 1992.

45. Terborg-Penn, "Discontented Black Feminists," 264.

Conclusion

Despite the valiant efforts of Dayton's suffragists, Amendment 23 was soundly defeated on September 3, 1912. More than 60 percent of the voters opposed woman suffrage, resulting in a final vote of 8,299 for and 14,439 against. Amendment 24 was similarly defeated. Although Amendment 23 garnered less that 40 percent of the vote in Dayton, the city's suffragists were not daunted. They described the results as "an endorsement to fill us with satisfaction and hope."[46] After 1912, however, Dayton suffragists began to look more like their national counterparts. They employed more traditional tactics such as political lobbying and petition drives and abandoned community mobilization, except among labor unions. DWSA arguments, however, continued to use the same rationales, especially the desperate need for working women to hold the franchise.

The DWSA's burst of community mobilization and cross-race, class, and ethnic alliances may have arisen mostly because of the ad hoc nature of the 1912 campaign and the resulting premium placed on political expediency. Nevertheless, the fact that Dayton suffragists, unlike their counterparts at the national level, accepted and eagerly courted a broad base of support is significant and offers new insight into the nature of the suffrage movement, especially at the local level.

Whereas national leaders disdained such alliances as counterproductive, at least some local communities, this study proves, were more willing to see such support as an advantage. The eventual passage of woman suffrage was a local phenomenon. Had local communities not organized and convinced their state representatives to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, the entire national movement would have been meaningless. Therefore, a more thorough understanding of the suffrage process at the local level is necessary if the full picture is ever to be illuminated.

This study has proven that in Dayton, Ohio, in 1912, white, middle-class, native-born women did considerably more than simply mobilize themselves. Instead, this local case study has provided a lens for understanding better class, race, and immigrant involvement in local suffrage movements. Dayton suffragists, mostly white, middle-class women, determined that their interests would be better served if they attempted to work with and mobilize the black, working-class, and to a much lesser extent, immigrant populations.

In 1912 Dayton's suffragists, in only ten short weeks, made 150 speeches, passed out thousands of letters and pamphlets, and secured support from key black leaders, labor unions, and one of the city's major newspapers, the *Dayton Journal*.[47] Dayton suffragists demonstrated creativity and political acumen in their quest for the franchise. Their efforts, and those of other suffragists who struggled in local organizations across the nation, demand further analysis. This process will not only record their actions, but perhaps it will contribute to a better understanding of the class, race, and ethnic dynamics within the suffrage movement.

46. "Forward Movement of Equal Suffrage," *Dayton Journal*, 4 September 1912.
47. Editorial, *Dayton Journal*, 11 August 1912.