

“ONE OF THE LORD’S DEMOCRATS”: NELLIE PETERS BLACK AND THE PRACTICAL
APPLICATION OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN THE NEW SOUTH, 1870-1919

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
LIST OF FIGURES	6
ABSTRACT	7
CHAPTER	
1 PREFACE.....	9
2 “SHE WAS BORN AN ARISTOCRAT . . . NEVERTHELESS SHE WAS ONE OF THE LORD’S DEMOCRATS”	15
3 “A GOOD NAME WITH WHICH TO DO GOD’S WORK . . .”	39
4 “. . . TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN THE MASTER’S BUSINESS”	60
The Episcopal Church in Atlanta.....	60
Mission Work	63
Episcopal Churchwoman.....	75
5 EDUCATION REFORM.....	88
Self-Culture and “. . . becoming accustomed to their own voices.....	89
The Kindergarten Movement: “. . . to aide in the character building of the child.”	94
Increasing Educational Opportunities Throughout Georgia.....	107
6 CREATING THE “GOOD” CITY: THE POLITICS OF MUNICIPAL HOUSEKEEPING.....	114
The Cotton States and International Exposition	116
The Atlanta Woman’s Club	121
Organizing for Charity.....	124
Fighting Disease and the Great White Plague	132
The City Beautiful Movement.....	140
7 “WHAT WE NEED IS TO MAKE LIFE ON THE FARM BRIGHT, INTERESTING, AND HAPPY. . .”: AGRICULTURAL REFORM AND THE COUNTRY LIFE MOVEMENT IN GEORGIA	149
The Country Life Movement	150
Practical Experience: Farmer Black	152
Agricultural Reformer: The Farm Rallies.....	157

8	CREATING A “CHRIST-NATION”: THE WAR PRESIDENT AND WORLD WAR I..	183
	The Politics of Food.....	186
	Conservation, Motherhood, and Morality	194
	“Blessed are the Peace Makers. . .”	201
9	EPILOGUE: “DEPART, O CHRISTIAN SOUL, OUT OF THIS WORLD. . .”	212
	REFERENCE LIST	217
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	238

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1-1 Nellie Peters Black.....	14
3-1 Richard Peters	57
3-2 Nellie Peters in 1862.....	57
3-3 Nellie Peters	58
3-4 George Black	58
3-5 Nellie Black and her daughters Louise King Black and Mrs. Lamar Rucker.....	59
4-1 All Saints, Sylvania, Georgia.....	87
4-2 Sunday school class at Peters Farm, Gordon County, Georgia.	87
5-1 Savannah Morning News, 15 May 1917.....	113
6-1 Woman’s Building at the Atlanta Cotton States & International Exposition (1895).	147
6-2 Throughout the tuberculosis scare, racist headlines appeared in the major newspapers prejudicing whites against their servants.	147
6-3 Washerwoman headlines from 11 March 1910. The one on the left ran in the Atlanta Georgian and the one on the right appeared in the Atlanta Constitution.....	148
7-1 This is an undated advertisement for the Peters’ Farm. Note “N.P. Black” is listed as the “Manager.”	183
7-2 Nellie Black and her nephew playing croquet at Peters’ Farm (1903).	183
7-3 (Atlanta Constitution)	184
7-4 Nellie Black in her cotton costume from the convention.	184
8-1 GFWC Canning Label.	210
8-2 The patriotism of canning.	210
8-3 Patriotic appeal from the US Food Administration.	211

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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By

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My dissertation examines the broad impact of the confluence of the social gospel, progressive reform, and the power of organized womanhood in the South during the period between Reconstruction and the end of World War I. By focusing on one woman, Nellie Peters Black (1851-1919), and how she fashioned, promulgated, and even exemplified the social gospel in the New South, the connection between religious theology and secular reform becomes clear.

Nellie Peters Black was part of a network of (primarily Protestant) women who organized to implement their various progressive-reform goals, many of which were grounded in social gospel theology. My study offers an explanation of how women like Black obtained their reform goals within the oppressive political, social, and religious structures in which they operated. Historians have been slow to identify the social gospel in the South because they have been looking for it in the wrong places – those inhabited by theologians and clergy. If the scholarly examination of the movement is broadened to include its practical application, then evidence of it becomes more apparent and the role played by Black and other women appears more significant.

Black was a formidable figure in Georgia whose influence permeated philanthropic and political arenas. Using the powerful positions that she held in both the Georgia Federation of

Woman's Clubs and the Episcopal Church in Georgia, she worked tirelessly to bring about reforms in agriculture, education, labor, and social welfare causes. In doing so, she broadened the public boundaries of women in the New South. Nellie Peters Black's career as an activist and reformer is emblematic of what was laudable and regrettable, ambitious and circumspect, and progressive and reactionary in white women's activism at the dawn of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1
PREFACE

RICHARD PETERS' STOCK FARM
CALHOUN, GORDON COUNTY, GA.
ANGORA GOATS FOR SALE
Great Bargains Offered
N. P. Black, Manager

Anyone in the market for quality livestock from a Georgia breeder during the late nineteenth century would have probably considered buying it from the Richard Peters Stock Farm in Gordon County, Georgia. Peters, the most prolific breeder of Angora goats in America, died in 1889, but the farm continued to ship goats and cattle via railroad to all parts of the United States. Occasionally, customers came to the farm to meet its accomplished manager "N. P. Black." Imagine their surprise when they were greeted at the farmhouse door by Nellie Peters Black, a robust mature woman with a commanding presence and an obvious sense of humor. Suddenly their gifts of cigars and brandy no longer seemed appropriate. The woman in front of them was not only a farm manager, she was also the most prominent clubwoman in Georgia, a generous philanthropist, a dedicated religious lay leader, and a tireless civic activist.¹

If they had been greeted by a man, the visitors to the Peters Farm would not have found the farm manager's accomplishments so surprising. It was rare during the nineteenth century for a woman to manage the business interests of a farm, but anyone who knew Nellie Peters Black was not surprised at her ability to succeed in that task, or in any of the other roles that she assumed. What qualities did this woman possess that enabled her to maneuver so confidently through male dominated social, political, and religious realms where women were not welcome?

¹Quote in chapter title taken from BRO 401, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, University of Georgia Libraries, electronic version, <http://www.libs.uga.edu/Hargrett/rarebook/broadside/index.html>, Feb. 2007. For information about Richard Peters and the Peters Farm, see Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985) and James C. Bonner, "Genesis of Agricultural Reform in the Cotton Belt," *Journal of Southern History*, 9, 4 (Nov., 1943): 475-500. There is no comprehensive biography of Nellie Peters Black.

Born in 1851 into one of Atlanta's founding families, Nellie Peters led a privileged, but typical Victorian childhood. Her days were spent working on school lessons, going to church, and riding horses. Family accounts indicate that young Nellie was curious, obedient, and displayed a maturity beyond her years. When she was old enough she was sent north to finish her education at a prestigious girls school. Upon her return to Atlanta, she enjoyed an active social life. Like other young women of her social class, she enjoyed playing cards, attending musicals, sewing, visiting with friends, and attending parties. However, Nellie could most often be found at the mission she established, where she served as both administrator and teacher. Having possessed a strong religious faith since childhood, she believed that the Lord had called her to work "in his service" for others. She soon earned a reputation as one of the most charitable and practical young women in Atlanta.

Large boned and somewhat plain looking, Nellie Peters could not have been considered beautiful by the standards of her day. However, her self-confidence and engaging personality made her popular with both men and women of all ages. She cultivated a large group of friends and acquired several beaux. At the age of twenty-six she married and spent the next ten years making a home for her husband and children. The unfortunate death of her husband brought this stage of her life to an premature end. Although precipitated by tragedy, widowhood afforded her the time, resources, and opportunity to become a public activist. Now able to capitalize fully on her charismatic personality, Nellie Black tackled her ambitious reform agenda with indefatigable energy and indomitable self confidence.

Nellie Black was known for her candor and willingness to speak out publicly about issues that she deemed important. Newspapers eagerly printed her opinions regarding a variety of subjects, including politics. During the 1906 Atlanta mayoral campaign Black wrote an editorial

that simultaneously endorsed a particular candidate, exploited a feminine stereotype, and lambasted the political system that denied women suffrage. Comparing women of her day to the American founding fathers, she noted she and her fellow clubwomen experienced “taxation without representation.” “We can’t vote, but we can talk . . . and [we] women are going to talk for Capt. Joyner, even if we can’t vote for him!”² Comfortable and adept at maneuvering in the male bastions of power, the outspoken Black worked the corridors of both city hall and the state capital, chastizing politicians who, according to her, shirked their responsibility to their constituents. When the city of Atlanta debated the need for a boys reformatory, she shamed lawmakers into allocating funds for the project. Black demanded to know how they would answer the boys who asked “Why have you left me to perish in my sins, ye legislators of Georgia?”³ Not all of the issues that she publicly addressed were as serious. When a silent film depicting the life of Jesus Christ came to an Atlanta theater, the *Constitution* printed her review in which she advised “all who believe in the old time religion, as well as those who have never believed in a divine Savior” to go see the movie.⁴ To Black, the saving of souls, like politics, was important business.

Nellie Black believed in giving credit where it was due, even if that meant acknowledging her own accomplishments. Her leadership style was characteristic of women activists of her era and reflected both the circumstances of women’s relative powerlessness and the culture of clubwomen. Depending upon the situation, she could either cajole or compel. Whether she was lambasting politicians or offering advice, Nellie Black’s rhetorical style was

²Wants Joyner Elected Mayor: Mrs. Nellie Peters Black Writes Card About Candidate,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1906.

³“For the Reformatory: Mrs. Nellie Peters Black Appeals to the Legislature,” *The Constitution*, 10 November 1894.

⁴Nellie Peters Black, “Life of Christ Praised By Mrs. Nellie Peters Black,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 March 1913.

authoritative, yet simple. When explaining what she perceived to be complex problems to crowds, she often used humorous anecdotes, Bible stories, and metaphors. At times she may have come across as condescending or patronizing, but not to the press and her fellow clubwomen who praised her “common sense” approach to problem solving. Some of Black’s speeches and editorials reveal an assuredness that borders on hubris, but because of her cheerful disposition and occasional self-deprecating comments, she did not come across as conceited. Her self-confidence was both her most notable strength and flaw. It gave her the conviction that reform was possible and straight-forward (simply a matter of will power and resources), but it blinded her to the intractable obstacles to the changes she proposed.

Contributing to Nellie Black’s proficiency as an articulate and charismatic public speaker, was her impressive physical appearance that seemingly affirmed her social authority and influence. Her large bosom, round face, gray hair, bifocal glasses, and wardrobe contributed to her matronly demeanor. Whether addressing a crowd in Atlanta or in one of Georgia’s many small towns, Black dressed impeccably. Although stylistically simple, her dresses were made from the finest fabrics and reflected the tasteful fashions of the day. She maintained that the feminine appearance - at any age - should be fashionable, yet modest. Speaking to an audience of young women during World War I, Black reminded them that “Society” girls should “keep their self respect” and rise above the “decoration of the drugstore.” She advised them to forego “paint and powder, dresses low in the neck and too short in the skirt.”⁵ Hemlines, alas, were already rising upward when Black died in 1919.

My dissertation is not intended to serve as a conventional biography of Nellie Black. Although she was genuinely spiritual, Black was not an introspective person and did not, as a

⁵“Mrs. Nellie Peters Black on Paint and Powder,” *Madisonian*, 11 October 1918.

habit, record her deepest thoughts and feelings. Like many of her male contemporaries who have been the subject of biographies, she did not leave a record of her interior life.⁶ She left only a few glimpses into her interior life, mainly during her young adulthood when she pondered her life's purpose. Once she determined her course in life, she did not harbor second thoughts. Although there are many aspects of Black's personal life that would be fascinating to know more about, extant sources are silent about them. Subsequently, most of what we can know about Black has to be gleaned from her own records, newspaper clippings, and the archives of the organizations to which she belonged. The chapters that follow trace the public life of a public figure who happened to be a woman.

In my dissertation, Nellie Peters Black takes her place alongside the other white-gloved ladies that historians have been writing about for the last two decades. She was a formidable figure in Georgia whose influence permeated philanthropic and political arenas. Her career as an activist and reformer is emblematic of what was laudable and regrettable, ambitious and circumspect, progressive and reactionary in white women's activism at the dawn of the twentieth century.

⁶Biographies of men often focus primarily on their public lives. For example, Stephen Kantrowitz's biography of South Carolina senator Ben Tillman focuses almost solely on his political career and reveals very little about the politician's private life. See Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).



NELLIE PETERS BLACK
(1851-1919)

Figure 1-1. Nellie Peters Black (photo courtesy of Atlanta History Center).

CHAPTER 2:
“SHE WAS BORN AN ARISTOCRAT . . . NEVERTHELESS SHE WAS ONE OF THE
LORD’S DEMOCRATS.”

In 1887, New South booster Henry Grady asked his fellow Georgians, “What shall the South do to be saved? Through what paths shall she reach the end?”¹ Whites throughout the South were asking themselves the same questions as they searched for a new social order and promoted economic progress in their still physically and emotionally devastated homeland. To many, including Grady, the conservative merging of progress and tradition known as the New South movement (and later as southern progressivism) seemed to be the answer.² Some Protestants in the South found their answer in a fusion of secular progressivism and Christian theology known later as the social gospel, a reform movement that sought Christian remedies for the social and economic problems of the day.³ The social gospel, simply stated, was “the religious expression of progressivism.”⁴

¹Quote in heading from an obituary in the *Atlanta Constitution* (24 August 1919). Although information about Nellie Peters Black’s early life and family is included, this study commences circa 1870 because Nellie Black had by then matured as a social Christian and begun in earnest her career of benevolence. The year 1919 serves as the ending point for several reasons: America had come through World War I, the Protestant Episcopal Church had undergone significant organizational and administrative changes, and Nellie Black died in August of that year. (Hereafter, Nellie Peters Black will be referred to in footnotes as NP or NPB.) Quote about the New South from Henry Grady, “The South and Her Problems,” *The New South: Writings and Speeches of Henry Grady*, Introduction by Mills Lane (Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1971), 14.

²As Wayne Flynt wrote, “Southern Progressivism, like all things southern, is a bird of a different feather, no matter how much it may resemble the rest of the flock.” See Wayne Flynt, “Southern Protestantism and Reform, 1890-1920,” *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience*, Sam Hill, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 137. For a more thorough explanation of southern progressivism, see Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1972) and William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

³While there has been scholarly interest in the social gospel during the last few decades, one of the most thorough explanations of the movement remains Ronald C. White and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), based on Hopkins’s earlier work. See Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). Other significant works on the social gospel include Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper, 1949) and Robert T. Handy, ed. *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966). Although I do not intend to enter into the debate over what constitutes a “movement,” for lack of a more concise definition I will use the term to describe the

One social gospeler who had no doubt about Georgia's future was Mary Ellen "Nellie" Peters Black (1851-1919). Dubbed Georgia's "pioneer club woman," Black dedicated her life to organizing women for the purposes of benevolence, self-improvement, and social and civic reform. Possessing such admired Victorian virtues as social prominence and piety, Black was active in the traditional female reform venues of education and religious outreach. Yet, in true progressive fashion, Black, an independent thinker with a keen business sense, also promoted the causes of social efficiency and diversified farming.⁵ Holding powerful positions in both the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) and the Woman's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia, she became one of the most public representatives of female activism in early twentieth-century Georgia.⁶

Composed of clergy, professional social workers, educators, progressive politicians, club women, and social reformers of all ilks, the Social Gospel movement, like the broader

social gospel. Even scholars who claim it was not a unified social or religious movement, but rather a phenomenon or social consciousness or even merely a "mood," invariably wind up applying the label to the subject. This dissertation will follow the example of historians who use the terms "social gospel" and "Social Christianity" interchangeably when writing about the movement. However, neither identification should be confused with Christian socialism. See Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) and Jacob H. Dorn, ed., *Socialism and Christianity in Early 20th Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

⁴Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 2. Theologian Walter Rauschenbusch is considered the father of the Social Gospel movement. In 1907, his optimistic yet controversial *Christianity and the Social Crisis* caused a mild stir among American Protestants dissatisfied with the increasing disconnect between religious and secular culture. In the book Rauschenbusch, a self-professed socialist, identified capitalism and industrialization as the sources of all social ills and charged the church with the responsibility of reforming society, thus hastening the kingdom of God on earth. See Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907).

⁵Although the presence of women in agricultural reform was not common, Black was not alone in her participation in the movement. Fellow Georgian Rebecca Latimer Felton also advocated agricultural reform. Like Black, Laura Clay of Kentucky and Katherine Smith Reynolds of North Carolina also managed successful farms. See LeeAnn Whites, "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife's Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* LXXVI, 2 (Summer 1992): 354-72; and Margaret Supplee Smith, "Reynolda: A Rural Vision in an Industrializing South," *The North Carolina Historical Review* LXV, 3 (July, 1988): 287-313.

⁶Black served three consecutive terms as president of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs. Due to its large size, the Diocese of Georgia split into two separate dioceses in 1907. Then secretary of the Women's Auxiliary of the Diocese of Georgia, Black became head of the organization in the newly formed Diocese of Atlanta.

Progressive movement, reflected the world view of the Victorians who were grappling with uncertain economic conditions, new ideas such as Social Darwinism, and a rapidly modernizing and industrializing society. Part of “a developing world-wide interest in social Christianity,” the social gospel could claim neither American distinctiveness, nor southern roots.⁷ Although the movement existed simultaneously in both the North and the South, the urban-based southern social gospellers were fewer in numbers than their northern counterparts.⁸ However, as the Social Gospel movement was interdenominational within mainstream Protestantism (Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal), religious leaders found strength in numbers and formed cooperative relationships in cities across the South during the late nineteenth century.⁹ As historian Numan Bartley wrote “the center of religious gravity had by the early twentieth century clearly shifted to the towns and cities.”¹⁰ Atlanta was one such religious center. Although Baptists and Methodists far outnumbered Episcopalians and Presbyterians, by 1900 black and white leaders of the mainstream Protestant denominations could claim more than 104 churches and missions.¹¹

⁷Some historians make a persuasive argument that the social gospel was part of a much larger, trans-Atlantic movement. See Handy, *The Social Gospel in America*, 4. See also Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth*.

⁸Northern social gospellers viewed the uplift of the South as part of their foreign missionary work. Southerners, on the other hand, presumed they were pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Movement leadership tended to be located in the urban areas of the North, but the South developed its own leaders who possessed a firsthand knowledge of southern problems and who were viewed as less threatening by the native-born population. For example, Episcopal priest Edgar Gardner Murphy ministered to textile workers in Alabama, spoke out against lynching, and successfully lobbied for child-labor legislation. See Hugh C. Bailey, *Edgar Gardner Murphy: Gentle Progressive* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1968).

⁹Representative of the movement’s inter-denominational appeal, other prominent social gospel spokesmen included Baptist Shailer Mathews and Congregationalists Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong. For information on these prominent social gospellers, see Handy, *The Social Gospel in America*.

¹⁰Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983, second edition, 1990), 113.

¹¹*City Directory*, (Atlanta, Georgia, 1900), 1915-18. Mt. Gilead Methodist Church and Utoy Baptist Church were both organized in Fulton County in 1824. According to historian Walter Cooper, the first “house of worship” in Atlanta (then Marthasville) was a “union church” built in 1845. Baptists (First Baptist Church of Atlanta) and

Politically marginalized during this period, white and black Protestant women created for themselves an influential and significant role within the Social Gospel movement. Because Protestant women were used to taking a back seat in both the administrative affairs of the church and community politics, they proved to be effective conduits for the social gospel message that urged individuals to be subservient to the collective good. Even though white Protestant men (many of whom were the civic activists of the new urban elite) controlled most activities within the church, their wives and daughters actually comprised the majority of the membership within these denominations and attended services in much higher numbers.

As one such wife and daughter, Nellie Peters Black never overstepped the boundaries of social propriety for her era. Like other southern members of the contemporary woman's movement, she did not rebel publicly against the paternalistic society of the South.¹² Unlike suffragists who often offended conventional southern sensibilities, Black chose to work within the established social, political, and religious hierarchies, diffusing opposition to her ideas with the traditional southern female weapons of good manners and tact. Compatible with the desire of social gospels to resolve conflict through mediation, Black's approach proved very effective in

Methodists (Wesley Chapel) first organized in Atlanta in 1847. According to Nellie Peters Black's reminiscences, Episcopalians first held services at a private residence in the city in 1846. In 1848, St. Philip's Episcopal Church was constructed. Presbyterians first organized in Atlanta that same year, later building their own church in 1850. Walter Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County* (Atlanta: Fulton County History Commission, 1934), 33-42 and 524-79.

¹²According to historian Nancy Cott, middle- and upper- class white women in this movement developed a gender consciousness and perceived themselves more as a separate class than a mere social grouping. Cott described these women as *feminine* (an adjective describing a social construct for women), but they were not feminists (a noun that signifies women who actively oppose the societal construction of women and sexual hierarchy). See Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 3-24. Black also qualifies as a member of the group defined by William O'Neill as "social feminists." However, I, like Cott, contend that O'Neill's term is too broad and lumps together the many diverse categories of progressive female reformers. It obscures important distinctions between settlement house workers, labor activists, and club women. See William O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969). See Cott's refutation of O'Neill's thesis in Nancy F. Cott, "What's In a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism'; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 76 (Dec. 1989):809-29.

dealing with groups and individuals opposed to change. Her Christian dedication and maternal image imbued her with an aura of moral authority that enabled her to become an effective leader in both religious and secular organizations. Through these organizational memberships, church affiliations, and social relationships, she established networks of women in counties throughout urban and rural Georgia that proved useful in her efforts to ally agriculture and business, partner state responsibility with private philanthropy, promote urban and rural cooperation, all of which would ultimately extend God's kingdom on earth.

This study seeks to understand how the social gospel, progressivism, and the power of organized womanhood converged to institute reform in the South during the period between Reconstruction and the end of World War I. By focusing on one woman - Nellie Peters Black - and how she fashioned, promulgated, and even exemplified the social gospel in the New South, the connection between religious belief and secular reform becomes clear. All of the reform campaigns in which Black actively participated can be directly linked to her sense of Christian duty. Unlike the generation of club women who came after them, Nellie Black and her contemporaries did not separate their religious work from their secular activism. In Black's case, Christian idealism provided the foundation for all of her philanthropic endeavors and civic activism. This type of female activism enabled many women to circumvent some of the patriarchal political and social institutions that existed during the period without overtly rebelling against them. It also complicates the traditional paradigm of progressivism which tends to separate religious and secular reform. Black does not fit neatly into any framework of progressive reform because she was not a reformer per se; social gospelers sought to redeem, rather than reform. In describing Nellie Black's intention, *uplift* may be a more appropriate word than *reform*. Black's intention was to expand the kingdom of God on earth and, in the process,

create a new Georgia - one that was economically efficient, aesthetically beautiful, and socially just. She envisioned a southern utopia landscaped with efficient farms and businesses, beautiful towns, clean cities, and pastoral country sides, all inhabited by Christian citizens.

While this dissertation uses Nellie Black as a lens through which to examine the practical application of the social gospel in the South, it also explains how the social gospel inspired some of the seemingly contradictory solutions proposed by southern progressives for problems centered on issues of class, race, and gender.¹³ Social gospelers assigned a religious connotation to *noblesse oblige*, the idea that the fortunate should always help the less fortunate. As such, social gospel theology served to validate white paternalistic attitudes toward the less fortunate, which included the economically, socially, and presumably mentally inferior blacks and poor whites. In *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (1991), Ralph Luker explains that, as a part of the nineteenth-century continuum of religious reform in which the participants sought “to organize society by the extension of common beliefs and values,” the social gospel “promoted social reform on a wide range of public issues, including slavery and race relations.”¹⁴ Luker argues that social gospelers were not so much critiquing the industrial capitalist society of nineteenth-century America, as they were espousing “religious beliefs and values that could serve to hold that society together.”¹⁵ Examined within such a

¹³William Link understands these paradoxes “of democracy and hierarchy, of humanitarianism and coercion, and of racism and paternalistic uplift . . .” See Link’s *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 323-24.

¹⁴Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 3. Some historians of religion have disputed Luker’s “attempt to place racial reform at the center of Social Gospel concerns. . .” See Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth*, xxiii.

¹⁵Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*, 4. Luker takes issue with Arthur Schlesinger’s long-accepted historical interpretation of the social gospel as “a response of reform-minded churchmen to the urban-industrial crisis of the late-nineteenth century.” (Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*, 2). Not only is Schlesinger’s thesis limited to a particular time and place (the northeastern-based industrial revolution of nineteenth-century America), it does not take into account the biblical message behind the social gospel, which was basically “love thy

broad, yet simple, context, the social gospel also helps to explain how southerners (including Georgians) dealt with the divergent and anxious state of urban/rural relationships during this period.¹⁶ To rural Georgians, the city of Atlanta metaphorically represented the evils of modernization and industrialization associated with the North. Urban reformers maintained that although country people possessed an idyllic purity, they needed the uplift espoused by those in the Country Life movement.¹⁷ In order to interpret and compare the experiences of urban and rural inhabitants, one must examine not only demographics, but also the social, cultural, and political relationships both within and between the two areas. For instance, throughout the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries, state politics in Georgia was dominated by a county/unit electoral system that guaranteed the continuation of one-party politics and the supremacy of rural county political machines. Urban businessmen watched helplessly as county

neighbor.” For comparative purposes, see Arthur Meier Schlesinger, “A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875-1900,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 64 (1932): 523-47.

¹⁶For more on urban/rural tensions and clubwomen, see Rebecca Montgomery, “Lost Cause Mythology in New South Reform: Gender, Class, Race, and the Politics of Patriotic Citizenship in Georgia, 1890-1925,” *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing With the Powers That Be*, Janet L. Coreyell, Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., et al, eds.(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 174-98. See also Rebecca Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006) and her dissertation, “Gender, Race, Class and the Politics of Reform in the New South: Women and education in Georgia, 1890-1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri - Columbia, 1999). For information on the relationship between clubwomen in Atlanta, see Darlene R. Roth, *Matronage: Patterns in Women’s Organizations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1940*, Scholarship in Women’s History: Rediscovered and New, ed. Gerda Lerner, vol. 9 (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994).

¹⁷In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt gathered together agricultural experts, educators, publishers and influential progressives and established the Country Life Commission to study the overall condition and quality of life in rural America. They concluded that efficiency and broad social policies would bring rural inhabitants fully into the market economy and “facilitate the general betterment of country life.” A loosely organized movement (within which clubwomen played a role) developed around the findings of the commission to help meet these goals. See *Report of the Country Life Commission*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909. Secondary sources include, David B. Danbom, “Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920,” *Agricultural History* 53, 2 (1979): 462-65 and Olaf F. Larson and Thomas B. Jones, “The Unpublished Data From Roosevelt’s Commission on Country Life,” *Agricultural History* (Oct.1976): 583-99. A thorough historiographical survey of Country Life scholarship can be found in Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, “The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American History,” *Agricultural History* 78 (2004):289-316.

elites dictated the political direction of the state.¹⁸ However, because urban women controlled both the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs and the Woman's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church, the power structure among these white women's institutions was reversed. Adherence to the social gospel explains the apparent lack of tension between urban and rural women in these statewide organizations.¹⁹ It also provides insight into the urban / rural tensions present during the period by explaining how Black – an urban elite, yet also a farmer - reconciled these tensions within her own identity.

This dissertation has a place in the now rich and varied scholarship that focuses on both southern women and progressive reform. However, it contributes most significantly to the historiography of the social gospel by exploring three aspects of the movement that have just within the last two decades begun to be addressed by historians. First, that the social gospel not only existed in the South, it influenced and affected social reform within the region. Second, that southern women played a crucial role in disseminating the social gospel message and effectively incorporated it into their secular reform goals. In addition, while they may have been fewer in number, Episcopalians (women in particular) were instrumental in both the development of social Christianity and in the formulation of secular social policies based on social gospel ideals. Finally, examining Nellie Black's activism in terms of her social gospel motivations will verify that there is indeed a political relationship between the sacred and the secular.

¹⁸The county unit system was based on the apportionment of county representation in the Georgia House of Representatives. Each county had two county unit votes for each representative in the House. Local primaries (not general elections) were the real political races. With Georgia possessing more rural counties than urban areas, politicians courted the county seats, rather than the five urban areas. This gross imbalance of political power was the source of much urban/rural tension. For an explanation of the county-unit system, see V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics* (New York: Random House, 1949). Information on urban/rural tension can be found in Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 103-26.

¹⁹Club records, newspaper clippings, and manuscripts reviewed by this author revealed no obvious evidence of animosity between urban and rural clubwomen.

For decades, the most significant work by social gospel scholars ignored - or disputed - the presence of the movement in the South. Early works that are still regarded by scholars as classic explanations of the social gospel do not reference the South to any great extent.²⁰ Historians over the last two decades may have come to terms with the existence of the social gospel in the South; however they have continued to discount the movement's influence in the region. Religious historian Robert Moats Miller maintains that, unlike the North, the agrarian South was too consumed with its own problems - primarily "the massive presence of blacks" - to respond to the social challenges posed by increasing industrialization.²¹ While the movement may not have been as pervasive as in the North, interesting studies have emerged that demonstrate both the extent of the social gospel in the South, as well as the amount of diversity among southern Protestants.²² Following Ralph Luker's lead, I would argue that, not only were many southerners concerned with what they perceived as the evils of industrialization, some also sought solutions to their own "peculiar" problems through the social gospel. After all, some New South progressives perceived problems between the races to be the direct result of northern industrialism encroaching upon their traditional southern way of life. While there may be a correlation between industrialization and the development of the social gospel, it should not be the only criterion for determining the existence of the movement in the South. Historian John

²⁰These classic works include: Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (1940); May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (1949); and Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (1966); White and Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (1976).

²¹Robert Moats Miller, "Social Gospel," *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, Samuel S. Hill, ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984, 1987), 302. See also Miller, "Fourteen Points on the Social Gospel in the South," *Southern Humanities* I (Summer, 1967): 126-40.

²²See Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), and Robert F. Hood, *Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990).

Lee Eighmy argued several decades ago that “the region’s long-standing problems of illiteracy, farm tenancy, and racial discrimination were in themselves sufficient cause for an aroused social conscience.”²³ In reality, some southerners realized that they could not solve their racial problems, but like Walter Rauschenbusch (considered the “father” of the Social Gospel movement) who claimed that “we shall never have a perfect social life, yet we must seek it with faith,” the social gospel validated their continuing efforts.²⁴

Perhaps historians have been slow to identify the social gospel in the South because they have been looking for it in the wrong places.²⁵ In the classic works, scholars located the social gospel as emanating from theologians and clergy. If the scholarly examination of the movement is broadened to include its *practical application*, then evidence of it becomes more apparent and the role played by women appears more significant. Historians examining the social gospel through the lens of gender have found a rich source of information in the records of Protestant women’s groups and auxiliaries that supported the boards of foreign and domestic mission societies. Their work demonstrates that women were much more than “a passive audience” for male social gospelers. In the forward to *Gender and the Social Gospel*, Christopher H. Evans argues that, “whether emerging from the churches of Protestant and Catholic America or African-American urban faith communities, women from diverse cultural and ethnic contexts felt

²³John Lee Eighmy, “Religious Liberalism in the South during the Progressive Era,” *Church History* 38, 3 (Sept., 1969): 359-372.

²⁴Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 420.

²⁵Religion historian Lynne Lyerly claims that “historians looking for a Social Gospel movement in the South initially examined the efforts of male church leaders only to [mistakenly] conclude that the Social Gospel had relatively little influence in the region.” In other words, they were looking in the wrong place. See Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, “Women and Southern Religion,” *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 247-82.

a special call to realize the social hope found in Jesus' teachings."²⁶ Indeed, as the records of organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, foreign and home missionary societies, and secular clubs reveal, organized women often incorporated social gospel tenets into their visions of social transformation.

Anne Firor Scott, one of the first historians to focus on the emergence of a female political culture and its relationship to religion, argued that historians have not merely overlooked, but consciously discounted, the religious motivation of women reformers during the Progressive period. Scott noted that "the effort 'to bring people to Christ' or to save them from sin was an enormously energizing concept for women in moral reform."²⁷ Kathryn Kish Sklar maintains that the religious views held by women activists of this era "legitimized their challenge to the status quo," defined their political agendas, and encouraged strategic political alliances "across Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish lines" that allowed the women to accomplish their individual goals.²⁸ Granted, in her work Sklar references the careers of northern reformers Jane Addams and Florence Kelley, but southern examples of secular reformers who infused their efforts with religious discourse exist as well. Nellie Peters Black often employed evangelical rhetoric in her speeches and reports not only because it effectively captured the attention of her audience, but also because she believed her work to be divinely guided and inspired. It is

²⁶*Gender and the Social Gospel*, eds. Wendy J. Deichmann and Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham found this to be the case in black churches as well, see Higgenbotham's *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA. & London: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁷Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 182. Also see Scott's earlier classic, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville & London: The University of Virginia Press, 1970, 1995), 134-63.

²⁸Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Beyond Maternalism: Protestant Women and Social Justice Activism, 1890-1920." Keynote essay of the conference on *Women & Twentieth-Century Protestantism*, Chicago, April 23-25, 1998 (Text available online at <http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/Women/sklaressy99.html>). Even though Nellie Black "worked within the established social, political, and religious hierarchies," she too challenged the status quo (see page 6 of this dissertation).

precisely this blended discourse that allowed Black and other social gospelers to move with ease between the secular and religious arenas within which they sought to institute change.

Like Protestant women, Episcopalians have long been neglected by scholars of the social gospel. Biographies of prominent Episcopal leaders of the movement, such as Edgar Gardner Murphy, characterize them as exceptional, rather than as proof of that the social gospel existed in the South and that Episcopalians actively participated in that movement.²⁹ Arguing that evidence of the Episcopal commitment to social teachings can be found in both early Pastoral Letters written by bishops to their parishioners and in the official reports to the General Convention and House of Bishops, theologian Robert Hood claims that the Protestant Episcopal Church played a “pioneering role” in the early development of social Christianity, addressing secular social issues during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁰ Subsequently, scholars have begun to explore the role of Episcopal women in the spreading of the social gospel. In many ways, the experience of Episcopal women during the Progressive period is similar to that of their peers in other mainline Protestant denominations. However, as the Anglican Church was for centuries grounded in a political relationship with the state, I argue that there was a difference. In sixteenth-century England, the head of state was the head of the Church and the two institutions were entwined and even in eighteenth-century America, the Anglican Church was state supported in several colonies, including Georgia.³¹ Although the

²⁹See Bailey, *Edgar Gardner Murphy: Gentle Progressive*.

³⁰Hood, *Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church*. A few years earlier, Donald K. Gorrell also noted that early in the movement, “the Protestant Episcopal Church actively encouraged social ministry. . .” See Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 15.

³¹For a history of the Episcopal church in America, see Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964). For information on the Episcopal church in Georgia, see Reba Carolyn Strickland, *Religion and State in Georgia in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University

Anglican Church fell out of favor in post-Revolutionary America, the Episcopal Church held close ties to secular leadership. While Episcopal women were as deprived of leadership roles within the church as their fellow Protestant sisters, they played a vital role in perpetuating the Episcopal culture of authority, tradition, and education that is derived from the unique relationship between the Anglican Church and the state. As a staunch Episcopalian, Nellie Peters Black seemed always aware of this relationship and, possessing both a traditional Anglican view and the progressive ethos of the day, she never shied away from encouraging the state to accept responsibility for the social welfare needs of the public.

Afraid of losing sight of their spiritual goals, Nellie Black and other church-women from the more liturgical denominations (Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran) did not generally use the church as a feminist platform during the Progressive period.³² They employed subtle yet sophisticated strategies to gain power within the church, while at the same time incorporating neighborhood outreach as a standard part of parish life. Over the last two decades, historians have explored how Episcopal churchwomen evolved from working primarily in a support capacity for the male-dominated Board of Foreign Missions to becoming missionaries and deaconesses. Historians Mary Sudman Donovan and Catherine Prelinger have more fully defined the role of Episcopal women in the Social Gospel movement by focusing on how Episcopal laywomen both initiated change within their churches and enlarged the scope of the church's ministry, as well as how they contributed to their secular communities. Episcopal laywomen, and Protestant churchwomen in general, were part of a large informal reform network of women that included settlement house workers, clubwomen, and professional churchwomen

Press, 1939) and Henry Thompson Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957* (Atlanta, GA: The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Atlanta, 1960).

³²Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth*, xxiii.

(deaconesses and missionaries).³³ One study that explores the role of Episcopal women in secular reform and effectively demonstrates the centrality of religious motivation to female reformers is Elizabeth Hayes Turner's *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920*. Turner theorizes that elite women from the more liturgical and less evangelical denominations drove the women's reform movement in *some*, primarily coastal, southern cities. Her thoroughly researched study demonstrates that this was the case in Galveston, Texas, both before and after the disastrous hurricane of 1900. According to Turner, "the foundations of white women's reform" in Galveston were grounded in church societies, benevolent institutions and women's clubs - many of which were populated primarily by elite Episcopalians.³⁴ Just as Galveston contradicts the stereotypical reform model of the evangelical Bible Belt, so too does Nellie Peters Black. Although Episcopalians were a definite minority within the Protestant denominations in Atlanta, Black - an Episcopal churchwoman - became one of the most powerful civic reformers in the city. That fact that could not - and did not - separate her duty to expand God's kingdom on earth from her sense of community responsibility also reiterates the centrality of religious motivation to female reform.

Like Elizabeth Hayes Turner's work, my study seeks to demonstrate the interconnectedness of religious affiliation, class status, and race in the formation of female identity in the South during the Progressive period. In doing so, it will reveal the political aspect

³³Within the last two decades, the role of Episcopal women in the spreading of the social gospel has attracted scholarly attention. See in particular, Mary Sudman Donovan, *A Different Call: Women's Ministries in the Episcopal Church, 1850-1920* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse - Barlow, 1986) and *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality, and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination* Catherine Prelinger, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

³⁴Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9. Turner's study follows the trajectory of both white and black women from the Gilded Age through the Progressive Era as they created their own separate "activist communities" in the wake of the 1900 hurricane, increasing racism, and struggle for suffrage.

of that identity. Perhaps not in the “V. O. Keysian” sense, but southern women such as Black were political in that they were an integral part of the power dynamic that created and executed institutional (governmental and otherwise) policies.³⁵ Nellie Black inhabited both the traditional male and female physical and ideological realms of social and political power. Her voice resonated not only throughout the meeting rooms of women’s club houses, the halls of government, and the pews of the church, but also in the newspapers that reported her activities. Black even thought of herself as a “politician”. Comparing herself to her fiancé (who was a professional politician) she once wrote: “We politicians . . . in our public career must use tact for fear of crossing the very persons whom we may want to use sometimes.”³⁶ Her personal style of activism can be best described as politic.³⁷

This dissertation will introduce to historians a woman - once so significant, but now relatively forgotten - who represents the social complexities of her time and place. It is, however, not a traditional cradle-to-grave biography. As Nellie Black’s speeches and papers fail to reveal much of her interior life, many of the significant details of her life story are missing. Those looking for such a biography will be disappointed. Yet, because she was both closely

³⁵It is no revelation that women have traditionally been locked out of the “inner sanctum” of southern political history. Historian Glenda Gilmore asserts however that, since women historians still can’t find their “V. O. Keysian way to rewrite, reperiodize, and reconceptualize” this history, perhaps it is time to stop worrying about the key and instead - get a new lock, preferably a combination lock that incorporates gender, race, and class. Glenda Gilmore, ““But she can’t find her [V. O.] Key: Lack of insight into the role of gender and race in Southern history”, *Feminist Studies* (Spring 1999): 133-53. Like Paula Baker, I use the term “politics” in a relatively broad sense to include “any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community.” “Government” refers to the formal institutions of the state and their functions.” “Policy” includes efforts by those both within and outside of government “to shape social or economic conditions with the support of government.” See Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *American Historical Review* 89, 3 (Jun., 1984): 620-47.

³⁶NP to GRB, 15 March 1877, Mss. #235, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia (Hereafter cited as Black Papers, UGA).

³⁷An adjective meaning “shrewd, crafty”. See *The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary*, Third Edition (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1995), 521.

associated with some of the institutions of social and political power and actively involved in many of the significant reform movements of the period, Black functions as a vehicle to explore larger issues. Her life serves as both an example of the power of organized southern womanhood and as a nexus of religion, class, gender, and race intersected. Evidence of Nellie Black's religious beliefs and identification as an elite, white woman can be found in her record of reform. However, her thoughts regarding race are less obvious and will have to be fleshed out through her conspicuous silences about racial crises of the period and religious rhetoric. An attempt must be made to decipher her views on race because, as historians Glenda Gilmore, Grace Hale, and others have determined, class and gender identity in the South was very much tied to race.³⁸ Above all else, Nellie Peters Black provides a human face and personal story for the Social Gospel movement in the South. Throughout the years she has been referenced in studies of club-women and featured in local Georgia histories, but there has been no in-depth study of her life's work and its relevance to the creation of a New South.³⁹ My dissertation seeks to fill that void.

Because the primary goal of social gospelers was to expand the kingdom of God on earth, the first part of this study deals with the various venues through which Nellie Black attempted to do just that. Although raised in a Victorian household, Black came of age in a time when middle

³⁸Two influential whiteness studies that focus specifically on the South include Glenda Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998). Other interesting studies have emerged. Louise Michele Newman explores the connection between American feminism and racial politics in *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Michelle Brattain focuses on the relationship between race and labor relations in the South. See Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). For an overview on the development of whiteness studies, see Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *Journal of American History* 89, 1 (2002): 154-73.

³⁹In 1945, NPB was the subject of a masters thesis. See Virginia Griggs Perry, *The Life of Nellie Peters Black* (University of Georgia, 1945). Griggs provided generous details and genealogical information about NPB, but very little context or analysis. For a less in-depth and more celebratory study of NPB, see Sara Hines Martin, *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Georgia Women* (Guilford, Conn: The Globe Pequot Press, 2003), 56-66.

and upper-class Protestants in America (and the South in particular) were torn between “old duties and new ambitions.”⁴⁰ Even in the South, traditional values of home and family no longer fit into the ideal of modern life. The social gospel called for an expanded definition of family and familial responsibility that could reconcile the two. Chapter three details Nellie Black’s family life, religious background, and the development of both her Christian philosophy and interpretation of Christian responsibility, which she extended to her family, her schoolmates, the local community, the state, and eventually the world. Like other practitioners of the social gospel, Black did not separate her duty to expand God’s kingdom on earth from her sense of community responsibility. As a young, unmarried woman in Atlanta, she established Holy Innocents, the city’s first mission. Through her work with both secular benevolent organizations such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Ladies Aid Society, young Nellie Peters became a part of an inter-denominational network of organized women who would later form alliances between religious and secular groups in order to accomplish their individual goals.⁴¹

Demonstrating more precisely Nellie Peters Black’s attempts to bring God’s kingdom on earth to fruition through the church, chapter four describes her work as a mature Christian. As a married woman residing in the remote south Georgia town of Sylvania, Black established a mission where no Episcopal Church existed. Later, as a widow in Atlanta, she re-established Holy Innocents mission. Broadening her influence in both domestic and foreign religious

⁴⁰Quote attributable to Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Cited in Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 76.

⁴¹NPB’s mother, Mary Ellen Peters, worked within what Raymond Mohl characterized as “cos” or “charity organization societies.” Mohl theorizes that when America (and the South in particular) experienced three economic depressions from 1870-1900, urban populations rejected the idea of public assistance and encouraged private charity. Mohl described the charity organization movement as an attempt “to systemize and coordinate private relief-giving at the local level.” See Raymond Mohl, “The Abolition of Public Outdoor Relief, 1870-1900” *Social Welfare or Social Control? Some Historical Reflections on Regulating the Poor*, Walter Trattner, ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 35-50.

outreach, Black served as secretary to the Woman's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church in the dioceses of both Georgia and Atlanta.⁴² As Nellie Black also taught Sunday school at various times and places throughout her life, this chapter highlights the development of the Sunday school as a Protestant institution (specifically in the Episcopal Church) and focuses on its role in the maintenance of Christian society.⁴³

As social gospelers maintained that God's kingdom on earth could only come to fruition in an orderly society, the next two chapters discuss how Nellie Black sought to develop one through her secular club work. Although driven by diverse motivations, clubwomen like Black typified the organizational progressivism identified by Robert Wiebe in his now classic *The Search for Order* (1968).⁴⁴ In particular, clubwomen (both black and white) pro-actively sought to create order out of their changing societies. They spoke the three social "languages" shared by the reformers of the period: the rhetoric of anti-monopolism used by both business insiders and traditional outsiders; the rhetoric of social bonding that stressed interdependence over individualism and cohesiveness over autonomy; and the discourse of social efficiency that

⁴²Formed in 1871 primarily to financially support the international influence of the Episcopal church, the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions served other purposes as well. Not only was it an acceptable venue through which women could participate in church administrative matters, the Auxiliary also provided them with a previously unavailable knowledge of world affairs.

⁴³The most thorough study of the development of the Sunday School movement in the South is Sally McMillen's *To Raise up the South: Sunday Schools in Black and White Churches, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001). For information on its development specifically within the Episcopal Church, see Robert W. Lynn & Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: 200 Years of the Sunday School*, second edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980) First edition (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1971).

⁴⁴Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967).

merged the philosophies of science, economics, and politics.⁴⁵ To this they added the language of social justice, which Nellie Black peppered with social gospel rhetoric.⁴⁶

Accurately described by historian Darlene Roth as “the quintessence of matronage,” Black’s reform efforts were very much influenced by her role as mother to both her family and community.⁴⁷ Women like Black translated the nineteenth-century ideology of “true womanhood” into the twentieth-century concept of public “mothering.” Chapters five and six also explore these interconnected views on motherhood, their origination in both Christian theology and social norms, and the philosophical relationship between motherhood and activism during the Progressive Era. Once her own children were grown, Black directed her maternal efforts toward the community, which she reasoned would be better served by mature women, rather than “young inexperienced shoulders.”⁴⁸ Historian Theda Skocpol claims it was exactly this “maternalism” that insured the success of women’s activism, whereas male paternalism had not been able to connect with the more “feminine” issues of the period.⁴⁹ An authentic example of republican motherhood, Black presumed that education was the key to producing productive citizens, who in turn would create an orderly society. Chapter five explains how she devoted her life to increasing educational opportunities for those groups traditionally deprived of them - primarily rural and poor urban children, women seeking higher education, and in a more limited

⁴⁵Daniel Rogers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* (Dec., 1982): 113-32.

⁴⁶Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 105.

⁴⁷Roth, *Matronage*, 73.

⁴⁸NP to GRB, 18 March 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

⁴⁹Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* See also Elizabeth J. Clapp, *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of the Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

sense, African Americans. This chapter underscores Black's broad definition of education, beginning with her efforts to reform education, specifically her work with the Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association (which she co-founded in 1896), her efforts to institute compulsory education for all children, and the struggle to get women admitted into the University of Georgia.

Like many progressives of the period, Nellie Black believed that only a clean society could be orderly because, after all, cleanliness was next to godliness. She presumed that "pure hearts" and "clean living" could best be achieved within a sanitary and efficient environment. Chapter six looks at how Black and other organized women in Atlanta became municipal engineers and established their own version of the City Beautiful movement. Black came to understand that ideals of cleanliness were closely tied to perceptions of class and race.⁵⁰ For example, as vice president of the Charities Conference in Atlanta, Black fought against the city council's "olfactory crusade" to "bar persons who carry odors" from streetcars.⁵¹ In her capacity as a clubwoman, Black encouraged her fellow members and politicians to pay "attention to parks, public squares, and above all, the cleanliness of court houses, jail depots, and all buildings open to the public."⁵² By integrating traditionally male urban spaces (including political "hot spots" in Atlanta such as the Capitol building and Piedmont Hotel) and creating new female spaces (such as club houses and kindergartens), Black and her fellow clubwomen worked to purify the city and became an integral part of the municipal decision making process. As Sarah Deutsch notes in *Women and the City*, such women were "never outside the city's power

⁵⁰For information on the significance of cleanliness and purity to social gospelers and progressives in general, see Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*. For information on the City Beautiful movement, see William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), and Julian C. Chambliss, "Atlanta and Chicago: Searching for the Planning Imperative, 1900-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2003).

⁵¹"An Olfactory Crusade," *The New York Times*, 14 May 1903.

⁵²NPB, excerpt from address to Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs, *Yearbook 1818-1819*, 4.

structure, they were always part of it, although their role changed.”⁵³ At the center of this discussion is the progressive obsession with cleanliness and how, in the rhetoric of Protestant reform, “dirt” (whether on the body, in the home or on the street) represented poverty and sin.

The next two chapters examine how progressives and social gospelers in the South attempted to infuse regional uplift with a sense of national identity, eventually fostering an international awareness and concern for the global family of man. As both a rural and urban activist, Nellie Black understood that lasting regional uplift depended on both the effective reform of agrarian life and a cooperative relationship between the town and country. Chapter seven describes Black’s personal experiences as a farmer, her interest in agricultural reform, and her vision of agrarian life in the New South. In private, Black was the feminine version of a “gentleman farmer,” having assumed management of the family plantation when her father died. However, in public she ardently supported practical and businesslike approaches to agriculture and became one of the leading proponents of the Country Life movement in Georgia. In 1914 she chaired a series of rallies sponsored by the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs. Touring each of the state’s Congressional districts, she espoused the necessity of crop diversification, of local markets to combat high freight rates, and of reduced dependence upon cotton revenues and imported foodstuffs. Although Black’s personal efforts to produce and market crops are emblematic of the problems facing the entire region during this period, her willingness to directly engage in agricultural politics was unusual for a woman of her time.

Lack of agricultural diversification was only one reason among many that the South remained mired in poverty and the social ills that accompany it. From 1912 through 1919,

⁵³Although Deutsch was referencing women in Boston, similar patterns of activity can be found in other growing cities of the period, such as Atlanta and Chicago. See Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

progressive civic and religious leaders, sociologists, and educators from both the North and the South gathered together in conferences or “congresses” to find ways to halt the deteriorating social and economic conditions in the South.⁵⁴ Members of these organizations, including Nellie Black, held that “social amelioration” was the religious duty of all those physically, spiritually, and economically able to control social conditions.⁵⁵ Chapter eight focuses on how World War I finally provided the impetus for the South to not only face its own demons, but also join the national reform agenda. As interest in international affairs increased dramatically as the United States drew closer to the war in Europe, social gospelers seized the opportunity to cast America as the global example of Christian duty and self-sacrifice. As one historian has noted, Woodrow Wilson philosophically viewed World War I as an opportunity to transform the American ideal of Manifest Destiny into the “social gospel ideal of America as the ‘Christ-Nation.’”⁵⁶ Also recognizing the window of opportunity opened by national need, the Georgia Federation of Club Women (led by President Nellie Peters Black) appropriated both the national war relief agenda and the public spotlight it provided to fulfill their own complex economic, political, and social objectives and also to increase their national influence. Chapter eight depicts how Black quickly and efficiently mobilized the Federation’s resources to face the challenges of wartime,

⁵⁴For information about the Southern Sociological Congress, see E. Charles Chatfield, “The Southern Sociological Congress: Organization of Uplift” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XIX (March, 1960): 328-48 and E. Charles Chatfield, “The Southern Sociological Congress: Rational of Uplift” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XX (1961): 51-64. See also, L. L. Bernard, “The Southern Sociological Congress” *American Journal of Sociology* 19 (July, 1913): 91-93. The greatest primary sources are the published convention reports edited by the General Secretary of the SSC, James McCulloch: *The Call of the New South* (1912), *The South Mobilizing of Social Service* (1913), *Battling for Social Betterment* (1914), *The New Chivalry-Health* (1915), *Democracy in Earnest* (1918) and “*Distinguished Service*” *Citizenship* (1919). The SSC did not publish the proceedings of the meetings held in 1916 and 1917.

⁵⁵L. L. Bernard, “The Southern Sociological Congress,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 93.

⁵⁶Richard M. Gamble, “Savior Nation: Woodrow Wilson and the Gospel of Service” *Humanitas* 14, 1 (2001): 4-22. See also Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).

particularly the GFWC's efforts to produce, preserve, and conserve food. With the exception of some state federation studies and broader works that focus on women and reform, little scholarship has focused specifically on the role of clubwomen - white or black - during World War I. However, club records, newspaper accounts, and government documents affirm the period as one of unprecedented opportunities for women.⁵⁷

Nellie Black died in 1919 at the age of sixty-seven. She had accomplished much in her lifetime. Examined from a contemporary perspective, Black's resume of activism seems overwhelming. Whether working to expand the Episcopal Church in Georgia, increase educational opportunities, encourage agricultural diversity, create clean and healthy cities, or strengthen the network of organized women, Black continuously broadened the public boundaries for women in the New South. She was a true progressive in that her efforts to change the society in which she lived were both sincere, yet paradoxical. The conclusion of this study addresses Black's death and reflects on the meaning of her reform efforts and the legacy of the social gospel in the South.

Stories of individuals such as Nellie Peters Black serve to flesh out and enrich the narrative of women and social reform during the Progressive period. They also demonstrate both the individual and collective nature of progressive reform. The records of various women's organizations in Georgia during the progressive period reveal the same names over and over again; clearly Black did not operate in a vacuum. She was part of a network of (primarily Protestant) women that organized to implement their various progressive goals, many of which

⁵⁷Some scholars have explored the role of southern white clubwomen during World War I. See Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) and Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997). See also Montgomery, "Lost Cause Mythology in New South Reform: Gender, Class, Race, and the Politics of Patriotic Citizenship in Georgia, 1890-1925," *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood*, 174-98.

were grounded in social gospel theology. The intention of this study is not to romanticize or exaggerate their accomplishments, but to instead offer an explanation of how women like Nellie Black obtained many of their reform goals within the oppressive political, social and religious structures in which they operated. Examining Black's relationships with her Episcopal lay sisters and fellow club women facilitates a deeper understanding of the complex and diverse strategies employed by various women reformers. Foremost, however, because of their entwined secular and religious nature, Black's activities provide a unique window into the changing social and political landscape of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South.

CHAPTER 3
“A GOOD NAME WITH WHICH TO DO GOD’S WORK . . .”

To my children . . . I bequeath, first of all, the heritage of a good name unsullied by dishonor from their Father and Mother and grandparents, which I hold to be far above the price of jewels, gold, silver, or land. I pray that each in turn will leave the same legacy to their descendants . . . I hope each of my children will give in proportion as they are able; systematically and cheerfully to the church and to the cause of philanthropy all their lives, in that continued blessings may descend upon them as it has done upon my father and mother and upon their father and mother who have ever been ready to give time and money to God’s work in the world. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.
Nellie Peters Black, handwritten will, 12 June 1912

In June of 1912, thinking she was near the end of her life, Mary Ellen “Nellie” Peters Black wrote her will. It is obvious from her carefully selected words, what she wanted her legacy to be - a good Christian name. Looking back on her life, she was confident that she had left this. Solidly grounded in both her familial heritage and religious upbringing, Black spent her entire life creating “a good name with which to do God’s work.” Because she lived in a patriarchal society, much of Nellie Black’s public and private identity during the first two-thirds of her lifetime is attributable to her father and husband, both prominent men.¹

In 1835, Richard Peters left Pennsylvania and came to Georgia to survey the proposed rail line between Augusta and the Chattahoochee River.² Within two years he rose to the ranks of superintendent and general manager, eventually becoming a major shareholder and officer in

¹Quote in heading from Nellie Peters Black’s handwritten will dated 12 June 1912. Court of the Ordinary, Fulton County, Georgia. As historian Jean Friedman has noted, long before women formally organized in clubs and associations, kinship and religious affiliations provided them with a sense of belonging and unity, as well as protection, in the isolated and predominately rural South. Even as families migrated from the country to the cities, this characteristic remained apparent in families such as the Peters in Atlanta. Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), xi-3.

²Peters was from a socially and politically prominent family in Pennsylvania. His paternal grandfather was Judge Richard Peters, Secretary of War under George Washington. The family’s fortune came from a variety of sources, including shipping and farming. See Nellie Peters Black, *Richard Peters: His Ancestors and Descendants, 1810-1889* (Atlanta: Foote & Davis, 1904).

the Western & Atlantic Railroad. Known as “the Georgia Yankee,” Peters quickly amassed a fortune in real estate and became a civic leader and member of the elite in the new town of Atlanta.³ In 1848, he married Mary Jane Thompson, whose father was both a physician and owner of the hotel where Peters boarded. While Richard Peters immersed himself in the business of business, his wife raised the children, directed the household, and focused on her church work, charitable endeavors, and social clubs.⁴

The second of nine children born to the couple, Mary Jane (nicknamed “Nellie” by the family) spent a reportedly comfortable and happy childhood in Atlanta. However, life changed for the Peters family when the Civil War arrived at Atlanta’s doorstep. Richard Peters had not favored southern secession and actually negotiated with many of his Unionist friends in Atlanta in an attempt to prevent it.⁵ When he realized, however, that war was inevitable, he contributed to the Confederate cause by providing supplies for both the troops in the field and those on the homefront. Because Peters’ investments in blockading enterprises proved successful, his family did not suffer the deprivation that many Atlantans were forced to endure. As faithful followers of social Christianity (what would later evolve into the social gospel), the Peters family shared what they had with friends and neighbors, as well as with others

³Richard Peters owned the land upon which the current state capital building sits, as well as much of Georgia Tech and some land in what is now considered “midtown.” Peters, along with his friend and railroad executive, J. Edgar Thomson, is credited with naming the “terminus” of the Western and Atlantic railroads. He is said to have also originated the subsequent town name of Marthasville. An astute businessman, Peters also acquired part of his fortune by purchasing a great deal of stock during the panic 1840 when the bottom dropped out of railroad stock prices. For biographical information on Richard Peters, see Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985). See also Jane Bonner Peacock, “Nellie Peters Black: Turn of the Century ‘Mover and Shaker,’” *The Atlanta Historical Journal* 23, 4 (Winter, 1979-80): 7-8 and Franklin Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, Vol. III (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1954), 177.

⁴Mary Jane Peters was a member of the earliest charitable organizations and cultural clubs, such as the Butterfly Club, a small group of Atlanta matrons who met in their homes on a regular basis for “sociability.”

⁵Thomas G. Dyer, *Secret Yankees: The Union Circle in Confederate Atlanta* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1999), 16.

in need - of whom there were plenty.⁶ Atlanta was besieged with wounded soldiers and refugees from all parts of the Confederacy fleeing the encroaching Yankees. As chairman of the city council's finance committee, Richard Peters efficiently managed Atlanta's meager relief funds. Mary Jane Peters worked diligently for the Ladies Relief Society (a group that raised funds to help the poor not served by any church or religious organization).⁷ Although the finances of the Peters family remained relatively intact, young Nellie nonetheless witnessed the economic devastation wreaked on her hometown by the Civil War. She accompanied her mother and their house slave Mose on daily visits to makeshift hospitals to deliver biscuits, soup, buttermilk, and coffee to wounded soldiers. Although her efforts were limited to the white sons of the South, Nellie absorbed the lesson that the true meaning of Christian charity was to relieve suffering.⁸

Shortly before the siege of Atlanta, the Peters family safely evacuated to Augusta. Because of his position with the railroad, Richard Peters was able to secure for the family a private railroad car. They escaped with many of their belongings, as well as the treasury for the Georgia Railroad. According to family accounts, their experience as refugees was relatively comfortable and was spent with friends and family.⁹ Six months later, the Peters

⁶For an explanation of the relationship between social Christianity and the social gospel, see the introduction to this dissertation.

⁷Mary Ellen Peters worked within what Raymond Mohl characterized as "cos" or "charity organization societies." Mohl theorizes that when America (and the South in particular) experienced three economic depressions from 1870-1900, urban populations rejected the idea of public assistance and encouraged private charity. Mohl described the charity organization movement as an "attempt to systemize and coordinate private relief-giving at the local level." See Raymond Mohl, "The Abolition of Public Outdoor relief, 1870-1900" in Walter Trattner, ed., *Social Welfare or Social Control? Some Historical Reflections on Regulating the Poor* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 35-50.

⁸According to the slave schedules for the 1860 census, Richard Peters kept slaves at both his home in Atlanta (five) and the plantation in Gordon County (sixteen). See "Civil War Reminiscences," Nellie Peters Black Papers, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia. (Hereafter cited as AHC).

⁹The entire Peters family stayed with the family of Unionist John P. King, a good friend and business associate of Richard Peters. Like Peters, King was a galvanized Yankee and intent on staying in the South. The Peters and King

family returned to Atlanta to find their home destroyed and the city they had known in ruins. Although his fortunes vacillated, Richard Peters managed to enter and emerge from the Reconstruction period financially solvent. A member of the group C. Vann Woodward dubbed the “Redeemers,” Peters aligned himself with other New South boosters such as Henry Grady, who alleged that it made good business sense to put the animosity of the war aside and rebuild Atlanta as quickly as possible.¹⁰ Peters obviously practiced what he preached, as tax returns for the year 1868 show that he was the richest man in Atlanta, with an estate valued at \$97,700, most of which was invested in city real estate.¹¹ Peters and other members of this restored business class attempted to strike a delicate balance between the agrarian values of the Old South and the need for an industrialized New South.¹²

Characteristic of girls her age from socially prominent families, Nellie Peters left Atlanta after the war to attend finishing school in the North, returning to her father’s home state of Pennsylvania. While at the prestigious Brooke Hall, Nellie developed leadership skills and

families remained friends for generations. NPB named one of her daughters, Louise King Black, in honor of the King family.

¹⁰ A former Whig, Peters continually rode the fence between the Radicals and Confederates. He was, at times, labeled a “scalawag,” but his biographer chose to identify him instead as a “cooperationist.” Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters*, 143-53. See also C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 1-23.

¹¹ Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, Vol. I, 797.

¹² Henry Grady described this balancing act to a New York audience: “I have thought of a thousand things to say; five hundred of which, they will murder me for when I get back home, and the other five hundred of which will get me murdered at this banquet.” *The New South: Writings and Speeches of Henry Grady*, Introduction by Mills Lane (Savannah: The Beehive Press, 1971), xxv. On New South business elites, see: Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); James Michael Russell, *Atlanta, 1847-1890, City Building in the Old South and the New* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); and James M. Russell, “Elites and Municipal Politics and Government in Atlanta, 1847-1890,” Paul Escott and David R. Goldfield, eds., *The South for New Southerners* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 37-70.

offered both spiritual guidance and friendship to her classmates.¹³ By all accounts, she was popular with both the faculty and her fellow students. It was also at school that Nellie developed a personal philosophy that melded Christian dedication with an earnest work ethic. Heavily influenced by Brooke Hall's headmistress Miss Eastman, Nellie disciplined herself in preparation for a future serving others. She repented of her "sinful ways of mis-spending time," which according to Miss Eastman included: "indefinite musings; anticipating needlessly; needless speculation; indulgence in reluctance to begin a duty; in doubtful cases, not deciding at once; musing needlessly on what has been said or done, or what may be; and spending time in reverie which ought to be spent in prayer."¹⁴

Upon her return to Atlanta after graduation, Nellie Peters took Mrs. Eastman's counsel to heart and the concept of duty became an even more important part of her daily life. According to family legend, Nellie declined the diamond ring her father offered her as a present for her twenty-first birthday and chose instead a horse, which she named Diamond.¹⁵ Family lore also records that she began her career of benevolence by riding Diamond around Atlanta visiting poor whites. However, it was probably her love for horses - not people - that inspired one of her early attempts at civic activism. Upon her return to Atlanta she corresponded with the Massachusetts

¹³Brooke Hall offered "young ladies the advantages of a comprehensive classical, literary, and scientific course of study, as well as instruction in music, painting, and drawing under teachers and professors of distinguished qualifications." *The Daily Constitution*, 7 August 1880. According to correspondence contained in her personal papers, Nellie's friendships with her schoolmates typify those described by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 53-76.

¹⁴Listing dated 1 June 1866, Brooke Hall Scrapbook, Nellie Peters Black Papers, Mss. 235, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (Hereafter cited as Black Papers, UGA).

¹⁵Correspondence indicates that Nellie loved greatly loved her horse, but felt compelled to sell the animal when she became engaged and was faced with leaving Atlanta. Her sadness was soon replaced by irritation when she sold Diamond for \$65 to a man who later resold the horse for \$125. NPB to GRB, 28 February 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) about the prospects of organizing a chapter in Georgia.¹⁶ As the movement for animal welfare was relatively young in the United States and centered in the northeast, it is likely that Nellie became interested in the work of the SPCA while away at school. In 1876, Nellie and her friend Louise King of Augusta organized a Georgia SPCA. The girls collected donations (primarily from their friends and families), distributed pamphlets, and reported incidences of the mistreatment of “dumb brutes” to the city.¹⁷ Concerned with the welfare of horses that stood for long hours in the hot, dusty Atlanta streets while their owners shopped or conducted business, Nellie petitioned the city council in 1877 to erect six ornamental drinking fountains so that “citizens and strangers alike could refresh their animals.”¹⁸ When examining Black’s long career of social welfare activism, it is not surprising that she was first involved in the animal welfare movement. In the early days of the movement in cities such as Boston and New York, animal welfare groups worked to prevent cruelty to children, who were also “God’s creatures.”¹⁹ Many women were involved in the

¹⁶Frank B. Fay to NP, 1 April 1873, Nellie Peters Black Collection, Georgia Department of Archives & History, Morrow, Georgia (hereafter cited as Black Collection, GDAH).

¹⁷The largest donation for the fountains came from Louise’s father, John P. King (president of the Georgia Railroad). King and Richard Peters were good friends. See E. Y. Clarke, *Illustrated History of Atlanta, 1879* (Facsimile Reprint, Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing, 1971), 103. There is no evidence that this early SPCA chapter lasted longer than a few years, but NP no doubt learned from the experience the value of familial and social connections for charitable fund raising.

¹⁸*Annual Reports of the Committees of Council, Officers and Departments of the City of Atlanta, 1877*, Book 8, 566, AHC.

¹⁹The first national animal protection organization, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, was founded in London in 1824. The first American organization (what was to become the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) was founded in New York City in 1866. In the 1870s, that group led a fight against child abuse and neglect. Founded in 1873, the Atlanta Humane Society was originally chartered to protect women, children, and animals. No evidence could be found to indicate that Nellie Peters was a part of that group. For information about the history of the movement, see: Diane L. Beers, “A History of Animal Advocacy in America: Social Change, Gender, and Cultural Values, 1865-1975” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1998) and Bernard Oreste Unti, “The Quality of Mercy: Organized Animal Protection in the United States, 1866-1930” (Ph.D. diss., American University, 2002). James Turner’s theory that impulses toward animal protection emerged as a response to industrialism may account for why the movement did not develop in the South as early as it did in the

movement. Historians and sociologists have argued that women were (and are) more likely to become advocates for animal welfare causes not because they have more nurturing natures, but because they have more experience with “structural oppression that makes them more disposed to egalitarian ideology, which creates concern for animal rights.”²⁰ As the Episcopal Church was the first Christian denomination in America to denounce animal cruelty, it is likely that religious values, as well as nature and social environment, contributed to Nellie’s concern for animal welfare.²¹

While the drinking fountains for the animals were a gift to the city of Atlanta from the SPCA, Nellie had to persuade council members that their benefits outweighed the cost of installation and water. The fountains could only enhance the appearance and utility of downtown Atlanta’s unpaved streets, which in wet weather became “muddy quagmires and in dry spells emitted great clouds of suffocating dust.”²² In a resolution adopted in June 1876, the city council agreed to accept the fountains, install them, and provide the water.²³ Working closely with the city’s committee on Wells, Pumps, and Cisterns (probably more closely than the committee would have liked), Nellie helped select the locations. She also supervised the

North. See James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), 53.

²⁰Charles W. Peek; Nancy J. Bell; and Charlotte C. Dunham, “Gender, Gender Ideology, and Animal Rights Advocacy” *Gender and Society*, 10, 4 (Aug., 1996): 464. Nellie Black loved animals and kept “pets” in one form or another all of her life. Historian Kathleen Kete has connected the petkeeping culture of the 19th century Parisian bourgeois to the construction of their class and gender identity, but no such study currently exists on American culture. See Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994). Interesting studies do exist, however, that explain the connection between feminism and animal welfare activism. See the above-mentioned article by Peek et. al. and Josephine Donovan, “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory” *Signs*, 15, 2 (Winter, 1990): 350-75.

²¹Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, 20.

²²Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs, Vol. I*, 850.

²³*The Daily Constitution*, 6 June 1876.

manufacture of the fountains, although this proved to be a frustrating process for her. In a letter to George, she complained about how long it was taking to produce the fountains

I called on my dear friend at the Terra Cotta Works. I find he's as immovable as his burnt clay image - my horse's head is in 'status quo' and still looks like a mule and is therefore a fitting monument to the molder.²⁴

The fountains provided welcome relief for the animals, but human welfare needs were more pressing in Atlanta at the time. Nellie Peters joined her mother and other socially prominent women in organizing creative fund-raising events to help alleviate widespread poverty in post-war Atlanta. "Entertainments" such as balls, fairs, lectures, circuses, and suppers became a popular way to raise funds for charity. Beginning in 1867, these ladies initiated a series of fashionable "calico balls," to which ladies wore calico dresses and gentleman calico scarves. Afterwards, the participants donated their garments, along with money and supplies, to the relief effort. Nellie helped coordinate the third calico ball, which took place in February 1871 at the new Atlanta Roller-Skating Rink, the free use of which was donated to the women by the operators. Admission tickets to the ball cost \$1.00 or the donation of a calico dress or - in the case of a gentleman - a calico scarf at least four yards in length. The cold weather assured that attendees would be wearing plenty of calico. Merchants who attended were asked to donate dry-goods, coal, wood, or other "useful" domestic items. The well-attended ball was deemed both a social and financial success, as it netted \$212.00, 153 yards of calico cloth, 18 calico dresses, 43 yards of shirting, and 50 lbs. of flour. Several members of that planning committee became the founding members of other charitable organizations.²⁵

²⁴NP to GRB, 28 February 1877, Black Collection, GDAH. NP was referring to E. Pelligrini's Terra Cotta Works. See Clarke, *Illustrated History of Atlanta*, 113.

²⁵Eula Turner Kuchler, "Charitable and Philanthropic Activities in Atlanta During the Reconstruction" *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 10 (Dec., 1965): 48-50.

Recognizing the need to consolidate the city's various altruistic groups, many of the women involved in the charitable "entertainments" joined with other prominent citizens of Atlanta in 1874 to form the Atlanta Benevolent Association (ABA). The founding board consisted of Governor Joe Brown as President, aided by vice-presidents representing each ward of the city and a secretary and treasurer. Nellie Peters, one of only two single women on the board, served as vice-president for the first ward. The purpose of the group was "to relieve the suffering and wants of the poor, sick, and afflicted of the city: to meliorate their condition and to promote their physical and moral welfare and happiness." The charter also specified that the Association was "not to supercede the work of the churches in providing for the relief of their own poor, since their duty is devolved on them by the Author of Christianity and cannot be transferred to any other body or association."²⁶ In actuality, many civic-minded Atlantans were concerned not that churches shirked their duty, but that "beggary" was being encouraged by "the pernicious practice of indiscriminate giving without investigation." The ABA founders' intention was that the "noble" ladies and gentlemen associated with the ABA could investigate each case and weed out the deserving poor from the "habitual spongers, pick-pockets, and swindlers." One female spokesperson for the organization vowed: "If the public will only sustain us, we guarantee to protect them from all such imposters and to provide for every case of real destitution."²⁷ The short-lived ABA served a dual purpose of helping the poor, while ridding Atlanta of social undesirables. Nellie Peters served on the board for less than a year and the ABA was later absorbed into other charitable organizations.

²⁶"Constitution of the Atlanta Benevolent Association" *The Daily Constitution*, 11 February 1874.

²⁷"Atlanta Benevolent Association: Protection to the Public" *The Daily Constitution*, 24 June 1874.

In addition to having benevolent spirits, young ladies such as Nellie Peters often possessed social motivations for their charity work. Following the dictates of Victorian social protocol, most of Nellie's male friendships were arranged through her brothers or girl friends, who sometimes played match maker. Many thought she would make a fine wife for a politician or clergyman. In 1871, a friend wrote from Pennsylvania

I don't know if I have ever told you of the new assistant at our church. I think you are just the one for him and I don't think he is spoken for. I think you would make a splendid minister's wife, but you will say what nonsense and so it is.²⁸

Although Nellie did not seem especially interested in young men, some were obviously interested in her. Having to decline one of Nellie's charity functions, one wrote

. . . nothing would have given me more pleasure than to have renewed our long, solved engagement by the re-redelivery of the diamond ring and the plighting of my troth again. Can't you get up another Charity Party? It would be a genuine charity to me . . .²⁹

By this point in her life, Nellie Peters understood well that social prominence and feminine influence could prove useful in obtaining her charitable goals.

In 1877, at the age of twenty-six, Nellie Peters married forty-five year old Colonel George Robison Black, a lawyer, legislator, and widower with four children. Black, the son a wealthy planter, grew up on a 3,000 acre plantation on the Savannah River in Screven County, Georgia. Although his "fire-eating" father, U. S. Representative Edward Junius Black, had been an advocate for secession since the Nullification movement of the 1830s, George Black was a "war hero who did not like war." Like Richard Peters, he was not eager to see the South leave the Union. Nonetheless, when Georgia seceded, Black joined the war effort as a lieutenant colonel with the 63rd Regiment, Georgia Volunteer Infantry and served the Confederate cause

²⁸Lucy Richardson to NP, 25 September 1871, Black Collection, GDAH.

²⁹G. E. Radcliff to NP, 20 February 1871, Black Collection, GDAH.

“gallantly.”³⁰ Family legend contends that the two first met at the Peters Plantation when Colonel Black’s troops were camped in the area, but the couple most likely became acquainted several years later while Black was serving in the legislature in Atlanta.³¹ Determining that they had much in common, the two decided to marry after a brief courtship.

Throughout the engagement period, Nellie stayed in Atlanta to attend to wedding plans, while George practiced law in his hometown of Sylvania, where the couple would live. Although Nellie wrote to George every other day, she received letters from him bi-weekly because mail delivery to and from rural Georgia was irregular and unreliable. When she complained to him about this, George increased the frequency of his letters to her. Their letters contained not only reports of daily activities, but also passionate testimonials of love. Before she met George, Nellie had confided in her diary that she wondered if she would ever find “a good man’s love,” so she seemed genuinely surprised by her passion for him.³² She had obviously enjoyed the attention of other beaux, but no correspondence with them revealed the depth of passion she felt for George Black. One day, while cleaning out her desk, Nellie stumbled upon an old packet of love letters. She wrote George about her reaction to them

A great feeling of pity came over me as I read them. I [regret] that I should cause so much pain to a true-hearted fellow but there was no regret, no lingering doubt mingled with my thoughts of the past. The present seems too real and pure and decent for me to think of anyone but you.³³

³⁰George Black (1845-1886) was only 15 when his father died. However, the family was evidently financially well provided for, as George attended the state universities of both Georgia and South Carolina. He married Georgia Eliza Bryan in 1863. Like Nellie, she was a cultured and educated woman, being one of the early graduates of Wesleyan College in Macon. For biographical information about the Black family, see Dixon Hollingsworth, *The History of Screven County, Georgia* (Sylvania, GA: Screven County History Project, 1989), pgs. 23, 28, and 40-44. See also *Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 596.

³¹Author’s interview with Nellie Rucker Walter, granddaughter of NPB, Savannah, Georgia, 15 April 1998.

³²Entry from NP’s “Private Diary”, 7 March 1874, Black Papers, UGA.

³³NP to George Black (GB), 18 March 1877, Blacks Papers, UGA.

Nellie's letters to George reveal that, in spite of their age difference, she was quite comfortable in their relationship and loved him deeply. The couple shared not only physical passion, but a sense of humor as well. Commenting on the pair of horses George was giving her as a wedding gift, Nellie wrote that she hoped the animals would "enjoy getting together as heartily as you and I expect to do."³⁴

Nellie Peters approached married life with the same sense of duty she had applied to her church work and charitable endeavors. Perceiving marriage to be the only acceptable alternative to the life of service she had planned for herself, Nellie chose to view her new responsibilities as "a transfer of duty." Characteristic of women of her class and time, Nellie clearly perceived the role of a wife to be subordinate to that of her husband.³⁵ She explained her feelings in a letter to George

I feel that my new life will be full of duty else I should not be happy in it. Is it really possible that I am to be a private in the ranks so soon- but my darling you'll be General. As you say, even the poor have given me to you. You have come and undermined all of my grand noble resolve of a self-sacrificious [*sic*] devoted life and I instead have installed your grand noble self.³⁶

In letters to George, Nellie often deferred to his ultimate authority. Once, while complimenting him on his photograph, she took the opportunity to reassure George that she knew her place: "Even though [your] lips are firm, I think of the love they can express and I do

³⁴NP to GB, 23 March 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

³⁵Marjorie Stratford Mendenhall, "Southern Women of a Lost Generation" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 33, 4 (Oct., 1934): 334-53. Women born before the Civil War often maintained "an attitude of reverence" toward their fathers and husbands. Mendenhall noted that a noticeable "diminution in reverence" began to appear in the next generation. This "relaxation of reverence" is apparent as the clubwoman movement gathered force and women's sphere became more public.

³⁶NP to GB, 11 March 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

not fear the obedience they may command from me.”³⁷ In other letters she explained that she viewed marriage as teamwork and told George “I’ll help you, you’ll help me, and then we’ll help each other - isn’t that being real help-mates?”

Although she seemingly resigned herself cheerfully to the role of wife and mother, Nellie Peters’ letters also reveal that she understood that she was surrendering her independence. She confided to George that she believed “a woman’s noblest truest sphere is in the home,” but she nonetheless intended to continue her charity work. Preparing George for this possibility, she wrote him that ministering to the “cheerless firesides” of orphans and widows was too serious a responsibility to be placed on the “immature shoulders” of young women. According to Nellie, this work should be undertaken by “married women who should try not be so selfish about their home life.”³⁸

Nellie Peters and George Black were married on Tuesday, April 17, 1877 in an evening ceremony at St. Philips Church in Atlanta. Their marriage personified the ideal consolidation of the urban and county elite, a powerful liaison in the New South. Although planter politicians like Black dominated state politics, their financial security depended upon the marketing and distribution networks established through the towns and cities. Maintaining the social and economic status quo in Georgia required a cooperative relationship between town and country.³⁹ Possessing both the necessary urban and rural prominence, Colonel and Mrs. George Robison Black represented the ultimate power couple of their day.

³⁷NP to GB, 21 March 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

³⁸NP to GB, 18 March 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

³⁹For background on the political and economic tensions that existed between the urban and rural areas in Georgia during this period, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens, GA.: The University of Georgia Press, 1983, second edition, 1990), 75-127.

Life in Sylvania was much more rural than that which Nellie Black had been accustomed. Even so, she managed to create a comfortable lifestyle for her growing family, which over the next few years included three more children: Nita Hughes, Louise King, and Ralph Peters. Both social status and seven children virtually compelled the family to live in a large rambling house on Main Street that had once served as a hotel for the small town. During their engagement, George planted a rose garden and remodeled the house to make it more suitable to Nellie's taste. Perhaps wanting it to resemble her old home on Peachtree Street, Nellie had "handsome" shade trees planted on the street adjacent to the residence.⁴⁰ After having lived with her parents for so long, Nellie seemed to enjoy the idea of managing a home of her own. She enjoyed it so much, in fact, that at times she felt guilty. Upon returning from an afternoon ministering to Atlanta's poor who lived in shacks that made Sylvania seem "palatial," Nellie wrote George: "as my conscience upbraids me; unless you think it necessary don't add the room or do anything at all to the house."⁴¹ One month later, having recovered from her spell of guilt, Nellie's letter had a different message

How is the carpenter progressing with our apartment? Don't forget a nice large closet in *the* back room, it is so convenient to tuck things out of sight when people come in unexpectedly. Housekeepers have to keep up outside appearances, you know.⁴²

On the subject of housekeeping, Nellie assured George that she was not afraid of hard work, but added that if she had to cook and wash laundry, she might "collapse."⁴³ As it turned out, she did not have to. The Blacks employed two African-American families that lived with

⁴⁰*Sylvania Telephone*, 20 January 1888.

⁴¹NP to GRB, 24 February 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

⁴²NP to GRB, 12 March 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

⁴³*Ibid.*

them; Nellie had household servants, a cook, dressmaker, and nurse for the children.⁴⁴ Although Sylvania was isolated in comparison to Atlanta, Nellie was not deprived of goods and services. Kitchen staples and household items could be procured from local merchants and what she deemed “non-essential goods” such as quality fabrics and candied fruits could be obtained by mail order stores in Atlanta and northern emporiums, such as John Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia.⁴⁵ Although she visited Atlanta whenever possible, Nellie engaged herself within the small community. Among her new friends was the editor of the town’s only newspaper, which Nellie christened the *Sylvania Telephone* when it was organized in 1879.⁴⁶ Obviously pleased at how well Nellie had adjusted to life away from Atlanta, George wrote to his mother-in-law that Nellie was “winning the golden opinion of everyone she meets and I am becoming prouder and prouder of her.”⁴⁷

After having served in the Georgia state senate, George Black was elected in 1881 as a Democrat to the Forty-seventh Congress. Tragically, one year later and a mere five years into the marriage with Nellie, he suffered a paralytic stroke while attending the congressional session in Washington. Paralyzed from the waist down, Colonel Black still had command of his speech and mental faculties and his supporters encouraged him to run for re-election.⁴⁸ Not being able

⁴⁴1880 Census, Screven County, 64.

⁴⁵Annual Reports of the Clerk of the Ordinary, 1882-1889, Screven County, Georgia. Microfilm Roll #109936, Screven County Public Library, Sylvania.

⁴⁶Hollingsworth, *The History of Screven County, Georgia*, 102.

⁴⁷GRB to Mrs. Richard Peters, 8 May 1877, Black Papers, UGA.

⁴⁸“Col. Black’s Condition” *Sylvania Telephone*, 25 March 1882 and “Col. George R. Black” *Sylvania Telephone*, 20 July 1882. See also *Men of Mark in Georgia, Vol. III*, William J. Northen, ed. (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, Publisher, 1911), 322-35.

to wage an effective campaign, Black lost the election. Nellie nursed him at their home in Sylvania until he died of heart failure in 1886.

Nellie stayed in “the little village” of Sylvania to “do her duty and be both a father and mother” to her children and stepchildren.⁴⁹ According to the terms of George Black’s will, dictated only a few days before his death, Nellie received: a lot and home in Atlanta, one acre of land in Sylvania, and the use of the house in Sylvania “for as long as her father lived plus one year after his death.”⁵⁰ As executrix of her husband’s will, Nellie administered both the household accounts and her husband’s business accounts. She was required to submit vouchers for all of the family’s expenses to the executor of the will, her husband’s former law partner. Although this did not sit well with Nellie, she meticulously recorded all of her expenses from a spool of thread to the services provided by the local cotton gin.

After her husband’s estate was settled, Nellie Peters Black returned to Atlanta in 1888 as a financially comfortable widow with three small children. Wanting to maintain her new independence, Nellie chose not to live with her parents. Instead she purchased a one-story cottage across the street from the Peters’ new house on Peachtree Street.⁵¹ During the early years of her widowhood, Nellie busied herself with looking after the education of her children

⁴⁹Letter to “Dearest Daughter” from Mary Jane Peters, 9 November (n.d.), Black Papers , UGA.

⁵⁰Letter from Mary Jane Peters to NPB, 9 November (n.d.), Black Papers, UGA.

⁵¹Richard Peters built this new house “out in the country” because neighbors at the old location had complained about all of the animals he kept on his property. NPB purchased her house with \$1000 from her savings account and a \$3000 gift from her father. Richard Peters was extremely generous to his children. Upon their marriages, each received a gift of property equivalent to one modern city block. Louise Black McDougald, “My Seventh Move” *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 8, 32 (Dec., 1947): 37. Upon the death of her brother Quintard Peters, NPB moved her family into the Peters home.

and family matters.⁵² She spent a great deal of time with her father the year before he died, transcribing his memoirs. After his death, she published *Richard Peters: His Ancestors and Descendants* (a combination biography and genealogy of the Peters family) at her own expense and distributed it to libraries and family members all over the country.⁵³ Following the publication of her book, Nellie Black took time to travel. To “finish” her daughters’ educations, she took them on two extensive tours of Europe in 1904 and 1905, each lasting five months. Also during this period, Black became an astute business woman. Although most of her investments were handled by the Peters Land Company (the real estate company started by her father), Black did have some independent ventures. Not only did she own rental property, she was also co-owner of a realty improvement company with her son.⁵⁴ In addition, Black took over the management of the Peters family’s 1500 acre farm in Gordon County, which consumed a great deal of her time.

Up until this point in her life, much of Nellie Peters Black’s identity had been forged from that of her father and husband. That changed with widowhood, which proved to be the busiest period for philanthropy and activism in her life. As historian Linda Kerber explains: “As long as married women were understood to owe virtually all their obligation to their husbands they could make no claims of rights against the political community.”⁵⁵ Free from the bonds of

⁵²Unlike her own experience, Nellie opted not to send her daughters away to boarding school. They attended Washington Seminary in Atlanta. Report cards reveal that while both girls were good students, Nita accumulated “academic points,” while Louise collected demerits. Black Papers, UGA.

⁵³Nellie Peters Black, *Richard Peters: His Ancestors and Descendants* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1904).

⁵⁴Correspondence between NPB and George Adair (G. W. Adair Real Estate Company) show that although Adair managed her rental property, Black maintained approval of tenants and rental amounts. Black Papers, UGA. Her income came primarily from regular disbursements of stock and cash from the Peters Land Company. Returned checks, Peters Land Company, Mss. 170, AHC.

⁵⁵Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 305.

an outdated but lingering system of social and legal coverture, widowhood bestowed on women of Black's social status and economic means a new independence that came from being property owners and tax payers in their own right. That independence, coupled with her unquestionable moral authority, put Nellie Black in a unique position to stake her claim in various public realms: the church, the schoolhouse, the clubhouse, the farm, and the halls of local and state government.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Unlike most other southern states, Georgia's Reconstruction constitution (1868) secured for married women the legal right to own property in their own name. See Suzanne D. Lebsack, "Radical Reconstruction and the Property Rights of Southern Women" *Journal of Southern History*, 43, 2 (May, 1977): 196-216. Lebsack points out that the constitutional provision most likely originated from the movement to pass laws for "debtor relief," rather than any attempt to benefit Georgia's women. Academic studies of the effect of widowhood on elite women during the Gilded Age are scarce. Most tend to analyze widows in relation to social welfare reform. See S. J. Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: The Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880-1939* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006). For an interesting study of the relationship between widowhood and "true Southern womanhood," see Jennifer Gross, "'Good Angels': Confederate Widowhood and the Reassurance of Patriarchy in the Postbellum South" (PhD. Diss., University of Georgia, 2001). Although Gross focuses on women dependent upon pensions, she admits that widows of "outstanding public figures" (like Nellie Black), generally retained "special status which both restricted them and accorded them social and financial benefits." (5)

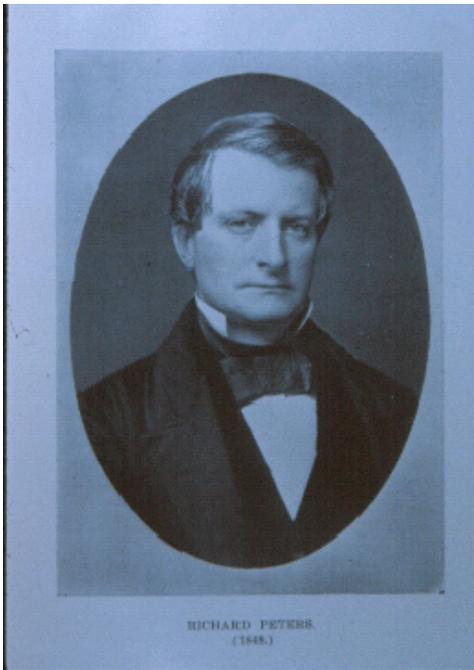


Figure 3-1. Richard Peters(photo from Richard Peters: His Ancestors and Descendants, 1810-1889I, 1904)



Figure 3-2. Nellie Peters in 1862.(photo courtesy of Atlanta History Center)



Figure 3-3. Nellie Peters (photo courtesy of Atlanta History Center)

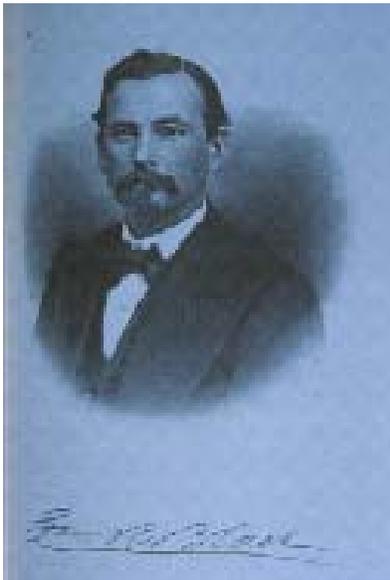


Figure 3-4. George Black(photo from Richard Peters: His Ancestors and Decendants, 1810-1889, 1904)



Figure 3-5. Nellie Black and her daughters Louise King Black and Mrs. Lamar Rucker. (photo courtesy of Atlanta History Center)

CHAPTER 4:
“ . . . TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN THE MASTER’S BUSINESS”

Like many of her female contemporaries, Nellie Peters Black gained her earliest experience as an activist through the church. Devoutly religious and strongly influenced by her family’s close association with influential Episcopal clergymen, she grounded her lifelong commitment to benevolence in a strict adherence to Episcopal doctrine and an identification with what would later be labeled the social gospel. The Christian idealism that Black integrated into her career as both a “churchwoman” and secular “clubwoman” is representative of what historian Susan Hill Lindley labels the “pragmatic social gospel, focused on action rather than theory or constructive theology.”¹ In other words, no matter what task Nellie Peters Black undertook, she sought to put her faith into action. Demonstrating her social gospel tendencies, she transposed her ideas of Christian stewardship into community service. In return, her high profile within the community made her a presence that church leaders could not ignore and enabled her to take a more powerful and public role in the church.

The Episcopal Church in Atlanta

The Peters family had deep roots in the Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania, even before Richard Peters arrived in Georgia in 1837 to find a small, struggling community of

¹Quote in header attributed to Nellie Peters Black (hereafter cited as NPB) wrote that women could be “more effective in the Master’s business” by “studying about missions, talking about missions, and praying about missions.” Typed notes, letter to Woman’s Auxiliary (n.d.), Woman’s Auxiliary Diary, pg. 17, Nellie Peters Black Papers, Mss.#235, box 12, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited NPB Papers). Susan Hill Lindley, “*You Have Stept Out of Your Place*”: *A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 141. On women’s role in the social gospel, see: Rosemary Skinner Keller, “Women Creating Communities - and Community - in the Name of the Social Gospel,” *The Social Gospel Today*, Christopher H. Evans, ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 71-85; Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, “Women and Southern Religion,” *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 247-82; and Mary Sudman Donovan, *A Different Call: Women’s Ministries in the Episcopal Church, 1850-1920* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1986), 146-54. On the role of African-American churchwomen, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Episcopalians. Although coastal Georgia maintained three strong Episcopal parishes, the western frontier of the state had been settled primarily by Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and some Quakers. Episcopal expansion in Georgia commenced in earnest in 1840 with the appointment of Stephen Elliott as the first Bishop of Georgia, thus making the state eligible to join the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States. Witnessing fairly rapid growth after that landmark, the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia boasted 21 churches with 870 communicants by 1850.²

While the Episcopal Church may have been growing throughout Georgia, it lacked a significant presence in Atlanta. In 1846, Richard Peters and a few other prominent citizens organized the town's first Episcopal Church, St. Philips. Peters served as a vestry member for many years and became a primary source of financial support for the struggling parish. The entire Peters family developed close friendships with fellow parishioners and clergymen. Richard and Mary Jane Peters even named two of their children for Episcopal bishops: Stephen Elliott and Charles Quintard. As a small child, Nellie Peters came to know many of these prominent clergymen, including Leonidas Polk, Stephen Elliott, and Charles Todd Quintard, all of whom were staunch Confederate supporters.³ In October 1861, reacting to the South's

²Although the Anglican Church held a prominent position in southern religion during Georgia's Colonial period, its influence diminished with the backlash against English goods and customs that followed the American Revolution. For a history of the Episcopal Church in Georgia, see Henry Thompson Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957* (Atlanta: The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Atlanta, 1960).

³Leonidas Polk, Bishop of Louisiana, known as "the Fighting Bishop" baptized Generals John B. Hood and Joseph Johnston. Charles T. Quintard, a chaplain on Polk's staff, baptized General Braxton Bragg. Stephen Elliott, "a staunch Rebel," held out hope for a Confederate victory until the very end of the war. Richard Peters was close to all three men and although he did not initially support the Confederate cause, he became an ardent supporter of The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. Although destroyed during the Civil War, the school was rebuilt afterwards by Quintard and became a lasting symbol of the Lost Cause. The Peters and Black families maintained close ties with the school. For a more thorough explanation of the relationship between the Confederacy, Episcopal clergy, and Sewanee, see Arthur Ben Chitty, *Reconstruction at Sewanee*, (Sewanee, TN: Proctor's Hall Press, A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1954 Edition with a New Preface by the Author, 1993). For information about Richard Peters' connection to all of the above, see Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 94-112.

secession from the Union, most southern Episcopal dioceses (including Georgia) joined together to form the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Confederate States of America.⁴ As Episcopal membership grew during the war years and St. Philips was no longer large enough to accommodate the increasing number of communicants, Richard Peters subsidized Bishop Quintard's efforts to establish Atlanta's second Episcopal church, St. Luke's. Although the short-lived parish was both constructed and destroyed in 1864, it existed long enough to have a profound influence on twelve-year-old Nellie. Known there by the clergy as a child who gave "prompt and proper answers to all of the minister's questions," Nellie regularly attended Sunday school and both morning and evening worship services. The funeral of her baby brother Stephen Elliott Peters (godson of Leonidas Polk) was the second funeral (Polk's being the first) and the last service held at the church before the Siege of Atlanta. Family legend contends that Nellie dropped her handkerchief on the floor during the service, and it remained there as a witness to the destruction of the both the church and much of the city by Sherman's troops. When Sherman found out that St. Luke's had been established by pro-Confederate clergy and constructed by soldiers from the Georgia militia, he ordered the church burned to the ground. Nellie's handkerchief somehow survived the devastation and Dr. Quintard later mailed it to her in Augusta, where she and her family were refugees.⁵

⁴The Anglican Church supported the southern justification of slavery. Episcopal clergy were slow to recognize slaves as "baptisable beings." They rationalized that slaves, as non-Christians, were not eligible to partake of the sacraments, including baptism and marriage. Daniel Boorstein, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965), 203. See also Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians & Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 7-12.

⁵Charles Quintard later published this account as *Nellie Peters Pocket Handkerchief and What it Saw* (Sewanee, TN: The University Press, 1907). Sherman spared most of the churches, except for the Protestant Methodist, Christian, and African churches. St. Philips Church, spared from destruction, was used as a stable, bowling alley, commissary, and dance hall for newly freed blacks. Local history reports that Sherman's sparing of most churches was due to the intervention of a Catholic priest, although Sherman's desperate need for housing and shelter for his troops could also account for the seemingly generous deed. In January 1866, Bishop Elliott "performed an 'office for the expiation

Mission Work

During the first few years of Reconstruction, Nellie Peters attended boarding school in Pennsylvania. After having been so busy at school, she returned to Atlanta somewhat adrift. Unsure what to do with her life, Nellie prayed daily for divine guidance. Although determined to devote her life to serving others and the church, opportunities in religious service for Episcopal woman were extremely limited.⁶ Sporadic and cryptic journal entries reveal that Nellie felt guilty because she perceived her desire to serve others to be in direct competition with her enjoyment of the same social activities and relationships as her contemporaries. As many of her friends settled down to married life, she wondered why such happiness evaded her. Nellie attracted the attentions of various beaux during these years, but none proved to be permanent. Recovering from one such failed romance, she chastised herself in her diary: “I thank God for answering my prayers and showing me the work to be done, but many months I have frittered away thinking about the expected friend.”⁷ Exactly one year later, again pondering a romantic attachment, she wrote

. . . Still my cry is for the ability and grace to do work in the blessed Master’s service than ever before. I can truly say that this is the dearest and most abiding wish of my mind. The friend of last year is yet [unsupplanted]. I am a thousand times more contented than in the days of my youth. . .⁸

and illustration of a church desecrated or profaned,’ taken from an Irish prayer Book” for the church. Alex M. Hitz, *A History of The Cathedral of St. Philip* (Atlanta: The Cathedral Chapter, 1947), 20-21.

⁶Short of marrying a priest or missionary, women were relegated to serving the church through “aide societies” or other charitable groups associated with particular churches. Although a few informal “sisterhoods” had existed since 1852, the position of deaconess was not officially established in the Protestant Episcopal Church until 1889 when the General Convention approved the canon that allowed “unmarried or widowed, devout and competent women under appointment by the bishop to assist in the work of a parish, mission, or institution under the direction of the rector or priest in charge.” Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 318.

⁷Diary entry, 12 January 1873, Private Diary, box 5, NPB Papers. NPB did not regularly record her feelings in a diary. In her entry for 16 July 1873, she wrote: “Just writing a journal is a very stupid thing as I think and feel so much that is too sacred and dear for expression. . .”

⁸Diary entry, 13 January 1874, *Ibid.* It is unclear if this is the beau referred to in the previous entry.

Finding it difficult to maintain that state of satisfaction, Nellie wrote two months later

. . . I cannot feel anchored. Is it sinful to have a strong womanly longing for a “good man’s love”? Am I casting doubt on Him who careth for me when these desires possess my heart? May the Holy Spirit guide and direct me to do right. . . Lenten season gives one the daily bread for our spirit and makes the soul feel strengthened and refreshed.⁹

While the inner conflict between her desire for romance and eagerness “to do God’s will” continued, Nellie Peters threw herself into various charitable and church projects, one of which was to raise funds for the construction of a rectory for St. Philips’s.¹⁰ As the Bishop of Georgia, John W. Beckwith, had declared the creations of missions in the state to be a priority, Nellie organized Holy Innocent’s, the city’s first mission, in 1874.¹¹ She persuaded her father to donate a lot he owned in a section of town where under-privileged white families lived. Richard Peters stipulated that only a chapel “for the worship of God in accordance with the rites of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America” could be erected on the land.¹² Nellie concentrated all of her energy on the project and it soon became known as “Miss Nellie’s Mission.” She hammered, nailed, painted, and plastered alongside other volunteers constructing the chapel. Although a deaconess administered the mission, Nellie personally supervised daily activities and

⁹Diary entry, 7 March 1874, *Ibid.*

¹⁰NP was a member of the Ladies Sewing Society of St. Philips. She (along with four married women) was instrumental in planning fund raising events such as musicals. The \$1200 raised by the women was supplemented by the donation of \$1600 by a prominent parishioner, W. H. Lowe. See “Bishop Beckwith,” *Atlanta Daily Constitution*, 26 October 1873.

¹¹Like his predecessor Bishop Elliott, Beckwith wanted to see the Episcopal Church reach into rural Georgia where the Baptist and Methodist denominations had a stronghold. Rural churches, no matter the denomination, suffered more financially from the Civil War than their urban counterparts, but urban churches were also pressed to find funds to rebuild or maintain church buildings and pay minister’s salaries. C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia* (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1972, 1915), 322-23. See also Wayne Mixon, “Georgia,” *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, Samuel S. Hill, ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 296. Growth in the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches did not increase to the numbers achieved by the Baptists and Methodists. It is interesting to note that those two denominations (unlike the Presbyterians and Episcopalians) maintained their “separate southern organizations” and did not reunite with their northern brethren after the war.

¹²Hitz, *A History of the Cathedral of St. Philip*, 27.

taught Sunday school classes. After attending Sunday morning worship services at St. Philip's, she would go to Holy Innocents to teach an afternoon Sunday school class and stay to attend evening worship service at the mission. Nellie obviously took her responsibilities at the mission very seriously and worked tirelessly to make it a success. Compelled by her sense of Christian duty to work with the mission, she also understood that others would not be so willing to undertake such a job. In a letter to her fiancé George, Nellie described the tiring and thankless nature of the work: "I am afraid that your being a man [you] cannot sympathize in this as the work you have done is never 'free gratis.'" ¹³ Her dedication and hard work yielded results when the mission was officially recognized and sanctioned by the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia. ¹⁴

In addition to contributing physical labor and administrative talents, Nellie resumed her boarding school role as spiritual advisor to some of the girls and fellow teachers at the mission. Many young women were no doubt attracted to her spirituality and charismatic personality. Having obviously taken some of Nellie's spiritual advice to heart, one former student from the mission wrote: "Yes, indeed Miss Nellie I have turned to God and truth and faith and this is all I find comfort in, reading the Bible." ¹⁵ Some developed lasting attachments and continued to correspond with Nellie even after they moved away from Atlanta. One former fellow teacher wrote

¹³NP to George Black (hereafter noted as GB), 14 March 1877, NPB Papers.

¹⁴"Holy Innocents Mission", box 1, folder 6, mss.#2183, William Granberry Collection (hereafter cited as WGC), Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia (hereafter cited as GHS). See also Helen C. Smith, "She Helped Found City's First Mission," *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*, 25 January 1976.

¹⁵Sophia Purse to NP, 7 September 1875, folder 2, Black Collection, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. (Hereafter cited as Black Collection).

I always said that you were good angel; and that send pure and holy thoughts to one . . .
Oh my darling, pray for me with all of your heart that I may never drift away from God
by not having communion. . . don't let me forget my duty.¹⁶

A few months later, the same young lady wrote to Nellie

Oh my darling, I think of you and love you so devotedly. Your prophecy that I would
forget that I depended on you so much has not been fulfilled. I never loved anyone as I
love you and I don't think I ever shall.¹⁷

Close attachments formed among the women who became each other's confidants within the
emotional realm of religion. Historian Catherine Clinton contends that such language as
contained in these letters cannot be dismissed as mere "rhetorical flourish" since other evidence
demonstrates that romantic friendships were substantial and filled the void of intimacy that
existed in some Victorian marriages. According to Clinton, this "female binding was a direct
result of the cultivation of separate spheres and the creation of a woman's culture."¹⁸ Holy
Innocents mission was definitely a female-controlled environment in which these young women
developed the self-confidence, if not to venture out of the domestic realm, to expand that realm
into traditionally-male areas such as the church.

Another endeavor of mission work important to both Bishop Beckwith and Nellie Peters
came to fruition when New York publisher William H. Appleton donated \$22,500 toward the
establishment of an orphanage to care for the daughters of the Confederate dead. Appleton
wanted to do something special to commemorate his good friend's election as Bishop of the
Diocese of Georgia. Built in Macon in 1871, the Appleton Church Home housed fifteen girls

¹⁶Delia Fay to NP, 6 January 1875, folder 2, Black Collection.

¹⁷Delia Fay to NP, 4 March 1875, folder 2, Black Collection.

¹⁸Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1984), 162-63. She also had similar relationships with her boarding school classmates (see chapter two of this dissertation). On this type of female relationship, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 53-76.

during its first year of existence. In his annual report to the diocesan conference, Bishop Beckwith reported that the girls were “well-fed, comfortably housed and clad, trained in housekeeping and house work of every kind. . . taught sewing and are receiving a sound English education.” He added that “above all, they are being reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”¹⁹ Nellie Peters took a personal interest in the girls at the Appleton Home and sent them boxes of clothing and goods, as well as shipments of fruits and vegetables from the Peters farm. She also perceived it as an opportunity to help the unfortunate girls she encountered in her work at Holy Innocents mission. The Rector W. R. Rees preferred to place in the Home orphaned girls who had lost both parents.²⁰ Using her influence and powers of persuasion, Nellie convinced Mr. Rees to accept Mary Ann Carter, a “half-orphan” from Holy Innocents whose mother was too ill to care for her. When Nellie received a reluctant acceptance letter from the home, she quickly packed the child and sent her by train to Macon. Upon Mary Ann’s arrival at Appleton’s, Mr. Rees wrote Nellie that he was “favorably impressed with the pleasant faced child.” He also extended a “cordial” invitation to Nellie to “visit the home and see its mode of working.”²¹ She did and continued to support the Home throughout her lifetime. Diocesan support for the Appleton Home gradually developed and it flourished.

Nellie Black’s fear that marriage would weaken her resolve to fulfill her Christian duty never became a reality. On the contrary, her new role as wife and mother provided her with the social status and financial resources she needed to broaden her endeavors in both Christian outreach and community improvement. Having relocated to rural southern Georgia, Black felt

¹⁹Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia*, 119-20. See also “100 Years Old, Appleton to Honor Past Residents,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 9 June 1968.

²⁰W. R. Rees to NP, 17 March ?, folder 2, Black Collection.

²¹W. R. Rees to NP, 19 April ?, *Ibid.*.

the absence of an Anglican community in her new hometown of Sylvania. Isolated from the Episcopalian congregations in coastal Georgia, Sylvania was located more inland and home to primarily Baptists and Methodists.²² The remote location virtually compelled Nellie Black to become a true missionary. Like her father many years earlier, she resolved to establish an Episcopal church. Realizing it would be a lengthy process, Black began by inviting the Rt. Reverend W. R. McConnell from nearby Scarboro to come to Sylvania once a month and offer “Sunday ministrations” in the Methodist church. Approximately five families attended the services. This arrangement lasted for two years, with the Blacks assuming all costs associated with the services. Even though the Reverend Mr. McConnell moved to another part of the state in 1880, the small but faithful group of Episcopalians continued to meet irregularly in the Methodist church and the Black’s home. Nellie Black arranged to have priests sent from Savannah to hold services and deliver communion. It was a taxing journey for the priests, who traveled by rail to the town of Ogeechee, twelve miles southwest of Sylvania. There they would be met by the Black’s carriage and brought to Sylvania. She also arranged for a teacher (“an authentic Anglican”) in a neighboring town to serve as organist for the services.²³

Anxious that the Episcopalians have a church of their own, Nellie sought permission from the Diocese of Georgia to establish a mission. In 1885, she purchased a lot in the center of town and had a small wooden church of simple design with a “square tower vestibule” constructed on the site. Before year’s end parish rolls for All Saints Chapel in Sylvania listed ten

²²George White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia: Including an Account of Its Natural, Civil and Ecclesiastical History; Together with a Particular Description of Each County* (Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1849), 517.

²³Dixon Hollingsworth, ed., *The History of Screven County, Georgia* (Sylvania, GA: The Screven County History Project, 1989), 102.

families as communicants.²⁴ Obviously impressed with Nellie's determination to nurture the rural outpost, the registrar noted in the diocesan records that nearly everything connected with the new All Saints Church - "the lot, the corner-stone, the chancel window, the six other windows, the bell, the organ, the altar, the brass altar cross, the credence shelf, the alms basin, the chandelier and lamps, the Bible, and even the cross that surmounts the belfry" - were the gifts of but a few "willing hands and loving hearts."²⁵ Despite her efforts to encourage people to join the new church, the small membership never grew beyond the Black's family and friends. During the approximately eighteen years of its existence, church records show that there were only twelve baptisms, fifteen confirmations, and six marriages.²⁶ When George Black died in 1886, the residents of the town raised funds and placed a bell in the tower of All Saints as a memorial to their native son. Nellie Black proved to be the driving force behind the parish and when she returned to Atlanta in 1887, All Saints slowly disintegrated and the Diocese of Georgia abandoned the mission.²⁷

Once back in Atlanta, Nellie Black resumed her "self-sacrificious duties to society."²⁸

Although she attended services at St. Philips, Black wanted to re-establish Holy Innocents mission, which had been destroyed years earlier by a storm. In 1893, she asked a fellow

²⁴Nellie Black signed the Instrument of Donation on December 17, 1887. Instrument of Donation for All Saints Church, mss.#1617, microfilm roll# x-1617-09, Episcopal Church, Diocese of Georgia, 1750-1942 (hereafter cited as EDG, 1750-1942), GHS.

²⁵William S. Bogart, "The Registrar's Seventeenth Annual Report," 1889, microfilm roll# x-1617-09, EDG, 1750-1942.

²⁶*Parish Register*, All Saints Church, Sylvania, Georgia, 1879-1897, Diocesan House, Diocese of Georgia, Savannah, Georgia (hereafter cited as DH).

²⁷The church building was later dismantled and reassembled as an Episcopal church in Barnesville, Georgia Hollingsworth, ed., *The History of Screven County, Georgia*, 102.

²⁸NPB used this phrase to describe her life before marriage. NP to GRB, 24 February 1877, box 2, folder 1, NPB Papers.

parishioner, Thomas Wood, if she could hold mission meetings in a vacant storeroom on his property. He agreed and Black conducted Sunday school classes there for three years. In 1896, Wood donated another piece of land for the construction of a new mission. To raise funds for the project, Black sold a piece of property her father had given her and persuaded family members and friends to also make donations. Supposedly without help from an architect, she designed the church with a “tabernacle” shaped roof in hopes of making it more wind resistant than the first Holy Innocents. Male members of the parish donated their labor to construct the building, which had to be able to serve many purposes. Black’s sister, Mae Atkinson, donated an organ from her home, which coincidentally had been constructed on the same corner lot where the first Holy Innocents had been located. The pews were actually benches that had been in the courtroom of family friend Judge Alex King, and Black donated the brass cross for the altar as a memorial to her mother and father. No one was safe from Nellie’s zealous campaign to revive the mission. She even drafted her children to the cause. Daughters Nita and Louise taught sewing, played the organ, and led in the singing of hymns. Son Ralph stoked the fire on cold days and served as a part-time maintenance man, attending to various chores about the place.

Holy Innocents thrived under Black’s supervision. In 1897, records show that fifty-five children regularly attended Sunday school at the mission.²⁹ Testing the Biblical adage, “ask and you shall receive,” Black obtained permission from Bishop Nelson to use the “de-consecrated” chapel near the mission in which to operate a free kindergarten and Mother’s Club.³⁰ However,

²⁹NPB handwritten notes, box 2, folder 1, Episcopal Diocese Collection.

³⁰“Report of the Board of Missions,” *Journal of the General Convention*, Diocese of Atlanta, 1909, 80.

with auxiliary duties and club work demanding more and more of her time, she turned the administration of the mission over to a full-time deaconess, Katherine Wood, in 1912.³¹

Nellie Black understood that one of the most effective ways to strengthen a mission was to establish an active Sunday school program. Although the Sunday School movement had been founded by Anglicans and one of the earliest Sunday schools in the United States had been established by John Wesley in 1737 at Christ Church in Savannah, Episcopalians had mixed feelings about the Sunday school movement.³² Because Sunday school teachers were most often women, some worried that the classes advanced the continuing “feminization of the church” and that women teachers threatened the authority of the male clergy.³³ Some questioned the necessity and legitimacy of Sunday school instruction, observing that no provision for it existed in the *Book of Common Prayer* or the General Canons. Both to overcome such opposition and to clarify the Episcopal position on the popular Sunday School movement, the Diocese of Atlanta established a Sunday School Commission. In a lengthy report issued to the General Convention, the committee concluded that the Episcopal Church was indeed responsible for “the Christian

³¹Holy Innocents Mission was maintained by All Saints Church, of which NPB’s mother, Mary Jane Peters, had been the initial financial support. Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 565-68; and Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia*, 213. Perhaps out of deference to her parents, Black had not wanted to sever ties with St. Philips. As a result, she was not a charter member of All Saints, but eventually moved her letter of membership there because of convenience and personal ties. “Holy Innocents Mission, Atlanta,” box 1, folder 6, WGC. See also “Women Painting Little Church in Valley of Pines,” *Atlanta Journal*, 8 December 1916.

³²The most thorough study of the development of the Sunday School movement in the South is Sally McMillen, *To Raise Up the South: Sunday Schools in Black and White Churches, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001). See also Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988; and Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: 200 Years of the Sunday School* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980). Specifically on women and Sunday schools, see Sally G. McMillen, “Southern Women and the Sunday School Movement, 1865-1915,” *Plain Folk of the South Revisited*, Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 129-60. On the Sunday school at Christ Church, Savannah, see Roger Warlick, *As Grain Once Scattered: The History of Christ Church, Savannah, Georgia, 1733-1983* (Columbia, SC: The State Printing Co., 1987), 17; and McMillen, *To Raise Up the South*, 11.

³³Those worried about the feminization issue, need not have been. Some of the country’s most prestigious business barons were Sunday school teachers, including: John D. Rockefeller, H. J. Heinz, and John Wanamaker. See Lynn and Wright, *The Big Little School*, 90-116.

education and training of its little ones” and that Sunday school served as “the beginning of the larger fellowship of the Communion of Saints.”³⁴ In addition, they argued that Sunday schools could encourage moral stability within the family. The focus placed on children by Sunday school programs reminded church members of their Christian duty to procreate and discouraged divorce. This was particularly important in the South, as some white clergy (including Bishop Nelson of Atlanta) were concerned that declining birthrates among the “English speaking people” would lead to “race suicide.”³⁵

Even before the Episcopal Church officially sanctioned Sunday schools, Nellie Peters Black had been dedicated to the Sunday school movement, teaching at the various churches and missions in which she was involved. Because she came into contact with so many children through her mission work who did not have the attention of loving parents, Nellie Black placed the responsibility for a Christian upbringing with the church community at large. This was the same justification for her zealous work on behalf of the Free Kindergarten Association. (When Black became secretary of the Woman’s Auxiliary of the Diocese of Georgia, she tirelessly solicited aid from the Bishop and Auxiliary for the kindergarten movement.) Black understood that, just as with the kindergartners, it was possible to reach the parents through their children. Especially in missions such as Holy Innocents, Sunday school served as a significant source of potential new members for the church.

³⁴The Sunday School Commission of the Diocese of Atlanta, reasoned that the institution of Sunday school separated those who followed only the Old Testament (Jews) from those who followed both the Old and New Testament (Christians). Parents featured in the Old Testament assumed the sole responsibility for the religious instruction of their children, but in the New Testament, the “Church as Mother” supplemented parental instruction. The Commission defined “the true function of the Sunday school,” summarized what should be taught, outlined the responsibilities of the teachers, and recommended ways “to increase efficiency.” “Report of the Sunday School Commission,” *Journal of the General Convention*, Diocese of Atlanta, 1912, 116-23.

³⁵“Address of the Bishop,” *Journal of the General Convention*, Diocese of Atlanta, 1908, 48.

Whether she was speaking to an auxiliary meeting or teaching a Sunday school class, Nellie Black used a variety of materials and methods to impart her message. Confident that the Sunday school classes (like kindergartens) could provide southern children with a global outlook, as well as moral lessons for life, she mingled traditional Bible stories with geography. She often used brightly colored maps “to paint a graphic picture of the missionary work of the twelve apostles” and highlight the location of “heathen and Christian lands” around the world.³⁶ Such a distinction surely validated the church’s crusade to send missionaries to far away “foreign” places. Black made sure that children understood exactly where the proceeds of their “mite boxes” went. (She said “great work came from small fingers putting pennies in the boxes.”) When possible she would have missionaries or their students speak to the classes or show “lantern pictures” of the mission schools in China, Japan, or Cuba.³⁷ American missionaries not only spread Christianity, they also propagated American values and political ideologies. So not only did they “plug temporary gaps in existing school networks,” Sunday schools (like kindergartens) became the training grounds for good citizens.³⁸

Nellie Black also taught non-traditional Sunday school classes at the family farm in Gordon County, Georgia. During the last two decades of her life, Black enjoyed spending the summer there, as well as weekends during the spring and fall when her schedule permitted. The Peters family had supported St. James Episcopal Church in Calhoun since its founding in 1881,

³⁶Loose notes, NPB, Woman’s Auxiliary Diary, box 12, NPB Papers.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Boylan, *Sunday School*, 167.

but Nellie was the one member who actually became a part of the parish family.³⁹ She became famous in Calhoun for the Sunday school classes she taught at the farm during the summer. Black kept attendance records on the pupils, most of who belonged to the white tenant families on the Peters farm. Occasionally, the children of guests at the farm would also attend. The number and ages of the students varied; some Sundays she recorded as many as thirty-five children in attendance.⁴⁰ As she did in her mission work in Atlanta, Black enlisted the aid of her two daughters to help teach Bible stories, sing hymns, play games, and make refreshments. Often, the classes turned into all-day events. Hymn singing took place in the morning before breakfast. Following the morning chores, Black would gather the students (dressed in their Sunday best) in the parlor to read a short service she had prepared. Servants and tenants were also invited. Those who worked for her were probably careful to pay close attention when Black read the lesson. (However, not everyone did. One witness recalled seeing some of the boys standing on their heads against the parlor wall during the reading of the gospel!) As Black herself possessed a sense of humor and fun-loving nature, she tried to bring those qualities out in her students. There would be games (such as baseball or stick ball) in the afternoon and the children would leave for home with gifts of candy sticks and apples.⁴¹ Black remained devoted to her parish family in Calhoun and the Peters family continued to support the religious community there long after her death.⁴²

³⁹The church had been organized by a small, but prominent group of Calhoun citizens in 1881 and constructed on a lot donated by Peters family friend, John P. King. For information about St. James, see *1976 Bicentennial History of Gordon County, Georgia*, Burton J. Bell, ed. (Calhoun, GA: Gordon County Historical Society, Inc., 1976), 232.

⁴⁰Attendance rolls for 1901-1909, box 8, folder 6, NPB Papers.

⁴¹“Management of Peters Farm as Told by Mrs. Lamar Rucker,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 October 1925. See also Mrs. Hines and Major Roff, “An Enjoyable Occasion,” *Calhoun Times*, 2 October 1902.

⁴²NPB’s son, Ralph Peters Black, donated land in Calhoun in 1936 for the Nellie Peters Black Methodist Church. He also supplied blueprints and funding for the construction of the church building. Wanting to keep the Peters

Episcopal Churchwoman

When the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia formed a Woman's Auxiliary to provide support for the all-male Board of Missions in 1889, Nellie Black became the organization's secretary for the Atlanta Archdeaconry.⁴³ "Dissatisfied with the feeble response to the call to the whole Church" to spread God's word at home and abroad, Episcopal women created an auxiliary in 1871 to "not only assist the Board in meeting its regular appropriations, but also to aid all missionary work of the Church, in any direction and in any way that may be recommended by *this* Board."⁴⁴ In other words, even though they were directed by the Bishop to assist the Board of Missions, the women did have some autonomy in terms of choosing their projects if they raised enough funds to support both. Indeed, by the turn of the century, the women were

name prominent in Gordon County, he stipulated that the church carry his mother's maiden name, rather than her married name of Black. In 1961, Ralph Black again provided funds for an addition to the church. The Black estate also deeded property to the church, the sale of which provided funds for a parking lot adjacent to the church. Bell, *Bicentennial History of Gordon County*, 455.

⁴³For a history of the Woman's Auxiliary in the Episcopal Church in general, see Mrs. Twing, *Handbook of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Church Missions House, 1897), 11-17. See also Margaret Marston Sherman, *True to Their Heritage: A Brief History of the Woman's Auxiliary, 1871-1958* (New York: The National Council of the Episcopal Church Center, 1958). In the 1950s, the name of the Women's Auxiliary was changed to "Episcopal Churchwoman," now commonly known as the "ECW."

⁴⁴First quote found in Sherman, *True to Their Heritage*, 3; second quote from Mrs. Twing, *Handbook of the Woman's Auxiliary*, 7. Women had been involved in the domestic missionary work of the church since the early 1820s, but could not participate in all associated mission work until they formed the Auxiliary. The women listed their five aims as: the increase of missionary funds; the circulation of missionary publications; the education of missionaries; the making, collecting and distributing of clothing for missionaries and their families; and the education of missionaries' children. In the decades following the Civil War, educated and affluent women in most Protestant denominations formed separate boards or auxiliaries. Historian Susan Hill Lindley claims that the formation of these boards was definitely a "power issue," in that the women wanted to have some control over the allocation of the funds they raised. The auxiliaries served as a previously-unobtainable "power base" for the women in the church. See Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place*, 76-77 and 88. In contrast, Rima Schultz argues that "women at the top of the diocesan auxiliary's organizational pyramid" (like NPB), while deriving a sense of accomplishment from their financial contributions, "never used money as a way to challenge the status quo." Rima Lunin Schultz, "Woman's Work and Woman's Calling in the Episcopal Church: Chicago, 1880-1989," *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality, and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination*, Catherine M. Prelinger, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19-71 (quote found on pg. 39). Yes, NPB was humbled at "doing the Lord's work," but she appreciated the opportunity afforded by the Auxiliary's sizable financial contribution to direct that work.

supplying a significant share of the funding for both domestic and foreign missionaries.⁴⁵ As the Woman's Auxiliary gradually became "an integral part of the church's administrative structure," historian Mary Sudman Donovan argues that many of the women involved "came to view their own ministries from a diocesan or a national rather than parochial point of view."⁴⁶ This certainly was true of Nellie Peters Black.

Although Nellie Black was affiliated with St. Philips, one of the wealthiest parishes in the Atlanta archdeaconry, most of the smaller and more rural parishes were strapped for even basic operating funds, and had even less money to support foreign missions. As Auxiliary secretary, she instituted a unique fund raising campaign for her archdeaconry. Inspired by the reformer Jacob Riis who claimed that "one dollar for foreign missions increases ten-fold the capacity for dealing with problems at home," Black persuaded the St. Philips Auxiliary to send one dollar to each of the women's auxiliaries throughout the archdeaconry to use as seed money for foreign mission projects.⁴⁷ Harkening to the "lesson of the loaves and fishes," Black urged the women to get to work and send the dollar back in multiples. If they could not raise additional funds, she instructed them to send the original dollar back to St. Philips. Unfortunately, Black's "cast a dollar upon the waters" campaign achieved mixed results. Some parishes did successfully increase the donation. Women in Clarkesville reported that their small group of only four auxiliary members had made money by sewing and selling aprons and fancy work. (In the process they also managed to make new altar cloths for the church). East Point sent back five

⁴⁵Ian Theodore Douglas, "Fling Out the Banner: The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church" (Ph.D, diss., Boston University, 1983), 93-94.

⁴⁶Mary Sudman Donovan, "Zealous Evangelists: the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, LI (Dec., 1982), 371-83 (quote from pg. 373).

⁴⁷Jacob Riis quote contained on back page of Board of Foreign Missions pamphlet (n.d.), Woman's Auxiliary Diary, box 12, NPB Papers.

dollars; Newnan only doubled the original donation. Several parishes however reported that they were unable to participate because of lack of membership or funding. Both Rome and Cedartown returned the original check. One particularly sad letter came from the church in Dalton. Although she sent \$8.56 back to Black, Mrs. M. L. Craighill reported that “our church has been all but abandoned and Mr. Craighill [the rector] left nearly three weeks ago and I have been managing alone.”⁴⁸ While the campaign did not raise the hoped-for missionary funds, it did alert Black (and subsequently the Bishop) to both the sad financial state and declining membership of many of the smaller parishes. While during the first decade of the twentieth century the Episcopal Church had expanded in Georgia, the responsibility of instilling the new congregations with an appreciation for the diocesan mission goals fell on the shoulders of the women’s auxiliaries.

Black’s burgeoning network of devoted women was further expanded when Bishop Nelson nominated Nellie Black to be the diocesan secretary for the Women’s Auxiliary in 1905. This time-consuming charge required travel throughout the state and to national conventions.⁴⁹ Black’s nomination, like the election of Bishop Nelson, represented a shift in power away from the more affluent parishes in the eastern and coastal parts of the state, such as Savannah, Augusta, and Athens.⁵⁰ Black was reluctant, but obeying an inner voice that said “you must give

⁴⁸Responses to NPB, Auxiliary Scrapbook, box 12, NPB Papers. NPB came up with another way to raise money for the Auxiliary. As attendance at Auxiliary meetings was strictly monitored, she devised a plan in each member was charged one nickel for each absence. At the end of the meeting season, she and her mother, Mary Jane Peters, each owed .05¢. However, “two young misses owed \$1.20, as they had each missed 24 meetings!” Auxiliary Scrapbook, pg. 10, box 12, NPB Papers.

⁴⁹NPB was the fourth woman to serve in the position and the first (and last) Atlantan. The Diocese of Georgia split into two separate dioceses in 1907.

⁵⁰When Nelson became the Bishop of Georgia, he chose Atlanta as his cathedral city for several reasons. First, he thought the capital of the Church should be the capital of the state. He also cited Atlanta’s “accessibility and healthfulness.” In addition, “the formative condition of Atlanta and the present weakness of the Church in the midst of population increasing daily” presented unique opportunities. Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia*, 140.

of your best to God's service," she accepted and undertook the task at a blistering pace.⁵¹ Within two weeks of her appointment, she had written to every archdeaconry in the state offering to come and speak to their women on the importance of mission work. To make oversight of the large diocese more manageable, she persuaded Bishop Nelson to increase the number of archdeaconries to seven, from the previous number of five. Within a month, she had even organized a new Auxiliary branch at Barnesville. According to their eleventh annual report (1907), statewide membership in the Woman's Auxiliary had reached almost 25,000.⁵² By the end of her first full month in office, Secretary Black had addressed over 614 Episcopal women, students, and clergy throughout the seven diocesan archdeaconries about the importance of mission work.⁵³

During her administration, Black maintained a full schedule of archdeaconry visits and kept thorough records of Episcopal women's activities throughout the state.⁵⁴ No doubt her experience as president of the Atlanta Federation of Women's Clubs proved beneficial. By serving as diocesan secretary of the Auxiliary, the most powerful administrative position a woman could assume in the Episcopal Church, Nellie became the most influential woman in the Diocese of Georgia.

When Bishop Nelson assumed leadership in the Diocese of Georgia, he brought with him "militant views" about the need to expand the Episcopal Church in the state by increasing the

⁵¹NPB notes, Woman's Auxiliary Diary, box 12, NPB Papers.

⁵²Biographical notes on NPB, box 1, folder 1, NPB Papers.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁴NPB always insisted that thorough records be kept in any of the organizational activities (secular or religious) that she participated in. One example of this is her organization of the All Saints Church in Sylvania. In an 1889 diocesan document, diocesan registrar Wm. S. Bogart complimented All Saints on their "prompt and thorough" reports to the diocese. See "The Registrar's Seventeenth Annual Report," 1889, microfilm roll# x-1617-09, EDG, 1750-1942.

number of missions.⁵⁵ Nellie Black shared his desire to establish both religious missions and secular schools in the more rural parishes. She advocated that “manual training and many other modern ideas [might] be established for the practical instruction and improvement of the young minds.” Realizing that each parish would want to contribute to particular mission projects, Black reminded Auxiliary members that “the success of parish work will never be assured unless you share in the spreading of the gospel to heathen lands.”⁵⁶ Those “heathen lands” could be both foreign and domestic. The Woman’s Auxiliary supported Episcopal missions and schools in Japan, China, and Cuba. Black was so convinced of the critical need for mission work that she personally created designated missionary funds. Inspired by the work of Bishop Knight in Cuba, she established the Bishop Knight Scholarship for the Episcopal school in Guantanamo, Cuba (1905). At her first meeting as secretary of the Woman’s Auxiliary for the Diocese of Georgia, she praised Knight as a paragon of the true missionary spirit and Christian obedience

He went to Cuba not because he wanted to go, but because the Church sent him and he dared not disobey the Spirit. He went determined to conquer and look at the result one year later - the communicants, Sunday schools, and day schools have doubled. . . Why? Because the head believed in the Cause and every co-worker believed and no one grumbled or complained. Trust in the Lord with thy heart and lean not toward thine own understanding . . .⁵⁷

Black hoped that the women would strive to follow Bishop Knight’s example. When she, Bishop Nelson, and members of the Board of Foreign Missions spoke about the missionaries and their work, they did so with an almost militaristic rhetoric and patriotic zeal. Indeed, the

⁵⁵By all indications, both Bishop Nelson and NPB were successful in this initiative. In 1893, the Diocese of Georgia had 88 missions. By 1906, the year before the diocesan split, statewide missions numbered 108. Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia*, 141.

⁵⁶NPB to Auxiliary Archdeaconry leaders, n.d., box 3, folder 10, NPB Papers.

⁵⁷NPB, typed notes for Secretary’s Report to the Woman’s Auxiliary of the Diocese of Georgia (n.d.), Woman’s Auxiliary Diary, box 12, NPB Papers.

interdenominational Christian missionary movement became one of the most effective conduits of the Protestant nationalism so rampant in the early twentieth century. It was an important component in America's imperialist agenda to obtain economic control of not only Cuba, but also the Philippines and Puerto Rico.⁵⁸ While Black did not perceive nationalism to be the primary goal of the missionaries, she understood that aspect of their work. Referring to the foreign missionaries, Black instructed Auxiliary members to “. . . keep in touch with the heroes who are planting the flag of the Church side by side with the flag of our own country and who are opening the way through commerce for the friendly intercourse of nations.”⁵⁹

As the Diocese of Georgia was primarily a “missionary diocese,” the continued support of the Woman's Auxiliary was critical. After their obligations to both the diocesan and national Board of Missions were met, Black and the other churchwomen devoted their attention and funds to domestic projects, including the Benedict Memorial School for boys and girls near Cedar Town in western Georgia. Black considered this work so crucial that at the national conference in 1906 she spoke from the floor on behalf of “the needs and character of the poor people of the southern mountain district.” Placing the corresponding secretary of the Board of Missions, John Wood, on the spot in front of the entire convention, she asked him if they (the mountain people) were included in the appropriations of the Board of Missions. After being told that they were not, she decided that the woman's auxiliaries in Georgia must support their own.⁶⁰ That same year, Black created the Rural School Fund to provide both educational scholarships for rural girls

⁵⁸On the relationship between foreign missionary work and American imperialism and nationalism, see Douglas, “Fling Out the Banner: The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church,” 95-168.

⁵⁹“President's Report,” *Report of the Second Annual Meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Diocese of Atlanta*, 1909, pg. 7, box 51, EDG, 1750-1942. Episcopal missionaries, however, played a relatively small role when compared with the larger numbers of Methodist missionaries.

⁶⁰“Women's Work in Far Away Land,” unidentified newspaper clipping, Woman's Auxiliary Diary, box 12, NPB Papers.

and also “well-trained teachers who could care for their mind, body, and soul.”⁶¹ She also constantly reminded auxiliary members to send boxes of “clothes and pecuniary items” to any rural missions in need, white or black. Nellie Black was particularly impressed with the work that was being done among “the colored people of St. Athanasius Parish” in the coastal town of Brunswick.⁶² Shortly after assuming the position of Diocesan Secretary, Black addressed a gathering of 205 students at the St. Athanasius School. She reported that the children gave the “general appearance of intelligence and neatness.” Later that evening, Black attended services at St. Athanasius and afterwards spoke to a group of twenty “colored” women who “promised to do all they could for the mission cause.”⁶³

Nellie Black’s leadership style and rhetorical expression were much like that of the Episcopal clergy with whom she came in regular contact. Wary of both the dogmatic emotionalism of the evangelicals and the ritualistic practices of the Catholics, “Anglican clergy encouraged a temperate, practical piety among the laity through liturgical observance and moral admonition.”⁶⁴ Although Black peppered both her religious and secular speeches with Christian rhetoric (when presiding over both types of meetings she opened with the Lord’s Prayer and closed with the Doxology), like many Episcopalians of her day, she did not like displays of emotion by clergy or laity.⁶⁵ Expressing her disappointment in one such demonstration, Black

⁶¹*Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary*, Diocese of Georgia, 1907, p.48-49, DH.

⁶²“Woman’s Auxiliary of Savannah Archdeaconry,” *Savannah Morning News*, 16 December 1905.

⁶³Nellie Peters Black, *Woman’s Auxiliary Diary*, p. 3, box 12, NPB Papers.

⁶⁴Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 11. Heyrman is referring to Anglicans in the American South during the middle 18th century, but these preferences lasted well into the 20th century in many Episcopal churches.

⁶⁵Religion historian Lynn Lyerly has noted that “the study of women and religion must encompass both and envision a spectrum from private to public rather than a division between the two.” NPB certainly shared her “personal interior religious life” with many of her friends and fellow auxiliary members. See Cynthia Lynn Lyerly,

complained about an Episcopal communion service she attended while on shipboard crossing the Atlantic Ocean. “The officiate went through so many emotions and genuflections, making a cross with his arms and other things, that Nita [her daughter] and I failed to get to the rail before he concluded the service.”⁶⁶ Black’s messages to Auxiliary members were direct and succinct. She adhered strictly to the church’s liturgical calendar and sacraments and encouraged Auxiliary members to do the same. Black was particularly adamant that financial obligations to both the diocese and the United Offering be met or exceeded.⁶⁷ In one of her early letters to Auxiliary members she claimed that there was no excuse for members not to meet their fiscal responsibilities. After all, it was outrageous that Americans annually spent “\$11,000,000 on chewing gum and a mere \$7,500,000 on missions.”⁶⁸ Black’s figures may (or may not) have

“Women and Southern Religion,” *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 249.

⁶⁶Entry in Travel Diary, 7 October 1906, box 5, folder 6, NPB Papers.

⁶⁷Begun in 1889 at the Triennial Meeting of the Woman’s Auxiliary, the United Offering is collected from all diocesan branches at the United Service of the Triennial Meeting. Donations, collected throughout the three year period above and beyond diocesan obligations, are placed in a golden alms basin at the United Service. The offering goes toward projects of the corporate Board of Missions. It is now known as the United Thank Offering. See Mrs. Twing, *Handbook of the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Board of Missions*, 37-38. There was a good-spirited competition between the various auxiliaries as to who could present the largest offering at the United Service. NPB humorously recounted her experience at the 1907 Triennial Meeting in Richmond

I was fortunate to secure a good seat near the chancel . . . As I sat quietly waiting for the services to begin with Georgia’s offering of \$1,683.57 in my hand, I was feeling very thankful that we had gone so far beyond any previous amount. I heard a lady near me whisper ‘Pennsylvania has \$3,800’ and the other lady said “we have \$8,000” and I thought “Well, we will have to soar pretty high to get up to you!

NPB, handwritten notes contained in Woman’s Auxiliary Diary, box 12, NPB Papers. Interestingly, NPB’s somewhat sarcastic remarks did not appear in the official report or in the newspaper account. See “Mrs. Black Writes Interesting Account of Triennial Episcopal Convention,” unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d., box 5, folder 3, NPB Papers. On the Triennial Meeting, see Avis E. Harvey, *Every Three Years: The Triennial Meetings, 1874-1967* (New York: Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, 1970).

⁶⁸NPB, notes to Auxiliary members, n.d., Woman’s Auxiliary Diary, pg. 10, box 12, NPB Papers.

been somewhat exaggerated, but the women understood her point. When gifts of time and money fell off, Black chastised the women to try harder

Hold weekly prayer services during Lent. . . When you feel discouraged ask yourself: “Have I prayed as hard as I can-have I given all I can?” and you will probably have grace given to you to do more than you ever dreamed you could do. Faith and works make an irresistible combination.⁶⁹

Prayer alone could not accomplish all of the work to be done throughout the diocese.

Nellie Black’s leadership experience and organizational skills obviously contributed to her influence and effectiveness. She increased the efficiency of the Auxiliary by dividing the duties between various departments and forming specific committees, such as the Babies Branch and the Junior Auxiliary. She kept thorough and organized records of all the activities under her authority and - just as in her secular club work - she required accountability on all membership levels. In addition to constant prayer for the success of their tasks, Black advised members to research their particular areas of work by studying pamphlets published by the national church. She also encouraged Auxiliary members to take advantage of any training opportunities or assistance offered by the national headquarters of the Woman’s Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church, located in New York City. Black herself was on personal terms with Miss Julia Emery, the second National Secretary of the Woman’s Auxiliary, and visited her when she was in New York

Because of the massive responsibility of administering all statewide diocesan activities, members of the 1907 Diocesan Convention unanimously voted to bisect the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia into two separate dioceses.⁷⁰ The division of parishes and assets was a complex

⁶⁹NPB to Woman’s Auxiliary of the Diocese of Atlanta, n.d., box 3, folder 10, NPB Papers.

⁷⁰The result of the split was the formation of the Diocese of Atlanta (under the authority of the Right Reverend Cleland Kinloch Nelson) and the reorganization of the Diocese of Georgia (under the authority of the Right Reverend Frederick Focke Reese). On the division, see Malone, *The Episcopal Church in Georgia*, 133-51.

process and presented unique challenges for the new Diocese of Atlanta and its Woman's Auxiliary, of which Nellie Black was now the president. The split also allowed the new diocese to focus on issues more relevant to its increasingly urban parishes. In his address at the first annual convention of the Diocese of Atlanta in 1908, Bishop Nelson focused on issues that dealt specifically with the "social evils" spawned by urban life. Referring to the racial violence of the previous two years, he lamented that the "mob spirit with impunity practices lynching upon a certain class of offenders . . ." and "pistol-toters have grown into roving bands of bush-whackers and night-riders, who conceal their identity under masks and the garb of darkness. . ." He called upon Episcopalians to "recall their obligations as citizens and fulfill them, not confusing civic righteousness and social order with politics. . ." ⁷¹ Such social gospel-inspired clerical directives imbued Nellie Black's social activism with a sense of Christian mission and integrated her secular and religious work more so than ever before. Indeed, the clerical mandate to "extend the Gospel" took on an expanded meaning as the Episcopal Church became more active in the inter-denominational "religion forward" movements that sought to increase the involvement of laymen. ⁷² It also explains the involvement of Nellie Black and other prominent Episcopalians in the National Conference of Charities and Corrections and later in the Southern Sociological Congress (see chapter six).

While Bishop Nelson hoped that the new Diocese of Atlanta would play a role in the racial reconciliation of the South, he was unable to force immediate change. The Diocese of

⁷¹"Bishop's Address," *Journal of the General Convention, Diocese of Atlanta*, 1908, pg. 39-40.

⁷²On the Men and Religion Forward Movement, see Gail Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly*, 41, 3 (Sept., 1989): 432-65. Specifically on the movement in Atlanta, see *The Men and Religion Forward Movement in Atlanta* (Atlanta: Byrd Publishing Co., 1913); and James Robert Thompson, "The Forward Atlanta Movement" (M.A. Thesis, Emory University, 1948). Bishop Nelson declared the "laymen forward movement." to be "the honest and earnest answer to the challenge of twentieth-century Christianity." "Bishop's Address," *Journal of the General Convention, Diocese of Atlanta*, 1909, p. 42.

Georgia, indeed the entire Episcopal Church in the South, had since Reconstruction neglected its African-American members. Methodists and Baptists were winning the battle for black souls.⁷³ The creation of the new diocese granted white Episcopalians in Atlanta the sole responsibility for reaching out to their African-American brethren. However, diocesan officials decided that their outreach efforts would continue to be administered in the paternalistic form of education, rather than religious self-determination. In other words, whites would continue to oversee both black schools and churches. There is no evidence that Nellie Black disagreed with this particular diocesan policy. As president of both the Woman's Auxiliary for the Diocese of Atlanta and the Free Kindergarten Association, she supported African-American efforts to establish Sunday schools, kindergartens, and primary and secondary schools, particularly those that focused on "practical education" and "manual instruction" such as that encouraged by Booker T. Washington.⁷⁴ Never shying away from meeting with "the colored women who share our Christian concerns," she addressed a variety of African-American women's groups on how to create and administer missions and schools. In 1911, she served as chairman of the Negro Women's Meeting for the Atlanta's Woman's Golden Jubilee of Foreign Missions. Publicly she endorsed the diocese's policy of "self-help," but throughout her life Nellie Black made generous donations to black missions, churches, orphanages, and individuals. She gift-deeded two acres of land belonging to her family's farm in Gordon County to an African-American church for use as a cemetery. Yet, despite her personal patronage and eagerness to help African Americans in areas of education and health reform (see chapters five and six), auxiliary records indicate that in terms of diocesan support, her heart was clearly with the rural whites and foreign missionaries.

⁷³Shattuck, *Episcopalians & Race*, 7-29.

⁷⁴"Woman's Auxiliary of Savannah Archdeaconry," 16 December 1905.

To most Episcopalians, the social gospel represented the hope of eternal reward offered to those who did God's work in this life. Nellie Peters experienced this shared "hope fulfilled" when her father agreed to be "re-confirmed" in the Episcopal Church on Easter Sunday, 1877. Realizing that the implication of her father's decision extended far beyond himself, Nellie explained to her fiancé George that "when a man like father professes Christ before men, you may be sure to think the influence is felt."⁷⁵ In years to come, Nellie Peters Black would wield similar influence over women. Her rise in the ranks of the Woman's Auxiliary and ability to establish missions where none existed demonstrates her ability to create female spaces in the traditionally male administrative realm of the Episcopal Church. In addition, her work to establish Holy Innocents mission serves as an example of how the Episcopal Church integrated itself into social reform movements of the day and fulfilled its social gospel agenda in the South. Finally, Nellie Peters Black's devotion to Sunday school education and missionary work epitomizes her desire to extend God's Kingdom at home and abroad.

⁷⁵NP to GB, 1 April 1877, box 2, folder 2, NPB Papers.

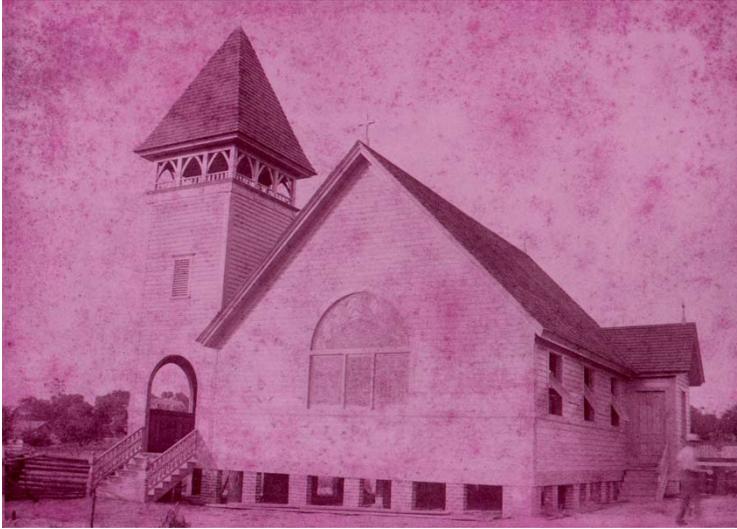


Figure 4-1. All Saints, Sylvania, Georgia. (photo courtesy of the Hargrett Rare Book Collection, University of Georgia)



Figure 4-2. Sunday school class at Peters Farm, Gordon County, Georgia. (photo courtesy of the Hargrett Rare Book Collection, University of Georgia)

CHAPTER 5 EDUCATION REFORM

“Advance the line for Georgia in the fight for educational development!” Nellie Peters Black defined education as “the foundation of all individual, civic, State, and national growth.”¹ During her lifetime, Black witnessed the transformation of education from an advantage enjoyed by the privileged few to a crucial component of citizenship provided to all citizens of Georgia. As historian Ann Short Chirhart notes: “Education lay at the core of every battle in Georgia about gendered identity, equality, individual rights, and industrial change, becoming the contested terrain on which fights for local control, church, and family authority, white supremacy, and white male authority were fought.”² Educational access determined not only who could vote or hold office, but also who would be able to enjoy the fruits of citizenship by being self-sufficient and participating in the growing consumer economy. Black’s broad definition of education indicates that she understood the interconnectedness of education, citizenship, and moral uplift, as well as the reciprocal relationship between an educated citizenry and regional regeneration. Increasing educational opportunity for southerners traditionally deprived of it (girls and women of all ages, very young children, rural inhabitants, and African Americans) became the focus of much of her club work.

¹President Nellie Black’s instruction to all GFWC members, “Georgia Club Bulletin, Number Three, 1918-1919.” Nellie Peters Black Papers, Mss.#235, box 9, file 2, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens (Hereafter cited as NPB Papers).

²Ann Short Chirhart, *Torches of Light: Georgia Teachers and the Coming of the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 3.

Self-Culture and “. . . becoming accustomed to their own voices

Although Richard Peters possessed the financial resources to send his daughter to any of the several women’s colleges in existence at the time, Nellie Peters did not attend college.³ She did however recognize the value of education to the individual, as well as to society. As the study of culture was considered ladylike and compatible to the role of middle and upper-class women in society, the widowed Nellie Black joined the Every Saturday History Class (ESC). Organized in 1894, it was one of the earliest study clubs for white women in Atlanta.⁴ Although a source of entertainment for the members, the ESC served a much larger function. The founders intended the purpose of the club to be “the promotion of friendship, wider culture and earnest study.”⁵ As women during that period had limited access to formal education, the literary club became an informal “school” where members took their scholarship seriously. Emulating male historical societies that became popular among southern intellectuals in the middle and late-nineteenth century, the women studied and discussed various topics in literature and world history.

Their interaction within the Every Saturday Club provided the women with valuable public speaking experience or, as an early historian of the clubwoman’s movement has written,

³Neither Nellie Peters nor her two sisters attended college. Although this seems strange considering how much she seemed to enjoy her finishing school experience, it probably speaks to her traditional upbringing and expectations of living a life of religious service. According to historian Darlene Roth, socially-prominent white clubwomen in Atlanta like Black generally did not pursue higher education. Their African-American counterparts, however had closer “ties to education” in that their elite status was based on educational affiliation. See Darlene Rebecca Roth, *Matronage: Patterns in Women’s Organizations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1940* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 86-87.

⁴The earliest study club for white women in Atlanta was the Nineteenth Century History Class, formed in 1885 as a Chautauqua Circle. Records do not indicate that Nellie Black was ever a member of this club. See J. C. Croly, *The History of the Woman’s Club Movement in America* (New York: H. G. Allen, 1898), 363.

⁵Club records, Every Saturday Club, MSS# 615, box 2, folder 1, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta, Georgia (Hereafter cited as ESC).

“an opportunity to become accustomed to their own voices.”⁶ Most women’s clubs met on weekdays when husbands were at work; however, the ESC is interesting in that members chose to meet on Saturday mornings, a time usually reserved for family or market shopping. In the early days of the ESC, members met in each other’s homes. Not only was this convenient, but it also provided an intimate, comfortable, and familiar environment in which the women could develop their public speaking skills and self-confidence.⁷

Club procedure demonstrates that ESC members took their scholarship seriously. After democratically selecting the subject of study for the season, a syllabus or schedule of study was prepared. Each member researched a particular aspect of the topic and later presented a paper to the club - complete with a thorough bibliography. The Young Men’s Library Association volunteered the use of their library, offering to order additional books should the ladies need them. Bound and exchanged with other study clubs, the papers presented a feminine perspective of history not commonly available at the time. Through these papers clubwomen found a way to define their place in “the progress of civilization.” As scholar Anne Ruggles Gere notes, this exchange of texts also strengthened the bonds of unity among clubwomen.⁸ After the first year, meetings became more elaborate and often featured guest speakers and exhibits that accompanied the papers. Meetings were conducted according to strict parliamentary procedure

⁶Mary I. Wood, *The History of The General Federation of Women’s Clubs For the First Twenty-Two Years of its Organization* (U.S.A.: Norwood Press, 1912), 29. For an analysis of the development of women’s literary clubs, see Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), 57-71; and Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U. S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 208-47.

⁷Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 62.

⁸Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 8. This exchange of information was considered so important that once the individual clubs joined the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, a “Reciprocity Committee” was established to facilitate “the exchanges of papers, constitutions, suggestions, and plans, thus keeping each club in touch with all others.” See Croly, *The History of the Woman’s Club Movement in America*, 359.

and attendance was closely monitored. Black took the study schedule so seriously that she made the motion that numerous absences could result in loss of membership.⁹ Excessive absences by any one member could cause the entire club to fall behind in their study schedule.

Nellie Black presented her first paper to the Every Saturday Class in March 1895, a scant two months after joining. She chose as her topic the Russian author Leo Tolstoy. Fellow members obviously found Black's paper interesting because her presentation was followed by "an animated discussion of Tolstoy's personal character and faith" which led to a philosophical "consideration of the relation of man and wife and the love which actuated the self-abrogation of Ruskin and others." By holding such animated discussions that connected classic literary themes to their own life experiences, the clubwomen gradually developed the self-confidence necessary to hold their own in the public arena.¹⁰ Black's subsequent papers for the ESC reflected her varied interests in literature, philosophy, and history. Her chosen topics included: "Early Prose Writers"; "Edward II and III of England"; "Prophets of the Persian Empire"; "Invasion of the Celts"; "Greek Age of Reason"; and "Influence of the Ancient Divines on the History and Literature of England." After the club expanded its scope of study to include biology, science, and physics, Black presented papers on "The Growth and Function of Trees" and the "Properties of Heat and Cold." When the ESC began to address social welfare and more controversial current issues, she presented a paper on "Agencies for the Assimilation of Immigrants."¹¹ While

⁹ Anne Firor Scott noted that parliamentary procedure became so central to the woman's club movement that by the end of the 19th century, a few women actually made a living traveling around the country teaching rules of parliamentary order to the leaders of various clubs. See Scott, *Natural Allies: Womens Associations in American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 111. Although women first authored and published histories in the 1700s, they were not commonly circulated. Jennifer Scanlon and Sharon Costner, *American Women Historians, 1700s-1900s: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), xi-xiii. For ESC information, see Club Records, ESC.

¹⁰ Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 226-27.

¹¹ Club Records, ESC.

the selection of most of these topics does not indicate any radical leanings on Black's part, the latter does prove that she possessed an awareness of controversial social problems and a conviction that women could help solve them.

Nellie Black enjoyed the intellectual stimulation and companionship provided by the club and it became an Every Saturday tradition to celebrate the last meeting of the year at her home. In 1901, Black threw a "pit barbecue" with an Old South plantation theme. Dining tables were set up on the back lawn under the trees and the menu included: a keg of beer, Brunswick stew, shoat and lamb, ham, chicken, cheese-stuffed tomatoes, pickles, and "pies, pies, pies." Club records described the servers at the barbecue as "plantation darkies whose round shiny faces were wreathed in such grins as showed their satisfaction [with] the part they played in the delicious comedy."¹² Black's reputation as a creative and amusing hostess, as well as her popularity with fellow members, is evident in the club records. Upon her return from a lengthy European tour in 1906, the ESC honored Black with a poem that expressed delight in her homecoming

Across the sea from foreign climes
Home our valued member came,
And the summons to go see her
Caused each 'Sat'days smile to flame.
We don't want Mrs. Black to leave us,
How we grieve to miss her face;
But if each return spells "Party,"
For short times we'll fill her place.¹³

Men were rarely welcome at women's literary club meetings, but in 1898 the ESC spawned a club that met informally once a month on Friday evenings and included husbands.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³The poem later appeared in a newspaper article. "Mrs. N. P. Black's Observation Party," Unidentified newspaper clipping, 24 November 1906, ESC.

Even though she was a widow, Nellie Black heartily endorsed the idea and the first meeting was held at her home. Known as the Monthly Club, it was unique in that it provided for the regularly scheduled mingling of the sexes to discuss intellectual matters.¹⁴ Some women's clubs invited men to special programs that were usually followed by dinners and receptions, but they were regarded more as social occasions than club meetings. This occasional mingling of the sexes was so socially fashionable that a ladies' etiquette book of the day suggested that "for gentleman's night it is best to have a rather light attractive programme, not because of any supposed intellectual inferiority of the masculine mind, but because men are usually rather weary after the business of the day. . ." ¹⁵ As the agenda of the Friday Night Club could not be considered "light," Black's short-lived experimental club was exceptional. Historian Karen Blair noted that, more often than not, husbands ridiculed their wives' efforts to expand their intellect. Husbands worried that club work would encourage their wives to neglect their domestic responsibilities. Some men viewed literary clubs as "incubators for trouble" that "challenged woman's traditional place in society."¹⁶

Some husbands' fears were well-grounded. Cultural clubs that delved into historical issues not only provided a venue through which women could challenge the patriarchal control of history, but also enabled them to stake a legitimate and socially acceptable claim on public culture.¹⁷ While they no doubt resented them, clubwomen understood some of the criticisms

¹⁴Scrapbook, ESC, box 2. No evidence could be found that the Monthly Club lasted longer than a few meetings.

¹⁵Florence Howe Hall, *A Handbook for Town and Country* (Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1909), 240-44.

¹⁶Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 70-71.

¹⁷Many members of the ESC (including Nellie Black) later held membership in organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Colonial Dames. This supports the claim of historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage that "elite white women found in history a resource with which to fashion new selves without surrendering links to the old." See W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "White Women and the Politics of Historical Memory in the New South, 1880-1920," *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War*

waged against them. Their focus on self-improvement could be perceived as self-indulgent and shallow. To defuse such attitudes, culture clubs such as the ESC shifted their emphasis from literature and history to contemporary social issues that reflected the evolving interests of the members.¹⁸ This evolution indicates that members consciously and rather quickly shifted their focus from self-improvement to community activism. The desire to improve one's mind was transformed into the duty of study and preparation required to effect social change. According to Anne Gere, "the 'thought and knowledge' gained from their study gave clubwomen the wisdom to carry out their practical work."¹⁹

The Kindergarten Movement: "... to aide in the character building of the child."²⁰

In her club work Nellie Black continued to focus on education, but broadened her scope. At the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, the Board of Lady Managers sponsored an exhibit based on the German educator Friedrich Froebel's method of early childhood education - the *kindergarten* or "children's garden." Froebel theorized that properly trained teachers could provide in a school setting the nurturing that young children required but - due to demands of an industrial modern society - were no longer receiving from mothers within the home. As women (mothers in particular) were perceived as the moral compass of Victorian society, it seemed natural for them to extend their moral influence outside of the home to counteract the destabilizing effects of modernization on the traditional southern way of life. Concerned about the moral welfare of poor and working-class whites and blacks, progressive

to *Civil Rights*, Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon, eds. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 115-39.

¹⁸Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 10-11.

¹⁹Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 215.

²⁰Letter from NPB to the GFWC (n.d.), NPB Papers

reformers in both the North and South hoped that kindergarten teachers would be able to instill a sense of order and discipline not only in their young charges, but in the parents as well.²¹

Although it developed more slowly in the less industrial and more economically depressed South, the kindergarten movement eventually gathered momentum. In cities such as Atlanta, it provided urban clubwomen with a socially acceptable space within which to transform their domestic authority into public reform. In return, the clubwomen helped bring attention and prestige to a cause that otherwise might have floundered.²²

It is not surprising that Nellie Black was drawn to Froebel's educational philosophy. His theory that the purpose of education was "to guide man to understand himself, to be at peace with Nature, and to be united with God" dovetailed very neatly with social gospel ideas about the role of education in the Christian response to social problems.²³ In 1895, Black helped organize the Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association (AFKA). While Black is not credited with founding the organization, she did prove to be its primary champion during the first decade of its existence. Governor William Northern served as the first president of the organization. An

²¹Froebel himself was somewhat of an early-nineteenth century reformer. He perceived kindergartens as "the basis of a comprehensive educational system which would regenerate mankind." Irene M. Lilley, *Friedrich Froebel: A Selection of His Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 20. For information on the development of the kindergarten movement in the United States, see Elizabeth Dale Ross, *The Kindergarten Crusade: The Establishment of Preschool Education in the United States* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976). For a global perspective that demonstrates that "the United States was not unique in regarding the kindergarten as the site of contested cultural, religious, and political goals," see the essays contained in *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea*, Roberta Wollons, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 7. For information on the relationship between the politics of maternalism and the development of the kindergarten movement, see Molly Ladd Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 43-73. For information about women's activities at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, see: *Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing Co., 1895); Darlene R. Roth and Louise E. Shaw, *Atlanta Women: From Myth to Modern Times* (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1980), 24-32; and Darlene Roth, *Matronage*, 33-42.

²²Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 193.

²³Froebel quoted in Lilley, *Friedrich Froebel*, 50.

educator himself, Northern had worked during his tenure as governor to increase the number of schools and colleges in the state.²⁴ The first “free” kindergarten in Atlanta opened on Magnolia Street in 1895 to serve the children of workers at the Atlanta Cotton Mill.²⁵

In 1896 Nellie Black became president of the AFKA, a position she held for almost twenty years. As historian Rebecca Montgomery has noted, Black’s “sterling credentials as a southern blueblood and Christian humanitarian” provided the AFKA with a social prestige and moral authority that not only attracted benefactors but also helped deflect criticism.²⁶ Black wasted no time exploiting her network of organized women. Along with funds donated by the Atlanta Woman’s Club (AWC) and several wealthy benefactors, the AFKA opened its second school (the first under Black’s presidency) in November 1896 on Willard Street. A third school opened in 1897 on North Avenue. The AFKA raised operating funds for the schools through membership dues, Christmas appeals, and charity “entertainments” such as balls, musicals, and dinners. Once again utilizing her social prominence, motherly authority, and network of organized women, Black organized creative and effective fund raising campaigns throughout her tenure as president. When she was hospitalized with pneumonia Black requested that no one send her flowers as they were “such a waste of money when there is so much need in the world.” She received instead numerous notes of appreciation and monetary donations for the kindergartens. One friend wrote that “St. Nellie for her goodness finds her flowers changed to

²⁴According to an unpublished history of the AFKA, the original organizer was Mrs. Z. Adams Cutler. “History of the Free Kindergarten Association of Atlanta”, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 1. Northern was identified with many charitable and religious causes, several of which NPB was also associated. For information about Northern, see James F. Cook, *The Governors of Georgia, 1754-1995*, Revised and expanded ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 178-80.

²⁵Virginia Griggs Perry, “The Life of Nellie Peters Black” (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Georgia, 1945), 25.

²⁶Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South*, 193-94.

dollars, to make the Free Kindergarten blossom like the rose.”²⁷ Within two years of its inception, the AFKA was affiliated with the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC). This alliance brought not only additional support, but also increased publicity. Nellie Black’s personal prestige also helped garner funds for the AFKA. When she broadcast the AFKA’s need for financial help to local newspapers, they published editorial pieces that praised Atlantans for their endorsement of the AFKA, but also reminded them that “what the kindergarten needs is money in the treasury. . .”²⁸

Answering critics that identified kindergartens as merely another form of charity for the poor, Nellie Black argued that the practical work of the schools was to teach students to help themselves. She claimed that the kindergarten classes would “implant noble thoughts and moral traits before the powers of evil [could] exert their influence” over the child.²⁹ Indicative of her interest in agriculture, Black sometimes explained the purpose of kindergarten training through agrarian metaphors. She argued that “a farmer will tell you not to plant seeds until the soil is well prepared.” The AFKA kindergartens were not affiliated with any particular religious denomination, but teachers stressed Christian values in their lessons to the children. In the eyes of social gospelers like Black, such values would instill in the children a sense of right and wrong and insure future good citizens. According to Black, “each child whose mind is filled with a pure, true ideal of manhood and womanhood becomes a bright and living power for good directly to some other human being as the years go by.” She also warned that “one vicious, evil-

²⁷History of the Free Kindergarten Association of Atlanta, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 1.

²⁸“Something For The Children,” BRO 1903 S6, Hargrett Library Broadside Collection, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, electronic version, <http://www.libs.uga.edu/hargrett/rarebook/broadside/index.html>, Feb. 2007.

²⁹Report of the President, Annual Meeting, Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association, April 25th, 1910, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 2.

minded boy or girl in a neighborhood will disrupt peace and joy in hundreds of homes.”³⁰ It is obvious that Black perceived her work in the kindergarten movement as a fulfillment of her Christian duty. She defended her support of kindergartens by quoting the “greatest friend humanity as ever known: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these little ones, ye have done it unto me.’”³¹

In addition to providing financial support for the schools, the AFKA also supported a school that trained teachers in Froebel’s methodology of early childhood education. The white student-teachers at Willette Allen’s Atlanta Kindergarten Normal School not only learned Froebel’s methods, they also studied physical health and a variety of scientific methods in childhood development. After completing the rigorous curriculum and receiving a diploma from the school, the “kindergartners” were placed in either Willette Allen’s kindergarten or one of the schools sponsored by the AFKA or a church auxiliary.³² The course work, along with practical experience in community service, prepared them not only to teach kindergarten, but also to serve the students’ families as informal social workers. Early in the movement, Black noted that the teachers had taken on “settlement work quite similar to that of Miss Jane Addams. . .”³³ In addition to their regular school day duties, kindergartners offered after-school story hours, as

³⁰Report of the President, Annual Meeting, Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association, April 28th, 1908, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 2.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²The trained teachers were known as “kindergartners.” African-American kindergarten teachers were trained at the education department of Spelman College. In 1897 the Atlanta Kindergarten Normal School received a charter from Fulton County for a period of twenty years. Petition, Superior Court of Fulton County, MSS 389, box 1, folder 3. Willette Allen was a Ohio native who, after moving to Georgia, became one of the guiding forces in the state’s kindergarten movement. For information on Allen and her school, see Rebecca Montgomery, *The Politics of Education*, 188-90; and Sarah Mercer Judson, “Building the New South City: African American and White Clubwomen in Atlanta, 1895-1930,” (Ph.D. diss. New York University, 1997), 298-301.

³³Report of the President, Annual Meeting, Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association, April 28th, 1908, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 2.

well as sewing and cooking lessons for older children. Members of the AFKA viewed the kindergartens as centers of the community where both children and their parents could benefit from educational opportunities. Kindergarten teachers supervised regular medical clinics, organized “mothers clubs,” and visited the homes of their students. Nellie Black explained their motivation: “through the door of the kindergarten we enter the homes of the little ones and extend the influence of our love of law which strives to raise the standard of future citizenship through raising the standards of parenthood.”³⁴ Theoretically, the help of professionally-trained kindergarten teachers (most of whom did not have children of their own) would enable mothers of kindergarten students to more fully comprehend their own roles. One mother reportedly claimed that, before becoming involved in her child’s kindergarten experience, she never “realized that motherhood was really a sacred trust, meaning something more than food for hungry mouths and clothes for bare limbs.” In terms of “character building,” Black claimed that “loving, patient, well-trained teachers” were actually more effective than the “tired, nervous mother who has a thousand other duties to require her care.”³⁵ Such a statement seems to lend credence to the assertion that the kindergarten movement was another form of social control exercised by progressive reformers. It is also telling that when Black became chair of the reform committee of the GFWC in 1896, she assumed responsibility for the free kindergarten movement rather than place it under the auspices of the education committee.³⁶ However, the fact that Black and other kindergarten advocates always stressed the benefits to the individual child over those reaped by the community indicates that they perceived kindergartens first and foremost as

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵“Georgia Club Bulletin,” NPB Papers, box 9, folder 2.

³⁶Croly, *The History of the Woman’s Club Movement in America*, 360.

a means through which to develop happy and healthy youngsters who would subsequently make good citizens. As if to provide proof that the rewards of good citizenship could be reaped early, Black proudly claimed that mothers of kindergarten students reported that their children “no longer fussed and quarreled like they used to . . .” and “they never leave the house until their face and hands are perfectly clean.”³⁷

In 1899 the Free Kindergarten Association opened another school to serve the children of mill workers. Located at the Atlanta Woolen Mills, the kindergarten also sponsored clubs and activities for the older siblings of the kindergarten students. A similar school opened at the Exposition Cotton Mills in 1902.³⁸ Mill schools, even more so than the other kindergartens, served as community centers. The AFKA’s work in the mill districts of Atlanta was representative of the nationwide interest of organized women in child labor issues. Like the General Federation of Womens Clubs, both the AWC and the GFWC had committees or departments that investigated the various abuses of children within industrial communities; whether they be linked to lack of education, impoverished living conditions, or child labor. These committees joined with national and state-level organizations such as the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) and the Georgia Child Labor Committee in an attempt to force legislators to pass child labor reform bills, as well a compulsory education bill to ensure that children were attending school, not working in a mill. Quoting the Presbyterian minister and child labor reformer Alexander McKelway, historian William Link noted that “schools and mills were in direct competition for the attention of the child in a struggle . . . that was not unlike ‘the

³⁷Report of the President, Annual Meeting, Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association, April 25th, 1910, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 2.

³⁸“History of Free Kindergarten As Told By Mrs. Rucker,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 February 1924, B7.

battle between Satan and the Archangel for the body of Moses - the one for its deeper burial, the other for its lifting into larger life.”³⁹

While there was little doubt that child labor abuses were particularly pervasive in Georgia, achieving support for reform legislation - especially a compulsory statewide education bill - proved to be a complex undertaking because of the various interests involved.⁴⁰ Although most of the mills provided financial support for the schools, they undoubtedly did so to garner good public relations within the city. Politicians and boosters had to be careful not to alienate mill owners and operators, as did the kindergartners and more conservative reformers who realized that without funding (regardless of the motivation behind it) from either the mills or city government, some schools might have to close. Diplomatic in his early attempts to reform labor practices at southern mills, Episcopal priest and child labor reformer Edgar Gardner Murphy was careful not to question the moral integrity of the mill owners or their motivation to employ children.⁴¹ Even Jane Addams, when she addressed an Associated Charities conference in Atlanta in 1907, did not mention the mills when she applauded the efforts of Atlantans to push a compulsory education bill through the legislature.⁴² While the GFWC publicly commended Georgia mill owners for agreeing amongst themselves not to employ children under twelve, the

³⁹William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 168.

⁴⁰Montgomery, *The Politics of Education*, 185-230. A statewide compulsory school attendance bill was also unpopular in some rural areas, as farmers did not want to be forced to give up the labor of their children to the classroom during harvest time.

⁴¹Murphy focused more on the societal implications of an uneducated populace. Edgar Gardner Murphy, *Problems of the Present South; a discussion of certain of the educational, industrial, and political issues in the Southern States* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910). For biographical information on Murphy, see Hugh C. Bailey, *Edgar Gardner Murphy: Gentle Progressive* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1968). For a more critical assessment of Murphy's "theological liberalism and social conservatism," see Ralph Luker, *A Southern Tradition in Theology and Social Criticism, 1830-1930. The Religious Liberalism and Social Conservatism of James Warley Miles, William Porcher DuBoise and Edgar Gardner Murphy* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1984).

⁴²“Jane Addams Speaks to Immense Audience,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 November 1907.

clubwomen also saw the agreement for what it was - a way to forestall protective legislation.⁴³

Always pragmatic, Black understood that the support of the mills was vital to both the kindergarten movement and the economy of the New South. In a report to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1904, Black defended her “friends” at the mill

In my work for the little children, as president of the kindergarten association, I have found that the best field for our work lies in the mill section. Charity means love. . . I am afraid you are going away from here without as much love and charity towards the mill owners of the south as I feel that you ought to have. Therefore my loyalty to my friends among those mill owners makes me say a word on that side. I happen to know many mill owners and there was never a nobler set of people in any nation or who give a more paternal - I use the word advisedly - oversight to their operatives, than you will find among our mill owners. I am glad to say this because it is a fact. I know mill owners who have established fine schools, churches, and in some cases they pay for carrying on kindergartens. In Atlanta we have a beautiful kindergarten room at the Exposition cotton mill with an excellent teacher and I have never seen children happier than they are under her care . . . I beg when you go back to your homes you will not think that our mill owners are trying to devour every little child on whom they can lay their hands.⁴⁴

Nellie Black was defending not only “friends,” but also family. Her father, Richard Peters, was one of the founding board members of the Exposition Cotton Mills (1882) and some of Black’s income from the Peters Land Company was derived from mill stock dividends.⁴⁵ Her paternalistic defense of the mill owners was undoubtedly a reaction to the scathing criticisms of northern-based journalists and reformers who accused white southerners of being “indifferent” to

⁴³Mrs. A. O. Granger, “The Work of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs Against Child Labor” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 25 (May, 1905): 102-07.

⁴⁴*Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings*, 1904, p. 305, electronic version, <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/>, Feb. 2007. In addition, many of the clubwomen involved in the kindergarten movement (including Nellie Peters Black) had financial and personal ties to the mills.

⁴⁵Walter G. Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County* (Atlanta: Walter W. Brown Publishing Co., 1934), 319. Records for the Peters Land Company from 1884-1891 reveal that monthly disbursements were made to all of Richard Peters children and that company revenue was generated in part from stock dividends paid by various Atlanta banks and companies, including at least one cotton mill. Company records, The Peters Land Company, MSS # 170, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

an industrial system that condoned the “murder of the innocents.”⁴⁶ Black argued that the environment outside of the mill was more dangerous to the children than the work inside of the mill. She appealed to the members of the Charities Conference to

Think of the poor little children who are outside of the cotton mills, so many of whom have a worse time than those in the cotton mills. We must improve the condition of our babies, our little children, for it is with the little children that rests the future of our country.⁴⁷

Black’s comments not only reflect her focus on kindergarten age children, but also indicate that she was either not aware of or chose to ignore the young age of many of the children working in the mills. Although labor statistics from the United States Census (1907) revealed that 57.5 percent of children working in southern mills were between the ages of ten and thirteen, unknown numbers of younger children also worked in the mills taking meals to family members or operating machinery.⁴⁸ Both mill owners and mill families were guilty of ignoring the legal prohibition of child labor under the age of ten. Mill operators often needed additional labor and mill families either needed the extra income or wanted their families to stay together. There were clearly many sides to the complex child labor issue and paternalistic reformers like Nellie Black and her fellow kindergartners and clubwomen had to be careful not

⁴⁶Southerners were particularly outraged by fellow Georgian Clare de Graffenreid’s article that exposed the living conditions of the mill workers in Georgia. See de Graffenreid, “The Georgia Cracker in the Cotton Mills,” *Century Magazine*, XLI (Feb., 1891):483-98. For a thorough analysis of her criticisms, see LeeAnn Whites, “The De Graffenreid Controversy: Class, Race, and Gender in the New South,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 54, 3 (Aug., 1988): 449-78.

⁴⁷*Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings*, 1904, p. 305, electronic version, <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/>.

⁴⁸Census statistics cited in C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1971), 416. See also Chen-Han Chen, “Regional Differences in Costs and Productivity in the American Cotton Manufacturing Industry, 1880-1910” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 55, 4 (Aug., 1941): 533-566. Chen’s article is a thorough comparative analysis of the mills in New England and the South. According to Chen, children were employed in the mills primarily as: ring spinners, doffers, weavers, spoolers, and scrubbers (549).

to entangle themselves too deeply into the controversy lest they risk losing ground in their struggle for educational reform.

The AFKA found that their plans to branch out and serve white children throughout the city required more funding than could be raised from private sources. When critics balked at the high cost of kindergarten education, Nellie Black asked: “Does it not pay in the long run to pull away the rocks and rubbish and let a poor stunted oak become a splendid, majestic tree?”⁴⁹ Although impossible to put a monetary value on “saving a soul,” Black had to try in order to obtain public funding. Supported by the AWC, Nellie Black approached the Atlanta City Council in 1897 for funding for the AFKA. School board members (Judge John T. Pendleton in particular) voiced opposition for the public funding of early childhood education, which they perceived as charity. Black publicly responded to Pendleton’s criticisms in a newspaper article

I have been involved in charitable work for the past 28 years of the the most practical kind, and the conclusion in my mind is that the true and real work of charity is to teach people to help themselves. The kindergarten work covers this ground . . . I am sure that when Colonel Pendleton consents to go with me and sees the development of my little flock of 114 little ones he will be converted from his prejudiced opinions.⁵⁰

It is not known whether or not Pendleton ever accompanied Black on a tour of the kindergartens, but several years passed before the city government finally agreed to support the AFKA. In 1908 the City Council of Atlanta began subsidizing the AFKA, with a modest monthly allotment of \$50. The council steadily raised its level of support as the number of kindergartens increased.⁵¹

⁴⁹Nellie Peters Black, “Results of Kindergarten Work As Seen in the Public Schools” newspaper clipping, n.d. (“1904?”), Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁵⁰“History of Free Kindergarten As Told By Mrs. Rucker,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 February 1924.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

In keeping with the prevailing racial customs of the age, the kindergarten movement in Atlanta was segregated according to race. Black clubwomen, who held many of the same ideas about citizenship as white clubwomen, sponsored their own kindergartens. However, their movement to create kindergartens for African-American children in Atlanta sprang from a different source than the Cotton States International Exposition. Beginning in 1896, Atlanta University (under the direction of W. E. B. DuBois) instituted a series of studies of the social conditions for African Americans throughout the United States. The studies found that in most African-American neighborhoods (including those in Atlanta) children grew up in an atmosphere of fear and neglect created by slum-like physical environments, absent fathers, and working mothers. Not only did black clubwomen seek to create good citizens, but they also perceived kindergartens as a possible remedy for the high mortality rates of their race. Created in 1905 by black clubwomen to provide free kindergartens for African-American children, the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association (GCFKA) opened its first school in 1908.⁵² Despite support from a variety of sources including churches and private philanthropists (including insurance financier Alonzo Herndon), the GCFKA had fewer funds to work with than did the AFKA. In her capacity as both AFKA president and chairman of the kindergarten department for the GFWC, Nellie Black supported the educational efforts of African-Americans. While she in no way suggested that blacks and whites should have equal opportunities for education, Black did publicly support African Americans' efforts to increase their opportunities for education. For her "interest in the work of the colored children at Atlanta University," Black was recognized by the National

⁵²For information on the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association (GCFKA), see: Jacqueline A. Rouse, "Atlanta's African-American Women's Attack on Segregation, 1900-1920" in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991): 10-23; Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South*, 203-06; and an unpublished history of the GCFKA "The Story of the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association," Neighborhood Union Collection, box 12, folder 25, Special Collections, Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center.

Association for the Promotion of Kindergarten Education.⁵³ In another show of support for African-American education, Black made a motion for the GFWC to “endorse the movement of the Ex-Slaves Memorial School, planned to give better education to the children of ex-slaves.”⁵⁴

Nellie Black was so influential and well-known to Atlantans that if she recommended worthy causes to newspaper editors, they usually devoted some space in their papers for her cause. In 1913, her public support of Willie Dickerson Rush’s attempts to help “negro children make decent and law-abiding citizens” earned the African-American kindergarten teacher and preacher’s wife space in *The Constitution* to describe living conditions in black neighborhoods. In the article, Rush detailed the mix of homes filled with both “vice and immorality” and “poor but honest” inhabitants. Exploiting Nellie Black’s honorable intention to help Rush, the paper’s editor took the opportunity to warn white Atlantans that “by ignoring this *Jungle* at our backdoor we are in effect maintaining an incubator of disease and crime, the products of which will prey upon our own people in money, life, health, and property.”⁵⁵ Black’s support of the kindergarten movement can be attributed more directly to her sense of Christian duty than ideas for economic reform, as social gospelers maintained that the latter would eventually flow from the former. She could, however, at times play the economic threat card if necessary to garner support. Often in her public speeches she stressed that “the growth and prosperity of Atlanta depended upon finding the “the proper solution” to educational difficulties.⁵⁶

⁵³Geraldine O’Grady to NPB, NPB Papers, box 6, folder 2.

⁵⁴NPB offered this resolution at an annual meeting. Although the resolution was adopted, no evidence could be found that the school ever came to fruition. *Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs Yearbook, 1916-1917* (Atlanta: GFWC, 1917), 5.

⁵⁵The two articles referred to appeared on the editorial page, separated by a mere three columns. Both were entitled “In Atlanta’s Jungle,” *The Constitution*, 28 May 1913.

⁵⁶At times, however, the newspapers did not reprint the entire speech and manipulated selective quotes that gave a false impression of the message that Black was really conveying. In April 1915, Black delivered a speech at the

Even though the push for public kindergartens originated as a class-based reform movement, municipal governments eventually recognized their social and educational value. The AFKA disbanded in 1923 when the Atlanta Board of Education added kindergartens to the public school system.⁵⁷ Acceptance on the state level came much slower. The GFWC fought for decades to get a permissive kindergarten bill passed in the Georgia legislature, but the state of Georgia did not institute a statewide public kindergarten program until 1979.

Increasing Educational Opportunities Throughout Georgia

As early as 1897, Black argued that kindergartens would help pave the way for increased educational opportunities for females. In a report to the GFWC she stated: “The [kindergarten] system prepares the way for the higher education of woman because it arouses the ambition of the child, it makes the little one anxious to learn, then follows the public school, then the great desire to explore still further heights of knowledge.”⁵⁸ Even though she did not live to see state-funded kindergartens, Black remained an ardent advocate for the higher education of women. On more than one occasion, she and other prominent members of the GFWC lobbied the state legislature for the admission of women to the University of Georgia, as well as to the Georgia Bar Association. Although women had been allowed to attend classes at the University of

Universalist Church in which she praised the progress made in education and attributed it to the “feminization” of the city. Two days later the *Atlanta Constitution*, recapped some of Black’s remarks, leaving out the praise for women and exaggerated her fears for the economic future of Atlanta. See “Atlanta’s Future At Stake,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 April 1915, 7. See also “Need of Good Schools Is Stressed At Universalist Church Meeting,” 26 April 1915, 3.

⁵⁷Sarah Mercer Judson, “Cultivating Citizenship in the Kindergartens of Atlanta, 1890s-1920s” *Atlanta History* 41, 4 (1998): 17-30. Judson explains the beginnings of the movement in both the black and white communities. Black club women established the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association in 1905.

⁵⁸“Five Phases of the Educational Problem,” *The Constitution*, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 November 1897.

Georgia beginning in 1911, they were not admitted as full-time students until 1919.⁵⁹ It was with great pleasure and pride that Black announced in her GFWC presidential address that year that “at last the doors of the State University have been opened wide to women” and that in September “brainy, ambitious women would finally enter the great institution of learning side by side with the men.”⁶⁰

In addition to the kindergarten movement and the campaign to get women admitted to the University of Georgia, Nellie Black and the GFWC worked to increase access to education for Georgia’s rural inhabitants. After having surveyed the state, the GFWC found that thirty-two percent of all school-age children in Georgia did not attend school and many of those between the ages of eight and fourteen had to work to help support their families. Concluding that “industrial education” would benefit these children more than traditional academics, the GFWC established “model” schools in Madison and Floyd counties and then created the Southern Mountain Educational Association to provide continued financial support.⁶¹ The Federation’s crowning achievement, however, was the establishment of a school to benefit the children living in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of north Georgia. As some of the GFWC members had summer homes in the area, the clubwomen knew of the poverty and isolation experienced by mountain families and that educational opportunities for these children were virtually nonexistent. The GFWC’s motivation for creating the school was characteristic of the trend of southern social gospelers to render assistance to poor whites before aiding African Americans.

⁵⁹Kenneth Coleman, *History of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 328. For information on the movement to admit women to the University of Georgia, see Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South*, 48-53.

⁶⁰*Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs Yearbook, 1918-1919* (Atlanta: GFWC, 1919), 12. Unfortunately Black did not live to see the women “enter the great institution of learning.” She died in August 1919.

⁶¹Carol Stevens Hancock, *The Light in the Mountains: The Story of Tallulah Falls School* (Toccoa, GA: Commercial Printing Company, 1975, 1990), xi-xii.

Race was always a factor in southern reform efforts and white clubwomen deemed the mountaineers worthy of their help because of a shared heritage. They liked to believe that “in the veins of the Blue Ridge Mountains runs the purest Anglo-Saxon blood in America.”⁶² In a report to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections Nellie Black espoused the virtues of the mountaineers

There are no people more honest, more noble, than are the mountain people of Northern Georgia, the so-called ‘crackers.’ I want you to take what you read about them in the papers with a grain of salt. If you knew them you would love them as I do.⁶³

Black was no doubt defending the mountain folk against the criticisms waged by reformers who focused on the paternalistic practices of the mill owners who supposedly employed the mountaineers.⁶⁴ As historian Darlene Rebecca Roth noted, the rural schools supported by the GFWC were paternalistic in that they enabled the clubwomen to ignore the issue of race, while keeping the poor white students “at a respectful, *thankful*, distance from their benefactors.”⁶⁵ Like Country Life reformers, the GFWC also viewed the school as a way to slow the gradual shift of rural inhabitants to the cities. Their goal was to “first prepare, then encourage the country boy and girl to stay at home and make a living - to make homes for

⁶²Vera Connelly, “The Light in the Mountains,” n.d., Heyward-Hawkins Collection, Mss. 1278, folder 24, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

⁶³*Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings*, 1904, p. 305, electronic version, <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/>, Feb. 2007.

⁶⁴See de Graffenreid, “The Georgia Cracker in the Cotton Mills,” *Century Magazine*, XLI (Feb., 1891):483-98. In actuality, the number of poor mountain whites employed in the mills has been exaggerated. See Chen-Han Chen, “Regional Differences in Costs and Productivity in the American Cotton Manufacturing Industry, 1880-1910,” 546. Chen argues that due to the poor soil quality of the Piedmont region where many southern mills were located, families from the unsuccessful lowland farms surrounding the cotton mills supplied much of the labor.

⁶⁵While Roth acknowledges that “. . . the schools were an honest attempt to meet great educational needs in a grossly illiterate part of the country,” she is critical of what she perceives as the clubwomen’s “aggressive reinforcement of the status quo.” See Roth, *Matronage: Patterns in Women’s Organizations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1940* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc.), 119. In contrast to Roth, Rebecca Montgomery argues that the clubwomen perceived the patriarchy of the highland home as a central problem and the creation of a more egalitarian family relationship as a solution.” See Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South*, 171.

themselves among their own people, to elevate the moral and social conditions of the entire community, in fact to become real home missionaries.”⁶⁶ Similar to their intentions for the kindergartens they sponsored, the clubwomen planned for the mountain school to become a type of community center and a catalyst for rural uplift.

In 1909, four years after initiating the project, the GFWC opened the doors of the Tallulah Falls Industrial School in Rabun County to twenty-two students and one teacher. By the time the school term ended in December of that year, student enrollment had increased to sixty-six boys and girls. Adhering to an education philosophy similar to Booker T. Washington’s, the clubwomen planned a “practical” curriculum that included industrial training, as well as academic courses. Along with academic classes, students could study basketry, sewing, cooking, drawing, and gardening. A few years later, several more sophisticated courses were added to the curriculum, including spinning and weaving, knitting, wood working, cabinetry, carpentry, furniture making, cement and concrete construction, shoe repair, textiles, laundering, sewing, crocheting, domestic science, and gardening and horticulture.⁶⁷

Because of the GFWCs effective publicity campaign, the Tallulah Falls School (TFS) attracted much attention and became known as “the Light in the Mountains.” The GFWC not only established the TFS, they also created a scholarship fund for students and formed a board of directors to administer the school. Due in part to the 1915 compulsory school attendance bill and the addition of boarding facilities at the school, TFS enrollment had increased to ninety-six students by 1915. Increased enrollment brought increased expenses. By 1917 the monthly expenses of the school came to \$250, an amount not covered by the donations from the clubs. In

⁶⁶Hancock, *The Light in the Mountains*, 20-21.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 16-44.

a move to increase the amount of pledges from individual clubs, GFWC district presidents were placed on the TFS board of trustees.⁶⁸ As president of the GFWC, Nellie Black had to constantly remind each district to fulfill its financial commitment to the school. In 1918 she appealed to the maternal instincts of district presidents: “First and foremost comes your own Tallulah Falls School, your very own child with her doors open to any district where a scholarship would prepare the way for a worthy pupil to enter.” She then applauded the districts where individual clubs had made “it a business to encourage and help the rural teachers.”⁶⁹ With the continued support of the GFWC, the Tallulah Falls School survived its lean financial times. Today the GFWC takes great pride in the fact that the TFS is the only boarding school in the United States owned and maintained by women’s clubs.

The concept of republican motherhood had turned mothers into teachers and the clubwomen involved in the kindergarten and rural education movements had turned teachers into mothers. Nellie Black’s work for the AFKA and the GFWC signified her maternalistic belief that educated clubwomen were duty-bound to serve as surrogate mothers to the community at large. Maternalism and its corresponding network of “matronage” (the organizational framework within which Nellie Black operated) explains how she accomplished her reform goals.⁷⁰ However, as Kathryn Kish Sklar has argued, maternalism as a historical paradigm cannot fully account for the motivation of Protestant women reformers like Black; nor can it

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹“Report of the President,” *Yearbook, Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs, 1918-1919* (Atlanta: GFWC, 1919), 11.

⁷⁰“Matronage” is a term coined by Darlene Rebecca Roth to specifically describe the network within which NPB operated. Roth defines “matronage” as the exercise of matronly attributes within “institutional settings.” See Roth, *Matronage*, 6-7 and 73-98. For a more thorough explanation of how the term applies to NPB, see chapter six of this dissertation.

serve as the only source of their moral authority. In Black's case, adherence to the social gospel both motivated her secular activism and "legitimized her challenges to the status quo."⁷¹

The desire of clubwomen to expand their domestic authority and serve as communal mothers was also evident in their municipal housekeeping campaigns. Educated citizens not only deserved to live in, but would by virtue of their education help create clean, healthy, and righteous cities. The next chapter examines how Nellie Black endeavored to make Atlanta such a city and how she carefully wove social gospel ideology and religious rhetoric into her secular activism.⁷²

⁷¹ Sklar takes issue with historians who continue to use maternalism as an historical paradigm to define Protestant women's activism during the Progressive era. She argues that maternalism "allows historians to recognize the 'morality' contained within Protestant women's reform energies without recognizing the religious roots and religious power of that morality." Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Protestant Women & Social Justice Activism, 1890-1920" Plenary Address, Women & Twentieth-Century Protestantism Conference, Chicago, April 1998. Electronic text available at <http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/Women/sklaressy99.html>. Other historians have also taken issue with the use of maternalism as a historical paradigm. See Jennifer Frost, "Maternalism and Its Discontents" *Gender & History* 13, 1 (April, 2001): 167-71.

⁷² Katherine Sklar noted that women like Black attached to their work "the transformative meaning and power of religion, of Christlike behavior." See Sklar, "Protestant Women & Social Justice Activism, 1890-1920."

WEEKLY MEETING OF THE TUESDAY'S LADIES' CLUB

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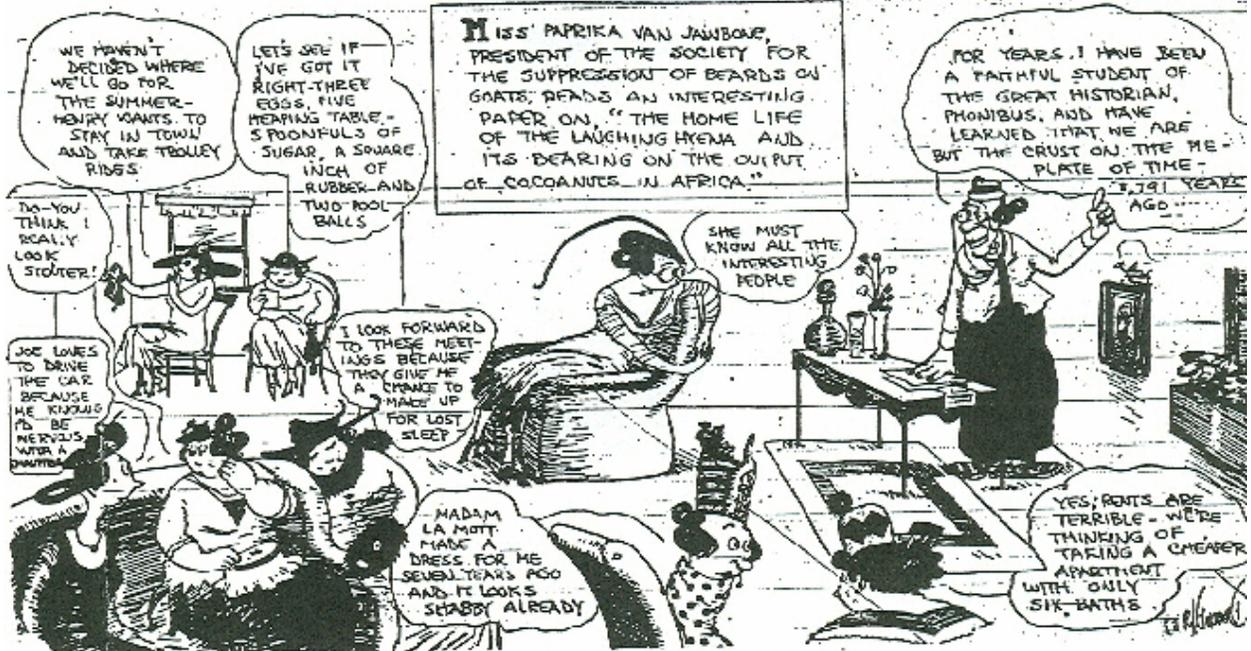


Figure 5-1. Savannah Morning News, 15 May 1917.

CHAPTER 6 CREATING THE “GOOD” CITY: THE POLITICS OF MUNICIPAL HOUSEKEEPING

Though Nellie Peters Black had been away from Atlanta less than ten years, the city her father helped create had increased dramatically in size and population during her time in south Georgia. By the mid-1880s, electricity lit the city and ran the streetcars, some carrying passengers out to the new suburbs. With miles and miles of paved streets, Atlantans no longer had to stroll through mud or dust. Blessed with accessible rail lines, cheap and abundant labor, and a business-friendly political environment, Atlanta witnessed an economic and commercial boom in the 1880s.¹ It was an exciting time and place in which to live and progressive Atlantans, including Nellie Peters Black, were ready to show their city to the world.

The Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 demonstrated that Atlanta was truly a Gilded Age city. On the surface it appeared shiny and new, but on closer examination it was impoverished, disease-infested, and dirty. The crowds that flocked to Atlanta for the exposition strained the resources of the city and revealed major deficiencies in the city’s ability to deal with its increasing population, poverty, and disease. Both progressive reformers and business boosters in Atlanta realized that the economic development of not only Atlanta, but also the South in general depended upon addressing the city’s problems. Urban reformers, particularly those like Nellie Black who were influenced by the social gospel, viewed poverty and disease as problems linked to collective economic and social ills rather than the private sins

¹The Georgia Federation of Women’s Club (GFWC) defined “good” cities as those “that are run by public-spirited officials for the good of the citizens, and are, therefore, clean, beautiful, and economical.” In contrast, they defined “bad” cities as those “run by selfish politicians or grafters, and are, therefore, dirty, ugly, and wasteful.” See newsletter (n.d.), Department of Civics, Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, Nellie Peters Black Papers, Mss.#235, box 9, folder 1, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens (Hereafter cited as NPB Papers). For statistical information about Atlanta during this period, see Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, Vol. II (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1954). It is interesting to note that Nellie Peters Black’s (NPB) father, Richard Peters, owned the controlling interest in the Atlanta Street Railroad Company, the first streetcar company in Atlanta.

of individuals. As urban studies scholar Daphne Spain has noted, this “shift in emphasis from private troubles to public issues was characteristic of the shift from charity to the Social Gospel as the compelling model for urban change.”² Although organized women had to circumvent obstacles such as entrenched networks of political patronage and weak municipal governments, they initiated many of the changes taking place in the new “professionally managed cities” like Chicago and Atlanta. Within their voluntary organizations, white and black clubwomen were free from male domination to craft their personal and feminine vision of the “good” city - a city that would be organized and maintained much like their own clean and orderly homes.³ Because keeping the home clean had always been the responsibility of women, it seemed a natural transition for middle and upper-class women who were newly freed of their own domestic chores (thanks to an abundance of cheap servant labor at the beginning of the twentieth century) to take on “municipal housekeeping.”

Although on a much smaller scale, the challenges presented by the Exposition were the same as those faced daily by government officials and civic organizers in Atlanta. How can great numbers of people crowded together in an urban environment be kept safe, clean, efficient, and orderly? Organized women in Atlanta, as a direct result of their participation in the 1895

²Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 67.

³Maureen A. Flanagan, *Seeing With Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1-12. Although Flanagan focuses on organized women in Chicago, Atlanta women followed a similar pattern of female activism. In terms of municipal planning and city-development, many historians have found similarities between Chicago and Atlanta. However, David Goldfield argues that the economic development of southern cities was stymied by the reluctance of post-Reconstruction municipal governments in southern cities to take responsibility for social welfare problems. Goldfield attributes this reluctance in Atlanta to the dominant influence of rural immigrants who brought their “distinctive cultural baggage” (an evangelical focus on individual salvation) to the city. David R. Goldfield, “The Urban South: A Regional Framework,” *American Historical Review* 86, 5 (Dec., 1981): 1009-1034. In addition to Spain and Flanagan, for information on organized women and city-building see Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Not as much scholarship on women in Southern cities has been produced. An exception is Georgina Hickey’s thorough study of Atlanta. See Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890-1940* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003).

Exposition, crafted a municipal housekeeping agenda that answered that question and would eventually enable them to help define the cultural and social geography of the city.

The Cotton States and International Exposition

During the 1870s and early 1880s, Atlanta business leaders - later known as boosters - began to stage fairs and exhibitions to promote agricultural innovations and to advertise the region's commercial promise. Following the model established by the business class in northern cities, fair promoters shifted their emphasis to attract national and international attention to the economic possibilities of the region. Perceived by historian Don Doyle as "launching the New South movement," the International Cotton Exposition (1881) not only highlighted Georgia's ability to produce quality cotton, but also promoted the regional manufacture of textiles and sectional reconciliation. For two and a half months, visitors to the fair witnessed a full-blown "performance of the 'Atlanta Spirit.'"⁴

Following the example of her father Richard Peters, who had been one of the initial promoters of agricultural and promotional exhibitions in Atlanta, Nellie Black helped organize many fairs. Promoters and sponsors welcomed her involvement and that of her fellow clubwomen because it softened the crass business image of the fairs and lent an air of respectability, thereby increasing attendance by the general public.⁵ Nellie Black not only contributed financially to the Georgia State Fair of 1891 by purchasing shares of stock, but she also served as head of the Department of Fancy Work. Running notices in newspapers, she solicited "fancy work" (decorative needle work such as table linens, doilies and hand towels)

⁴Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, and Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 152 and 157.

⁵Richard Peters was a both board member and exhibitor at Atlanta's first agricultural fair in 1850. See Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 40-41. For information on the evolution of fairs and women's roles in them, see Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

from women all over the state. She then arranged the display and sale of the work at the fair. Black also contributed her own handiwork. Although women during the Victorian era were expected to be handy with a needle, there were some women in the North who protested the sexual division of labor and argued that it was “better to fold the hands than do useless fancy work.”⁶ Black rejected this way of thinking, choosing instead to view the “fancy work” as a socially acceptable and practical way for women and girls to make money.⁷ Historian Kathleen Sander contends that the sale of fancy work “countered the stigma of paid work” for women and made “self-help fashionable for the genteel poor.”⁸

Having been successful with the Expositions of 1881 and 1891, boosters planned a much larger and more elaborate event that would rival the 1893 International Columbian Exposition and World’s Fair in Chicago. On opening day in Piedmont Park, African-American educator

⁶Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier publishers, Inc., 1980), 50. According to Blair, these women also advocated the institution of a collective system of homemaking in which the various domestic chores would be divided between individual households, thereby making labor more efficient and cost-effective because not every home would have to invest in all necessary housekeeping equipment. On “fancy work,” see Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 2-3

⁷Years later, in 1915, NPB served as vice-president of the Emergency Association for Unemployed Women, a “temporary” organization that operated a workshop in the parish house of St. Philips Episcopal Cathedral where unemployed women could gather to produce “handiwork.” The Association supplied sewing machines and supplies, as well as warm meals and a safe place to work. It also arranged for an exhibit and sale of the women’s work at the Georgian Terrace Hotel. See “Energetic Work Accomplished Saturday at Meeting of Emergency Assembly,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 March 1915.

⁸Modeled after English and Scottish bazaars of the early nineteenth century, “fancy fairs” where women sold their handiwork for charity first appeared in the United States in 1830s. These fairs eventually developed into the Woman’s Exchange movement. See Kathleen Waters Sander, *The Business of Charity: The Woman’s Exchange Movement, 1832-1900* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 14 -27. The Atlanta Woman’s Club later instituted a department of Co-Operative Exchange to aid “the women in the rural districts through the disposal of their hand work - such as, tufted bedspreads, pillow slips, runners, card table sets, luncheon sets, baby clothes, aprons, handkerchiefs, woven rugs, hand made laces, and a great many hand painted novelties.” As with all forms of progressive rural uplift, there was an element of control involved as the clubwomen instructed the rural women “what to make and how to make it.” See *The Atlanta Woman’s Club Souvenir Book* (n.d.), Atlanta Woman’s Club (AWC), MSS# 353, box 1, folder 3, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta, Georgia (Hereafter cited as AHC). Regarding NPB has head of Fancy Work, see letter to NPB from Mrs. A. M. Grafton, 9 September 1901, box 2, file 8, NPB Papers. Georgia clubwomen continued for decades to encourage women and girls to pursue the “domestic arts” such as: weaving, lace-making, knitting, basketry, rug-making, bead-work, etc. “The object being to show that women and girls need not leave their homes to work.” Mrs. Wilmer Moore, “Report of Arts and Crafts,” Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, *Yearbook 1917-1918*, 57.

Booker T. Washington delivered his controversial “Atlanta Compromise” speech designed to demonstrate the supposed racial cooperation of the New South and set the progressive tone for the Exposition. Originally intended to highlight southern enterprise, the Exposition also brought the outside world to the South. Atlantans could view the Liberty Bell, hear a John Philip Sousa concert, and watch “living pictures” (early and primitive motion pictures). From October through December, the Exposition attracted over eight thousand visitors, including President Grover Cleveland, numerous state governors, entertainers, and foreign dignitaries. Reports of the activities appeared daily in local newspapers and, although always in a questionable financial state, Atlantans considered the 1895 Exposition a rousing success.⁹

In addition to providing a spotlight for the progressivism of the New South, the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 offered both white and (in a more limited sense) black women, the unique opportunity to interact with each other on a national and international level. Composed of the most socially-prominent and influential white women in Atlanta, members of the Board of Lady Managers included a professional educator, a journalist, a political activist, and several organizers of the woman’s club movement. Each woman was strategically placed in a position that would be best served by her expertise and experience. For example, journalist Maude Ohl chaired the press committee and Nettie Sergeant, the principal of Girl’s High, chaired the education committee. Political activist Rebecca Latimer Felton (the oldest member of the Board of Lady Managers) served as business manager and chairman of the

⁹For information about the 1881 Cotton Exposition, see Walter G. Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County* (Atlanta: Walter W. Brown Publishing Co., 1934), 301-05; and Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 152-58. For information about the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, see: Walter G. Cooper, *Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing Co., 1895); Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 418-19; Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition* (Atlanta, 1896); Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, Vol. II, 311-32; and Andy Ambrose, *Atlanta: An Illustrated History* (Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, 2003), 97-100.

executive committee. Because of her experience with social welfare causes, Nellie Peters Black chaired the hospital and charities committee.¹⁰

Like the Board of Lady Managers of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, Atlanta women planned their own building and raised most of the construction funds through various "entertainments" and bazaars. One particularly interesting project was the special "woman's edition" of the *Atlanta Journal*, for which the women wrote articles and aggressively sold advertisements. Their hard work paid off and the women raised \$4,000 for the building fund.¹¹ Also like their Chicago counterparts, the Atlanta Board of Lady Managers sponsored a national competition to select an architect to design the building which would "represent the delicacy of southern womanhood."¹² Submitted by a woman architect from Pittsburgh, the winning design reflected not only the traditional values held by the women, but also their increasingly significant role as the moral and social engineers of the New South. The completed women's building contained artistic and historical exhibits, meeting rooms, an assembly hall, a model school, demonstration kitchens, a library, science exhibits, and a hospital and day nursery. Although not included in the efforts of the white women, prominent African-American women also exhibited their work and highlighted their accomplishments inside the Negro Building, "the first building

¹⁰An analysis of the role of women in the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 can be found in Darlene R. Roth and Louise E. Shaw, *Atlanta Women: From Myth to Modern Times* (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1980), 24-32; and Darlene Rebecca Roth, *Matronage: Patterns in Women's Organizations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1940* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994). NPB also served as vice-chairman of the executive committee under Rebecca Felton.

¹¹For information about the "woman's edition," *Atlanta Journal*, 16 February 1895, see Walter G. Cooper, *The Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, Illustrated* (Atlanta: Illustrator Co., 1896), 52; and Ann Colbert, "Philanthropy in the Newsroom: Women's Editions of Newspapers, 1894-1896," *Journalism History* 22, 3 (1996): 90-99.

¹²Roth and Shaw, *Atlanta Women: From Myth to Modern Times*, 25.

at a world's fair to be dedicated to the 'life, character, and work of the Negro Race and its progress'."¹³

Nellie Black's previous experience with regional fairs served her well, but she had never undertaken anything on the scale of the 1895 Cotton States Exhibition. As chairman of the hospital and nursery committee, she was in charge of coordinating and staffing the first aid and childcare facilities located on the first floor of the woman's building. This undertaking required many volunteers who possessed a variety of abilities. Black organized 102 of the (primarily married) women she worked with in other organizations. Utilizing their vast social connections, these women not only raised the necessary funds, but also recruited volunteer doctors and nurses to oversee the clinic and procured most of the supplies for the facilities through donations. From merchants all over the country Black solicited cots, medicines, linens, quinine, soap, food, baby bottles, milk, and wine and whiskey (for medicinal purposes only). Workers at the clinic treated a variety of ailments and emergencies ranging from lost children to broken noses. In a post-exhibition newspaper interview, Black attributed the success of the hospital to the "Christian fortitude" of the dedicated workers who often "sang the doxology and repeated in unison the Lord's Prayer." She proudly proclaimed that "black and white Americans and foreigners alike came for relief from pain and were all cared for kindly and skillfully."¹⁴ Displaying

characteristic thrift and economy, she arranged to have all leftover supplies given to the group of

¹³*Ibid.*, 25. See also Roth, *Matronage*, 38-39. African-Americans played a significant role in securing federal funding for the fair. Bishop Gaines (Georgia), Bishop Grant (Texas), and Booker T. Washington spoke to the legislative committee on behalf of the Exposition and assured them that, unlike previous exhibitions, there would be a "Negro exhibit" at the Atlanta fair. Delegation members reported that this assurance had helped secure the appropriation. See Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 418-19; and Walter G. Cooper, "The Official History of the Exposition," *The Cotton States and International Exposition* (Atlanta, 1896), 18.

¹⁴The list of emergencies also contained burns, bruises, bear bites, broken noses, falls, insect stings, electric shocks, and "a severed finger." The following year, Black also served as Woman Commissioner of the State of Georgia to the Centennial Exposition of Tennessee. For a review of the work of NPB's committee, see "Was a Great Work," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 January 1896.

women (of which she was one) creating a children's ward at Grady Hospital.¹⁵ Through her work with the hospital and nursery committee of the Exposition, Nellie Black had fulfilled both her Christian mission to help others and her desire to "boost" Atlanta into the national spotlight.

The Atlanta Woman's Club

Encouraged by their success at the Cotton Exposition and thinking that they could utilize the woman's building as a meeting space, some members of the Lady Board of Managers (led by Rebecca Lowe) decided to "organize a body worthy of Atlanta's progressive and independent spirit."¹⁶ That same year, twenty-five "thinking women" from four women's clubs: the Georgia Women's Press Club, the Business Woman's Club, the Chautauqua Circle, and the History Class of Atlanta (including Nellie Peters Black) formed the Atlanta Woman's Club (AWC). Deeming it "a representative, but conservative association for the advancement of women," charter members agreed that they would be "broad minded" in approaching club issues, but they "opposed using sensational methods" in the "pursuit of culture and human advancement." Initially focused on self-improvement, AWC members were well-read in world history and interested in current events. Understanding the correlation between knowledge and power, the clubwomen delighted in the fact that "the sun never set on Queen Victoria's empire, Queen Wilhelmina sat on the throne in Holland, and the Empress Dowager Tuen-Tson-Hsi ruled China." Fellowship and social contact were important to the members, but they were also

¹⁵For a review of the work of NPB's committee, see "Was a Great Work," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 January 1896. The following year, Black also served as Woman Commissioner of the State of Georgia to the Centennial Exposition of Tennessee.

¹⁶Scrapbook, 1895, AWC, box 2, AHC. See also Mrs. J. Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement in America* (New York: H. G. Allen, 1898), 365-66.

determined “to prove to the world that women could mean even more in their homes by participating in the civic, philanthropic and legislative interests of their growing city ...”¹⁷

AWC members clearly perceived their mission as an expansion of the roles they had played in benevolent societies and the church, as well as the home. They deemed it their duty to first identify social deficiencies and then serve as “social regenerators.”¹⁸ To implement their work more efficiently, the AWC developed eight divisions of work: literature, art, science, education, philanthropy, the home, civics, and the businesswoman. Just as the Lady Board of Managers of the Exposition had done, they assigned duties according to interest, ability, and connections. These bureaucratic divisions represented the national and progressive trend toward the division of labor, domestic science, and municipal housekeeping.

Atlanta had many organizations and clubs for white women in the 1880s and 1890s, but no unified effort existed among the participants. In character with the prototypical clubwoman of the period, Nellie Black held membership in several of these organizations. She became what historian Rebecca Roth dubbed the “species clubwoman.” Although Black had always been involved in charitable endeavors and religious outreach, as a socially prominent widow with grown children, she had the time and resources to direct her mothering duties toward the community. Roth contends that these maternalistic mature clubwomen operated within the organizational system of “matronage,” a term which she acknowledges does not exist in dictionaries, but defines as “the exercise of matronly attributes within institutional settings.”¹⁹

Similar to how women in post-Revolutionary War America used the concept of “republican

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*, 365-66.

¹⁹Roth explains that she uses the term “matronage” to describe the “cultural phenomena” that she observed in her study of Atlanta women between 1890-1940. She makes no claim that it applies to women in general. Roth, *Matronage*, 6-7 and 73-98.

motherhood” to deflect male criticism away from their “meddling in political ideas,” Roth asserts that Atlanta matrons (she notes Black in particular) used maternalism (the authority associated with motherhood) to defend their newly formed organizations.²⁰ It became the foundation of their organizational behavior and the means through which they exerted influence within their communities. Consequently, as the language at the center of their discourse, maternalism also served as the “preserver-transmitter” of their cultural and racial values. Both white and black matrons were expected to join clubs that reflected these values. Described by Roth as “the quintessence of matronage,” Nellie Black assumed active roles in over twenty-five cultural, civic, benevolent, religious, and social organizations throughout her thirty-year career as a clubwoman, a career that did not begin in earnest until she was almost forty years old.²¹

Realizing the advantage of unification, Nellie Black and other influential clubwomen incorporated the AWC into the Atlanta Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1899. This affiliation of women’s clubs afforded the white clubwomen of Atlanta a considerable voice in civic affairs. Following the national trend of club organization, the Atlanta Federation of Women’s Clubs quickly joined the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC), created in 1896. Shortly thereafter, the GFWC affiliated with the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. Founded in 1868, the national federation claimed by the mid-1890s to have the greatest number of female members belonging to any single organization in the United States. Membership in these federations provided women throughout the country with access to an inter-connected and

²⁰On republican motherhood, see Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998), 146. See also Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

²¹Roth, *Matronage*, 43 and 73. Although NPB belonged to the obligatory heritage clubs (Colonial Dames of America, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Daughters of the Confederacy), she did not hold executive positions in them, choosing instead to focus on religious outreach and civic activism. NPB’s mature age at the height of her influence surely validates Roth’s theory of matronly authority. Her senior status accounts not only for her influence, but could also explain her reluctance to publicly support certain controversial causes, such as suffrage.

somewhat diverse network of women and an unprecedented amount of public influence, which they could use to institute their social welfare agenda.²²

Organizing for Charity

Following the Civil War, social welfare needs of southerners were primarily the responsibility of private charity. While that remained the case for a long time, the South (like the rest of the country) eventually came to understand that coordination between the charities and local and state governments could make the dispensing of relief much more efficient and effective. In 1873, reform-minded members of private charities and religious agencies organized the first National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC) to facilitate communication between various public and private relief agencies. Although the membership initially represented primarily the Northeast, within a few years southerners were attending the conferences.²³ Held in Atlanta, the 1903 NCCC helped bring southerners into a national dialogue about the most pressing social problems in the South and throughout the country. The local committee was composed of 120 men and 60 women. As president of the Atlanta City Federation of Women's Clubs, Nellie Black was appointed by Mayor Howell to serve as

²²A thorough study of the white women's club movement in Atlanta is Roth's, *Matronage*. See also Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*, 365-66. There are not as many studies of African-American clubwomen. Information on the national black clubwomen's movement can be found in: Lynda F. Dickson, "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 2 (1987): 62-68; and Anne Firor Scott, "Most Visible of All: Black Women's Voluntary Associations," *Journal of Southern History*, 56, 1 (Feb., 1990): 3-22. A comparative study of black and white women's approaches to social reform is Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *Journal of American History*, 78, 2 (Sept., 1991): 559-90. An interesting study of African-American women in Atlanta is Jacqueline A. Rouse, "Atlanta's African-American Women's Attack on Segregation, 1900-1920," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 10-23.

²³For information about the NCCC, see: Elizabeth Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to World War I* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 124-28; and *Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings* (electronic version, <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/>, Feb. 2007). Some southern states also followed the national trend and developed state boards of charity to help coordinate relief efforts. Georgia, however, was not one of them, even though the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs fought for the establishment of a board for many years.

chairman of the ladies' committee for the NCCC. In that capacity she was in charge of many of the local hospitality-oriented arrangements traditionally handled by women, such as receptions, entertainment, decorations, and refreshments. However, she used the position to obtain exposure for the various women's clubs throughout the city and also as a means to educate clubwomen about the conference issues, many of which were included in their club agendas.

It was no secret that many of the problems discussed at the conference were targeted specifically to the South, and Georgia in particular. Reformers came armed with criticisms for southern counterparts who had not been aggressive enough in their attempts to secure government intervention in certain controversial reforms, particularly those pertaining to child labor. The southern hosts were on the defensive from the first day of the conference. In his welcoming address, Joseph Turner, chairman of the Georgia Prison Commission, admitted that although "vice, poverty, ignorance, and crime" did exist in the state, such conditions had not "menaced society" because Georgia was still an agricultural state where children "are born and reared in the freedom of God's sunshine."²⁴ At the impressive Saturday night session, settlement house activist Jane Addams called for Georgia to end "child pauperism" by instituting and enforcing stricter child labor laws. Somewhat surprisingly, future Georgia governor Hoke Smith supported Addams's position because he claimed child labor legislation would help put an end to illiteracy. Taking a harsher stand, Episcopal priest and child labor reformer Edgar Gardner Murphy directly challenged the defenders of southern mill owners who perpetuated the "false humanitarian prejudice" that children were "better off in the mills than outside of them!" At a session two days later, the president of the GFWC, Mrs. A. O. Granger, claimed that Georgia's clubwomen were "in harmony with the mill owners" and supported a compulsory education bill

²⁴*Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings*, 1903, p. 454 (electronic version, <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text>).

rather than stricter child labor laws. Granger argued that, because “negro” children went to school while white children worked in the mills, the white race in Georgia was “weakening with every successive generation.”²⁵ Nellie Black was also compelled to speak out in defense of the mill owners. At the concluding session of the conference, she spoke about her “loyalty to her friends among the mill owners”

. . . I am afraid you are going away from here without as much love and charity towards the mill owners of the South as I feel you ought to have. I happen to know many mill owners and there was never a nobler set of people in any nation or who give a more paternal—I use the word advisedly—oversight to their operatives, than you will find among our mill owners . . . I know mill owners who have established fine schools, churches, and in some cases they pay for carrying on the kindergartens. . .²⁶

Black’s comments reveal her own paternalist, but pragmatic, attitudes regarding charity and reform. Although her plans for uplift were grounded in social gospel ideology, they depended upon the economic resurgence of the South. Many of the Atlantans attending the conference were receptive to the suggestions offered by the presenters, but they held firm on their positions regarding race and southern industry. Even fellow southerner Edgar Gardner Murphy, who had lambasted those who defended child labor in the mills, understood that “patriotism” in the post-Reconstruction South was characterized by an appreciation of “usefulness,” “efficiency,” “social fitness and economic value,” and “industrial power.”²⁷ Summarizing the accomplishments of the conference, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that the people of Atlanta “accepted with appreciation” the suggestions regarding “the betterment of penal and charitable institutions.”²⁸ No mention was made of the controversial child labor issue.

²⁵*Ibid.*: 114-20; 188-91; 127; and 543.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 305. This discussion of the struggle between industrialists and child labor reformers also appears in chapter five of this dissertation.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 133.

²⁸“Week of Work Brings an End to Conference,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May 1903.

In spite of the attention focused on the abuses of child labor in southern mills, Nellie Black told a post-conference meeting of 3,000 clubwomen in Atlanta that she believed the “greatest” reform measure to come out of the conference was the call for a state-provided probation officer for youth offenders.²⁹ Like the *Atlanta Constitution*, she did not call attention to the child labor issue.

While she may not have directly supported child labor legislation, Nellie Black did not ignore labor issues all together. In 1903, she used her position in the NCCC as a platform to speak out publicly against Atlanta’s “olfactory crusade” to “bar persons who carry odors” from the streetcars. The city council presented this campaign as an effort to clean up the city, but Black saw past the subterfuge and recognized it an obvious attempt to segregate poor and middle-class whites on public transportation. The ordinance defined “odors” as “the scents which emanate from persons who work in factories, especially those devoted to the manufacture of guano.” However, Black argued that the ordinance was so broadly framed that conductors would have the authority to eject from the streetcar anyone who emitted an odor that other passengers found offensive. Considering the proposed ordinance “an outrage on the workingman,” she appealed to the mayor to veto it.³⁰ Black made a bold statement against class prejudice

²⁹“Mrs. Black’s Address to Atlanta Women,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 May 1903. Black played such a significant role in the Atlanta meeting that she was elected to serve as one of the three vice-presidents (the only woman) for the 1904 NCCC, scheduled for Portland, Maine.

³⁰NPB could have been influenced by the discussion of labor issues within the church. The Episcopal Church in America had been interested in labor problems since the late 1870s. In 1901, it issued its first report of the Joint Commission on Relations of Capital and Labor that called for Episcopal clergy to study labor conflicts and serve as mediators when possible. A few years later, the Episcopal Church sided more openly with labor, claiming that the Church had a duty to uphold the moral aspect of labor over against a mere economic interest.” Robert F. Hood, *Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 73-75. See also Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 38-39.

Some people prefer the good honest guano odors to those that emanate from our belles and beaux, who are generally redolent of 'Violet du Czar,' 'White Rose,' 'Musk,' or 'Chypre'; the latter perfume is pronounced 'sheep,' and it smells like goats."³¹

Nellie Black was not alone in her protest against the ordinance. As it was primarily aimed at employees of the Armour and Swift fertilizer plants, the companies obtained legal counsel to suspend the ordinance. They argued that much of the millions of dollars in profits generated annually by their companies was spent throughout the city by the "numerous" Swift and Armour employees. If the workers could not get to work, the entire city would "suffer injury."³² There was, however, substantial support for the ordinance from both Atlanta citizens and towns around the state. The *Sparta News*, for example, declared the ordinance to be a "move in the right direction" that would hopefully soon "apply to railroad trains and even to streets."³³ Protests by Black and the fertilizer companies were not effective enough to persuade the mayor to veto the olfactory ordinance or the city council to modify it. Similar to municipal ordinances passed by Atlanta and other southern cities in 1900 that required the racial segregation of streetcars, the degree of enforcement of the olfactory ordinance would be left to the streetcar companies who were often intentionally negligent in their enforcement. Yielding to a variety of economic pressures, including threats of potential boycotts from "Negro" passengers and part of the transit companies, Atlanta streetcars exhibited "a flexible system of segregation," in which whites and blacks sat together in the both the rear smoking sections and middle seats" of the

³¹Black's comments regarding the streetcar problem even appeared in the *New York Times*. "An Olfactory Crusade" *New York Times* (14 May 1903).

³²"Car Ordinance Meets Protest," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 May 1903.

³³"Talks About Atlanta Ordinance," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 May 1903.

cars.³⁴ It was not until after the race riot of 1906 that both the city of Atlanta and the streetcar companies seriously enforced the ordinances.

Prior to the 1903 Atlanta meeting, Nellie Black had been a part of the NCCC in that she submitted reports on the availability of charity in Georgia. In 1900 she reported that “Atlanta has a very fine system of charities, which are supervised by women and are conducted on strictly modern principles.”³⁵ She was, however, overly optimistic when she described Atlanta’s charities as a “system.” Even though many individuals were involved in more than one of the city’s various charities, there was little coordination between the groups. That situation changed in 1905 when lawyer Joseph Clayton Logan and other charitable businessmen organized the Atlanta Associated Charities in an attempt to motivate and effectively coordinate social welfare activities in the city. Predecessor to the Community Chest and the United Way, Associated Charities was the most powerful charitable organization in Atlanta. It served as an umbrella organization for the dispensing of charitable funds from both philanthropic individuals and various groups such as the Rotary Club and the Order of Old Fashioned Women. The organization also advised the city on how to disburse what meager “municipal aid” was available. Associated Charities board members (including Nellie Black) also served on the boards of other groups, making fund raising efforts more effective and the dispensing of funds and services more efficient.³⁶ As their definition of charity was “Love--With Judgment,” the

³⁴August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, “The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906” *The Journal of American History*, 55, 4 (Mar., 1969): 758. See also Charles Crowe, “Racial Violence and Social Reform-Origins of the Atlanta Riot of 1906,” *Journal of Negro History*, LIII (July 1968): 245-46.

³⁵*Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings*, 1900, p. 305 (electronic version, [http:// www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/](http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/), Feb. 2007).

³⁶For information on Associated Charities, see: Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South*, 120-21; and Kendall Weisinger, “Joe Logan, Genius of Social Work in the South,” *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* V, I (Jan., 1939): 4-16. Associated Charities not only connected recipients with charity, but also served as a resource for the various charitable

organization doled out funds with discrimination and caution.³⁷ Black herself described Associated Charities as a “clearinghouse to sort the worthy from the unworthy who appeal for help.”³⁸

Long before the organization and consolidation of charitable efforts, Atlanta women had been concerned with municipal housekeeping and health reform. The clubwomen adopted a maternalistic approach to dealing with the problems associated with urban life brought about by intense poverty and over-crowding. Realizing the connection between poverty and disease and recognizing “the great need of children and adults in unfortunate circumstances,” three socially prominent Atlanta women founded the Home for the Friendless in 1888 “to care for the poor and destitute of all ages.”³⁹ The residents or “inmates” (as they were labeled) included homeless women with children and “waifs.” Although, the settlement house movement was not prevalent in the South, the Home for the Friendless operated very much like one. The Home encouraged self-sufficiency among the older children and mothers by providing education and suitable

organizations and the city. It published an annual directory of all of the philanthropic, social, and civic agencies in Atlanta.

³⁷“Associated Charities Bulletin” (July-August 1916), 1, Atlanta Lung Association (ALA), MSS#322, box 22, folder 3, AHC.

³⁸“In Atlanta’s Spirited Commercial War She Never Overlooked Her Charities,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 June 1913. Although Georgina Hickey correctly identified Associated Charities as “part of the growing trend toward ‘scientific charity,’” Joe Logan and other board members were influenced by the social gospel. See Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City*, 79. The attitude and actions of the Associated Charities demonstrates that the ideas underlying both the social gospel and scientific charity were not necessarily divergent of one another. Daphne Spain argues that charities inspired by the social gospel did not discriminate between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, but the attitude and actions of Associated Charities demonstrates that the contrary was true. See Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, 7-8. The following case note confirms that such charities believed that “God helps those who help themselves:” In the case note of Mrs. Hire, the morphine habitual, it was decided that the Ass. could not furnish medicine to people whose moral sense is so deadened that they will not carry out instructions and take precautions for protection of others; so the case will be dismissed from the list. Board Minutes, Associated Charities, 13 December 1910, ALA, box 2, folder 31, AHC.

³⁹These women were: Mrs. J. R. Averill, Mrs. E. P. McBurney, and Mrs. L. B. Nelson. See, Hillside Cottage Records, 1898-1974, MSS 657, AHC. The Home was an outgrowth of the Atlanta Benevolent Association, of which NP had been a member before she married and moved away. See E. Y. Clarke, *Illustrated History of Atlanta*, 1879 (Facsimile Reprint, Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing, 1971), 100-03. In 1929, the Home for the Friendless became Hillside Cottages.

employment opportunities. Childcare was provided so mothers could either go out into the community or work within the Home. As it was never intended to be an orphanage, board members of the Home stressed the need to get children placed in stable homes as soon as possible. When unwed mothers came under their care, board members often arranged for the adoption of their babies.

Although not a founding officer of the Home for the Friendless, Nellie Black served as vice president for many years, often presiding over the weekly board meetings when the president was absent. Even though the Home employed a nurse, Black was actively involved in the daily operations of the Home. Because of her public influence and tenacity, she proved to be a consummate fund raiser for the Home. Utilizing her vast contacts within the community, she managed to collect sizable donations from some of Atlanta's leading citizens and companies. One reason Black was so successful in her efforts was that she solicited donations for particular purposes such as additional laundry funding (so the residents could change their bed linens more often) and increased milk allotments. Black argued that each child should have at least one full cup at breakfast. Always thrifty, Black insisted that no resources at the Home (whether time, money, or material goods) be wasted. For example, when the children outgrew their clothing or it became damaged beyond repair, Black suggested that the fabric be cut into scraps and made into rugs. She even offered to attend to the weaving herself. To keep them out of trouble and provide extra money, Black arranged for the boys with spare time on their hands to create a garden plot, raise chickens, and sell the eggs. Black took a personal interest in the children, sometimes arranging summer visits to her farm in Gordon County and special events such as "candy pullings."⁴⁰ Such seemingly small, personalized measures indicate that the women who

⁴⁰Board minutes book, Hillside Cottage Records, box 1, AHC.

ran the Home for the Friendless truly wanted it to be like a real home where the children would learn responsibility, appreciate discipline, and experience the love of family.

Fighting Disease and the Great White Plague

As the concepts of poverty and disease were intricately linked during the Progressive period, social reformers in both the North and South turned their attention to public health issues. Like the earlier post-Civil War era “sanitarians” who called upon citizens to make “warfare against uncleanness,” progressives maintained that the health and well-being of the country depended upon the “cleanliness of its people.”⁴¹ According to one historian, the United States underwent a “great sanitary awakening” during the 1850s, and by 1890 had witnessed a “golden age of public health.” In actuality this characterization applies primarily to urban areas of the Northeast and Midwest. Due to various economic, political and social factors, the primarily rural, post-Civil War South lacked the resources necessary to effectively institute reform. Historian C. Vann Woodward argued that the South did not begin to experience an “awakening of a new era in public health” until 1906, the year when all southern states finally had state Boards of health and began establishing county health departments.⁴²

Southern reformers faced an uphill battle trying to persuade state and local leaders that government should accept responsibility for public health. Fearing national interference and preferring local control over such issues, Georgia, like most states in the post-Reconstruction South, was slow to establish a permanent state board of health. It finally did so in 1903, but

⁴¹The sanitation reform movement resulted from the effective programs of the Civil War-era United States Sanitary Commission. For an explanation of the relationship between sanitation reform and the City Beautiful movement, see Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 59.

⁴²See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; Louisiana Press and the Littlefield Fund for Southern History, The University of Texas, 1971), 425. See also C.E.A. Winslow, “The Evolution and Significance of the Modern Health Campaign,” *Health in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Arno Press, 1977, 1923).

intense regionalism and inadequate funding stymied its efforts.⁴³ Municipal boards of health fared no better than state-level efforts, particularly in Atlanta where the City Board of Health served primarily to advise the mayor and council in matters relating to public health and municipal services, such as the completion of the city's water and sewage system. With no significant leadership from city or state governments, the citizens of Atlanta were often left to rely on private charity to meet their healthcare needs.⁴⁴

As president of the Christian service organization the King's Daughters, Nellie Black was instrumental in organizing Atlanta's first "free" hospital in 1891. Many of the women involved in the King's Daughters Hospital formed the core of the Women's Auxiliary that helped establish Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta's first public hospital. Grady opened its doors in 1892 to both white and black patients. However, with only one hundred beds, its services were limited and it did not serve patients diagnosed with incurable diseases, such as tuberculosis.⁴⁵

Tuberculosis as a serious health threat emerged in the early twentieth-century South along with the progressive obsession with cleanliness, the social gospel mission to alleviate human suffering, and the emerging biological study of disease. During this period, the so-called

⁴³T. F. Abercrombie, *History of Public Health in Georgia, 1733-1950* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Department of Public Health, 1950). For an explanation of the tension between state and federal authorities, see Margaret Warner, "Local Control versus National Interest: The Debate Over Southern Public Health, 1878-1884," *Journal of Southern History* 50, 3 (Aug., 1984): 407-28.

⁴⁴Created in 1848, the board did not possess the authority to enforce existing sanitation and health laws, or institute new ones. There were numerous conflicts between the city of Atlanta and Fulton and DeKalb counties over jurisdiction, as well as problems between the City Board of Health and the City Council's Relief Committee that oversaw any health initiatives associated with the social welfare work of the city. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, Vol. I, 265. For a survey of Atlanta's early efforts toward public health, see Richard J. Hopkins, "Public Health in Atlanta: The Formative Years, 1865-1879," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 53, 3 (1969): 287-304.

⁴⁵The King's Daughters also opened a hospital for "Incurables" in 1901. Information about the King's Daughters Hospital is sketchy. The following sources contain brief accounts, see: Virginia Griggs Perry, "The Life of Nellie Peters Black" (Masters Thesis: University of Georgia, 1945), 20-21; Jane Bonner Peacock, "Nellie Peters Black: Turn of the Century 'Mover and Shaker'," *The Atlanta Historical Journal*, 23, 4 (Winter, 1979-1980): 7-16; and *City Directory*, Atlanta, 1889-1893. Not surprising, the women of the Grady Hospital Auxiliary receive only minimal attention in most information about the founding of Grady Memorial Hospital. For information on Grady, see Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, II, 257-60.

“germ theory” - the scientific supposition that living organisms had a role in causing disease - was used more for disease prevention than for treatment. Although tuberculosis (also known at the time as consumption or TB) was often perceived as an urban northeastern disease, it was more prevalent in southern cities than anywhere else in the country. As TB especially affected poor whites and even poorer blacks, there was during this period a set of cultural implications attached to the southern sufferer that complicated the effective treatment of the disease and kept practical solutions from being implemented.⁴⁶ Often overshadowed by what historian George Tindall labeled “the Southern trilogy of ‘lazy diseases’” (hookworm, pellagra, and malaria), tuberculosis caused more deaths in Georgia than all of the “trilogy” diseases combined. Health records for the period indicate that the disease claimed between 200 and 300 lives annually in Atlanta.⁴⁷

Initially, tuberculosis attracted no more attention from public officials in Georgia than any other public health problem. In 1904, the state of Georgia created a State Medical Commission on tuberculosis to document the number of TB cases and assess preventative measures. The Commission’s work proved to be frustrating. In an attempt to awaken government officials and the public to the seriousness of the disease, the Commission directly connected the deaths that resulted from tuberculosis to financial loss for the community,

⁴⁶Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5-6. The causative agent of tuberculosis is a mycobacteria that is transmitted when airborne.

⁴⁷George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 277. As the state of Georgia did not institute a vital statistics law until 1914 (and even then it took five more years to implement), scholars have estimated the mortality numbers of various diseases based on reports and surveys of private foundations and groups. One of the most thorough sources of information about Atlanta’s crusade against tuberculosis is Margaret Ellen Kidd Parsons, “White Plague and Double-Barred Cross in Atlanta, 1895-1945” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1985). Some of the same information can be found in three other significant studies of Atlanta women and the fight against disease, see: Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City*, 106-31; Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 187-218; and Sarah Mercer Judson, “Building the New South City: African American and White Clubwomen in Atlanta, 1895-1930” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997), 70-119.

specifically in terms of lost labor productivity and higher insurance premiums. Despite the Commission's call for an immediate investigation into the feasibility of a state sanatorium, the state of Georgia ignored their recommendations and continued to rely on local authorities and private charity.⁴⁸

Established by the Atlanta Circle of the King's Daughters and Sons, Atlanta's first private treatment facility for tuberculosis, the Home for Incurables, opened its doors in March 1901. The International Order of the King's Daughters and Sons represented the social gospel desires to both improve local communities and connect them to the world at large. Still in existence, it is an inter-denominational Christian service organization of men and women whose three-fold mission of religious training, education, and philanthropy is taken straight from the Gospel of Mark 10:45: "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister."⁴⁹ From its inception, membership in the organization was open to both white and black women, but local chapters were segregated according to race. In 1893 a group of white women in Atlanta (including Nellie Peters Black) formed a Circle of the King's Daughters and Sons and focused on social welfare projects aimed at "helping the poor and needy, ministering to the sick, and caring for the widow and orphan." However, after a few years the group decided to focus solely on the care of "those

⁴⁸In their first report, they lambasted "those in charge of statecraft" for not providing either adequate funding for the State Board of Health or sufficient oversight for the establishment of local boards. The Board argued that effective treatment of the disease required: compulsory notification: rigid enforcement of existing "anti-spitting" ordinances, strict disinfection of sick areas, the isolation of the sick from the well, and an aggressive education campaign for disease prevention. Georgia State Commission on Tuberculosis, *Report of the Georgia State Commission on Tuberculosis* (Atlanta: Franklin Print and Publishing Co., 1905).

⁴⁹The by-laws state that "Anyone whose aims and purposes are in accord with its objects and who holds himself or herself responsible to The King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" is eligible to join. The International Order of the King's Daughters and Sons originated in New York in 1886 as a nondenominational charitable society. Scholarly information on the organization is meager. See Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 45-46. A published history does exist. See Dorothy F. Ellison, *History of the International Order of the King's Daughters and Sons* (Oakland, CA: Color Art Press for the International Order of King's Daughters and Sons, 1970). See also the organization's website at <http://www.iokds.org>.

suffering with incurable diseases.”⁵⁰ Intended for the treatment of all whites “hopelessly inflicted with incurable diseases,” ninety percent of the patients treated at the Home for Incurables were tuberculosis patients. Inundated with patients turned away from Grady Memorial Hospital, the Home for Incurables quickly outgrew the small cottage near the heart of downtown where it was housed. With funding from several philanthropists (including furniture retailer A. G. Rhodes), the Home moved into a new, much larger facility in 1904. The organization’s board successfully petitioned the city council for monthly support and eventually increased their patient capacity to twenty-seven.⁵¹ Within the next few years, two additional private sanatoriums opened in and around Atlanta for the treatment of middle and upper-class white TB patients. In 1907 the Associated Charities opened a Home Treatment Dispensary which offered a more holistic approach to disease treatment and prevention that addressed the social concerns that resulted from illness and poor sanitation.⁵² However, medical treatment in general for indigents and African Americans remained limited in Atlanta.

Having been both president of the King’s Daughters and an officer in the Associated Charities, Nellie Peters Black had been a part of the fight against tuberculosis in Atlanta from its beginnings. In 1909 Black accepted the position of vice-president of the newly formed Atlanta Anti-Tuberculosis and Visiting Nurse Association (ATA).⁵³ Although the ATA was

⁵⁰Erminie Ragland, “The Founding of the Atlanta Tuberculosis Association and the Home for the Incurables” *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 4 (July 1939); 256-62.

⁵¹Although Grady Memorial Hospital accepted indigent patients, it did not treat patients diagnosed with incurable diseases. *Ibid.*

⁵²For information on the Home Treatment Dispensary operated by the Associated Charities, see Parsons, “White Plague and Double-Barred Cross in Atlanta, 1895-1945,” 108-11. Parson’s work remains the most thorough study of the fight against tuberculosis in Atlanta.

⁵³The Atlanta Anti-Tuberculosis and Visiting Nurse Association was created in 1909 when the Home Treatment Dispensary (operated by Associated Charities) and the Atlanta Anti-Tuberculosis and Visiting Nurse Association (operated by the Fulton County Medical Society) merged. Both organizations were needlessly wasting resources through duplication. The new organization maintained the ATA name, but was headquartered in the same building

independent of the Associated Charities, the two organizations maintained close ties. After all, it made good economic sense to the forward-thinking community and business leaders on the board of Associated Charities to become involved in the fight against tuberculosis. As one member explained to the mayor in an attempt to secure public funding: “Atlanta loses a half million dollars annually because of the presence of tuberculosis in the city.”⁵⁴ Consequently, the board ascertained that, since the disease was three times as prevalent among blacks as whites, any impediment to Atlanta’s economic progress could be blamed on its African-American communities.

In calling attention to the number of tuberculosis cases in the black community, the ATA stirred up racist concerns among middle-class white women who suspected their African-American servants of bringing disease into white homes. When the number of tuberculosis cases reached what many Atlantans feared to be epidemic proportions in 1910, the white Atlanta Woman’s Club (AWC) petitioned the city council to take legislative action. Reacting to reports issued by the ATA that clearly illustrated “how black consumptives were living and dying next to piles of white customers’ laundry” and the racist fears of its members, the executive board of the AWC adopted a resolution urging the city council to pass an ordinance that would require all (primarily African-American) “washerwomen” to undergo medical inspection and register with the city. The clubwomen reasoned that if the disease appeared in a white home, such a measure would enable city officials to trace the disease back to a particular black neighborhood.⁵⁵ City health officers reported that there were approximately five thousand (primarily black)

as the Associated Charities, thus maintaining close ties to the charity. For a historical summary of the merger, see Parsons, “White Plague and Double-Barred Cross in Atlanta,” 108-115. In terms of primary sources, see records for both Associated Charities and the ATA contained in the manuscript collection ALA, AHC.

⁵⁴Board Minutes of the Associated Charities, box 2, folder 30, ALA, AHC.

⁵⁵Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*, 221.

washerwomen in the city. Of course, concerns were also raised about African-American servants in general; cooks and housekeepers as well as washerwomen were suspected of carrying the disease. Their inclusion raised the number of possible carriers even higher.⁵⁶ Realizing the registration ordinance would do nothing to increase medical access for “colored consumptives,” the ATA did not support the AWC’s campaign. They advocated instead for the construction of a separate state-supported treatment facility. Although Nellie Black was a prominent member of the AWC, her responsibilities as a board member of the Anti-Tuberculosis Association took precedence over club loyalty.⁵⁷ Like Rosa Lowe, Black understood that the successful containment of the disease depended not upon social segregation, but on increased education and medical treatment for the afflicted. Agreeing that the ordinance would not improve medical care, Black also recognized that the financial burden of the forced registration would most likely “cause pauperism among the negro women.” In a meeting with the city council’s special committee, she boldly asked: “What about protecting negro washerwomen from contagious diseases in the home of white people who send out soiled clothes?” Always concerned about the soul as well as the body, Black worried that a too rigid anti-tuberculosis law “might prevent negro women from making an honest living.” Of course, such a restrictive measure could also

⁵⁶The city council of Atlanta had taken similar actions against domestic workers in the past in an attempt to both exert control over the laboring class and pacify the white middle and upper classes. In an effort to limit the freedom of the workers, the city council passed a law in 1866 that required potential employers of domestics to obtain references from previous employers before hiring. When the city of Atlanta threatened to impose a punitive tax on , the waged a successful strike that thwarted the tax. For information on the struggle of Atlanta’s domestic workers against the city’s private and public power structures, see Tera W. Hunter, “Domination and Resistance: The Politics of Wage Household Labor in New South Atlanta” in Kenneth W. Goings, Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African-American Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 167-86. The city of Atlanta also instituted strict vagrancy laws to ensure that African Americans remained in low-paying menial jobs such as domestic servitude. If caught not working, black men and women could be arrested, tried, and sentenced to the state work farm. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies*, 69-70.

⁵⁷NPB had served as president of both the AWC and the Atlanta Federation of Women’s Clubs. Her membership in multiple organizations made her an effective liaison between them. For example, when the Anti-Tuberculosis Association needed extra space for TB patients, they sent NPB to the Home for Incurables to secure it. See Board Minutes of the Associated Charities, 11 February 1909, box 2, folder 30, ALA, AHC.

deprive white middle-class women of their domestic help. Nellie Black suggested that the law should only require the laundresses to register when they took in washing.⁵⁸ While such a differentiation may seem trivial, it speaks volumes about class distinctions of the period. It was more costly (therefore more prestigious) to have live-in servants that worked for only one white family, than to use a washerwoman who took in laundry for many families.⁵⁹

While Nellie Black may have been asking what seemed to her a practical question, the media deemed her comments sensational and they were printed in the front sections of leading local newspapers. The headline in the *Atlanta Constitution* read “Washerwomen Spread Disease Throughout the City.” Interestingly, the more progressive *Atlanta Georgian* ran an article on the same day titled “Washer and Washee Must Be Protected.” Perhaps as a result of the “great laundress debate” that played out in public, the “washerwoman” ordinance was referred back to Alderman Candler to “revise and perfect.” The city council did not pass the ordinance, but the supposed connection between black domestic workers and disease continued to be a political issue in Atlanta. The idea of requiring laundresses to register with the city surfaced again during the mayoral election of 1912, but again no such ordinance came into being. However, neither did increased access to medical treatment for African-American tubercular patients.

Albeit for different reasons, reformers and city boosters in Atlanta agreed that it would behoove the city to improve living conditions in the African-American communities and increase their access to medical care. However, city government took decades to make good on its promises of support. While access to tuberculosis treatment for blacks gradually increased and their death

⁵⁸“Washerwomen Spread Disease Throughout the City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 March 1910. This exchange is also reprinted in Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City*, 116-17; and Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*, 206.

⁵⁹Census Records reveal that NPB had live-in servants and would probably not have had to regularly utilize the services of a washerwoman. However, her personal account book for 1891-1893 shows occasional payments to C. J. Kemper (a store on Peachtree Street) for “washing,” box 3, NPB Papers.

rate from the disease (like that of whites) steadily declined after the 1920s, African Americans continued to have to challenge the white-controlled public healthcare system in Atlanta.

The City Beautiful Movement

Believing that “civic beauty encourages civic righteousness,” GFWC president Nellie Black urged her fellow club members and politicians to pay closer attention to “parks, public squares, and above all, the cleanliness of court houses, jails, depots, and all buildings open to the public.”⁶⁰ This particular focus of the clubwomen’s municipal housekeeping agenda reflected the national City Beautiful movement in which middle - and upper-class Americans attempted to create an urban landscape that reflected the progressive ideals of efficiency and social order, and at the same time celebrated the beauty of nature. Historians have labeled the years between 1900 and 1910 as the “heyday” of the City Beautiful movement. In its broadest sense, City Beautiful was a political movement, for it “demanded a reorientation of public thought and action toward urban beauty” and was a critical part of urban planning.⁶¹ There was, however, a religious aspect to the movement in that it made perfect sense to followers of the social gospel to integrate God’s world into that of man’s. Whether attributable to the influence of the social gospel or to progressivism, the desire to create a clean, orderly, disease-free, and beautiful New South was grounded in the belief that “cleanliness was next to Godliness.”

The City Beautiful movement served as “a catalyst for cooperation between city officials, urban planning professionals, civic groups, and enlightened individuals.”⁶² Clubwomen

⁶⁰Report of the President, Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, *Yearbook 1918-1919*, 4. Clubwomen had a series of spirited one-line phrases that served as rallying cries in their publications. “If you love your city, you must make your city lovely.” “The mean street produces the mean man.” “Beauty is just as cheap as ugliness.” See newsletter (n.d.), Department of Civics, Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, box 9, folder 1, NPB Papers.

⁶¹William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 1.

⁶²A comparative study of the role of clubwomen in the City Beautiful Movement in Atlanta and Chicago can be found in Julian C. Chambliss, “Atlanta and Chicago: Searching for the Planning Imperative, 1900-1930” (Ph.D

throughout the country embraced the movement because it meshed with many of their reform agendas (including municipal housekeeping) and ideological influences (including the social gospel). The role of women in the City Beautiful movement validates the significance of women in “the construction of urban culture,” a physical and conceptual environment traditionally assumed to be controlled men.⁶³ It was perhaps in City Beautiful initiatives that clubwomen in Atlanta exerted their strongest influence over city government. Early on in the movement, city officials recognized the usefulness of the clubwomen’s City Beautiful initiatives in the overall urban planning for the expansion of Atlanta. Acknowledging their influence and ability to get things done, Mayor Livingston Mims called on the Atlanta Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1902 to spearhead beautification plans for various districts within the city. The women considered Mims an ally in their City Beautiful efforts. During his two terms in office he secured city funding for park and sewer improvements, street paving, and the construction of new public buildings such as a hospital and a library. Other mayoral administrations (especially those of James Woodward who both preceded and succeeded Mims) during the period were fiscally conservative to the point that they considered such municipal expenditures frivolous.⁶⁴ The fact that they had not gained suffrage did not keep the clubwomen from expressing political opinions. In 1906, Nellie Black publicly endorsed a candidate in Atlanta’s controversial mayoral race. She wrote in the *Atlanta Constitution*

dissertation: University of Florida, 2004), 26-59. Chambliss points out that Atlanta differed from Chicago in that there was less input from professionals in southern cities. Urban planning professionals included: landscape architects, engineers, architects, and academics.

⁶³Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, 65.

⁶⁴For a summary of the mayoral administrations during the City Beautiful period, see Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 640-79.

Here is one time when I would like the privilege of casting a vote, but alas! We women have taxation without representation, but we can talk all the same, and the women are going to talk for Capt. Joyner, even if we can't vote for him!⁶⁵

Black's article not only served as an endorsement for Chief Joyner, it also highlighted the fact that, like their revolutionary forefathers, women were citizens in that they paid taxes, but lacked a representative voice in government because they could not vote. Joyner was elected and instituted several municipal housekeeping initiatives that supported the clubwomen's City Beautiful initiatives, including the laying of sidewalks; additional street paving; substantial additions to the water works system (as only 65% of Atlanta residents had access to city water); park improvements; and the construction of a new fire station.⁶⁶

Like their white counterparts, African-American clubwomen played a significant role in the City Beautiful movement in Atlanta. Following the lead of Booker T. Washington who understood that claims for racial equality depended heavily on the ability of African-Americans to prove to whites that they adhered to the progressive ethos of cleanliness and purity, middle-class black clubwomen sought to uplift their race by cleaning up their neighborhoods and creating their own "discourse of respectability."⁶⁷ Excluded from many of the parks and facilities white clubwomen were seeking to improve, African-American clubwomen went to work beautifying their own neighborhoods and those where the lower classes lived. "Traveling the middle ground between exclusion and cooperation," there were times when black and white

⁶⁵"Wants Joyner Elected Mayor: Mrs. Nellie Peters Black Writes Card About Candidate," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1906.

⁶⁶Cooper, *Official History of Fulton County*, 668-69.

⁶⁷Louise Newman, "Moving Beyond the Resistance/Accommodationism Divide: Gender and Race in the Discourse of Booker T. Washington," *Reconsidering the Legacy of Booker T. Washington*, ed., Fitzhugh Brundage (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 177-92. For additional information on both Booker T. Washington's obsession with cleanliness and the role of African-American women in the sanitation movement, see Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 89-92 and 117-21.

clubwomen crossed racial lines and worked together to ensure the success of particular initiatives, such as municipal clean-up days.⁶⁸

Nellie Black considered the City Beautiful movement especially compatible with the GFWC's child welfare agenda and constantly pushed for initiatives that would increase the verall "quality of child life"

The hope of our nation lies in the children; we must unite to make the children of Georgia happy and useful by giving them playgrounds for health and good schools with vocational training and a chance to earn a good living."⁶⁹

Contending that the playground movement would "solve to a great extent the child problem of the future," the clubwomen not only stressed the need for more playgrounds, but also called for them to be "properly equipped" and supervised by adult volunteers who could "direct the play." Because they claimed that happy and healthy children would most effectively convey the lesson that "health and happiness are the natural result of cleanliness," the clubwomen involved children in their beautification efforts in several ways.⁷⁰ The GFWC encouraged city federations to establish Junior Civics Leagues, modeled after and supervised by the federation's civics department. The young people had to pledge not "to injure any tree, shrub or lawn" or "spit upon the floor in a streetcar, school house, or any public building or sidewalk." In addition, they had to promise to "protect the property of others" and "be a true loyal citizen."⁷¹ Children also participated in the GFWC's annual clean-up week held in various towns and cities

⁶⁸Julian Chambliss, "Moral Authority and Public Power: Clubwomen Activism and the Construction of Municipal Space," unpublished conference paper, Georgia Association of Historians, Jekyll Island, Georgia (April 2002), 5.

⁶⁹"Mrs. Black's Letter," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 November 1916.

⁷⁰Mrs. Lyman Amsden, "Report on Civics," Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs, *Yearbook 1917-1918*, 62. See also "Child Conservation of Vital Importance Says Federation Head," unidentified newspaper clipping (n.d.), Heyward Hawkins Family Papers, Mss#1278, box 2, folder 8, GHS.

⁷¹See newsletter (n.d.), Department of Civics, Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs, box 9, folder 1, NPB Papers.

throughout the state every April. The clubwomen's maternalistic approach worked effectively in both their child welfare reforms and City Beautiful initiatives.

As GFWC president, Nellie Black urged attention to aesthetics not just in the city of Atlanta, but also throughout the state. In her first official presidential report, she applauded members for not forsaking "our home beautiful" in carrying out the pressing war work. Black was determined to see Georgia become "an earthly paradise" where "waste places blossom like the rose" - particularly the Cherokee Rose, which the GFWC persuaded the legislature to adopt as the official state flower in 1916.⁷² Black reminded members that "each tree or shrub you plant this year will help make our dream of a beautiful Georgia a glad reality."⁷³ Like economic boosters throughout the South, the GFWC supported the "good roads" movement, but the clubwomen contended that "beautiful" should be included as a qualifying characteristic for "good." The GFWC's "good roads and boulevards" committee worked with the Dixie Highway Association to beautify the roadways that would eventually become a part of the ambitious highway project connecting Georgia to points north and to the Midwest. Securing flower seeds from the federal government, the clubwomen encouraged the residents along the highway to beautify their yards so that all travelers would enjoy the scenery and Georgians in general would adopt a "kindlier interest" in the highway. While beautification was important, the clubwomen also understood the political and economic significance of the Dixie Highway. Once completed, it would help bring the South into the national economy by facilitating the efficient shipment of southern products to the North and northern tourists to the South. During wartime, it would

⁷²Nellie Peters Black, "A Greeting for the New Year," Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs, *Yearbook 1918-1919*, 4.

⁷³*Ibid.*

enable the federal government to more quickly transport military supplies and troops.⁷⁴

Elsewhere in the state, Black reported that “two thousand crepe myrtle trees had been planted on the highways in South Georgia.”⁷⁵ She suggested that trees not only beautified the surroundings, they could also serve as “living monuments” that would be much more appealing than a “cold marble shaft.”⁷⁶ Black complained to her fellow clubwomen that

The saints in heaven must weep over the unnecessary and ostentatious tombs in the cemetery when a plain headstone would mark the last resting place of the loved one, and the extra money could do so much to help the worthy boy or girl to get a good education.⁷⁷

Like many of the clubwomen’s overlapping agendas, their City Beautiful initiatives (at least in terms of aesthetics) meshed well their ideas regarding thrift and conservation.

For Nellie Black and clubwomen collectively, there were both wins and losses in the attempt to create “the good city.” While Black failed to fend off the segregation of public transportation and diminish class discrimination, her successful attempt to keep the city of Atlanta from passing the washerwoman registration ordinance facilitated a public debate that

⁷⁴Although founded in the northeast during the late 19th century, the Good Roads movement in the South initially began as an attempt to encourage farmers to participate in truck farming. The movement in the South was slow to gain momentum because state legislatures did not want to appropriate funds for the maintenance of the roads. See Howard L. Preston, “Good Roads Movement,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 22-23. Named in honor of fifty years of peace between the North and South, the Dixie Highway was initiated in 1914 by a group of governors who thought it would be advantageous for all states involved to have a single highway system connecting Florida and Michigan. In Georgia, much of I-75 northward from Macon covers the roads originally included in the Dixie Highway. It is interesting to note that the part of the Dixie Highway that went through Gordon County in northwest Georgia was installed on land owned by the Peters Land Company, of which NPB was a principal shareholder. For information about the Dixie Highway, see Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991). On the GFWC’s work with the Dixie Highway Association, see Mrs. Logan Pitts, “Report on Good Roads and Boulevards,” Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, *Yearbook, 1917-1918*, 64-65.

⁷⁵“Report of the President,” Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, *Yearbook, 1917-1918*, 18.

⁷⁶“Report of the President,” Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, *Yearbook 1918-1919*, 12.

⁷⁷*Ibid.* NPB practiced what she preached. Both the Peters family headstone and her grave marker in Atlanta’s Oakland Cemetery are very simple monuments lacking in any ornamentation.

underscored the interconnectedness of health reform, race relations, and regional prosperity. Because of their far-reaching network of organized women, moral authority, and public influence, the clubwomen of Atlanta (like their counterparts throughout the country) had successfully “saved their city” by insinuating their vision of the “good city” into municipal planning.⁷⁸ The next chapter will chronicle how Nellie Black and her fellow clubwomen attempted the same mission in the countryside.

⁷⁸ According to Daphne Spain, the women converted “religious doctrine and domestic ideology into redemptive places that produced social order at a critical moment in the nation’s development.” See Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, 237.

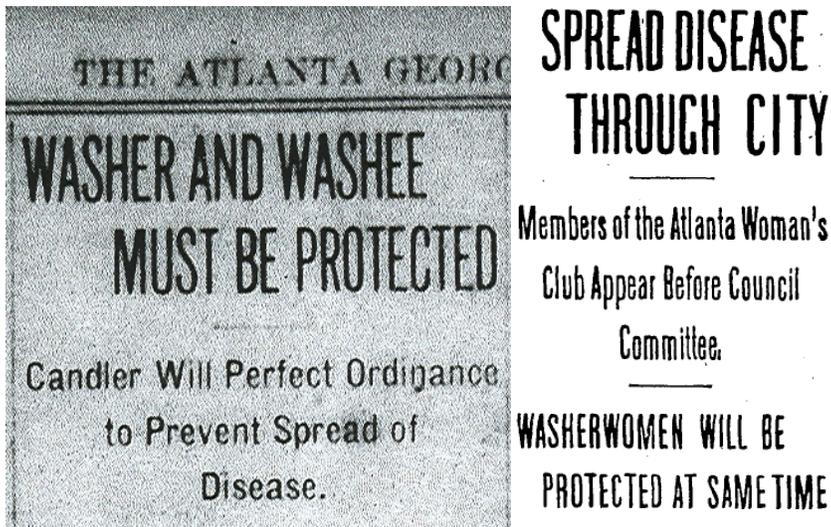


Figure 6-3. Washerwoman headlines from 11 March 1910. The one on the left ran in the Atlanta Georgian and the one on the right appeared in the Atlanta Constitution.

CHAPTER 7:
“WHAT WE NEED IS TO MAKE LIFE ON THE FARM BRIGHT, INTERESTING, AND
HAPPY. . .”: AGRICULTURAL REFORM AND THE COUNTRY LIFE MOVEMENT IN
GEORGIA

In a 1915 speech to the Southern Conference for Education and Industry meeting in Chattanooga, Nellie Peters Black articulated - through her characteristic fashion of storytelling - what she considered to be the primary problem plaguing Georgia farmers. Producing a menu card from an Atlanta restaurant, she explained that all of the food items listed had been imported from other states: the sweet potatoes came from Indiana, the radishes from Louisiana, the eggplant from Florida, the carrots from Illinois, and the cabbage from Wisconsin and Maryland. The only Georgia grown crop on the menu was turnip greens and they had been raised in Fitzgerald by “a colony of Yankees!” Claiming that the state of Georgia spent \$186 million annually to procure food for its people, she pleaded for the South to “raise its own living and be prepared to sell to the rest of the world.”¹ Just as Henry Grady’s parable about how the South had contributed nothing to a funeral in Pickens County, Georgia except “the corpse and the hole in the ground” had alerted southerners to their need for industrialization, Black’s simple story effectively illustrated the fact that Georgia farmers had become too dependent upon cotton and neglected to raise enough food crops to feed themselves or sell to others.²

¹Quote in chapter title attributable to Nellie Peters Black, “Address Delivered in New Orleans Before the Southern Conference of Education and Industries,” 19 April 1916, Nellie Peters Black Papers, Mss.#235, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia (Hereafter cited as NPB Papers). “New Record Made in Attendance” *Chattanooga Times*, n.d., NPB Papers. Black recycled this story on several occasions. For another newspaper article, Black explained that she had encountered the same list of vegetables at a local market, but added onions from Ohio, Canadian rutabagas, and “African indive for the palate of the epicure.” Unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d., NPB Papers.

²In 1889 Henry Grady delivered a speech in Boston in which he lamented the South’s lack of industry. He recounted how he had attended a funeral in Pickens County Georgia where the South had provided nothing except “the corpse and the hole in the ground.” Speech reprinted in *Major Problems in the History of the American South*, Vol. II: The New South, Second Edition, Paul D. Escott, David R. Goldfield, Sally G. McMillen, Elizabeth Hayes Turner, eds. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 90-91.

The Country Life Movement

The complex problem of crop diversification was only one of many contributing to the general demise of country life. The “rural arm of American Progressivism” - the Country Life movement - represented an urban-based attempt by reformers to raise rural America to the social and economic standards of a modern industrialized society. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt established the Country Life Commission to study the condition of rural life in America. These agricultural experts, educators, publishers, and influential reformers proposed that efficiency and broad social policies would bring rural inhabitants fully into the market economy and facilitate “the general betterment of country life.”³ They called for the improvement of rural churches, schools, roads, healthcare facilities, volunteer organizations, and family life. Progressives viewed such reforms as not only morally necessary, but also indispensable to the material well-being of the emerging middle class and urban elites who depended upon farmers to supply the cities with food and necessities at reasonable prices. In theory, encouraging farmers to modernize and increase efficiency would convert agriculture into

³*Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909). For a thorough explanation of the diversity in the Country Life movement, see David B. Danbom, “Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920,” *Agricultural History* 53, no.2 (1979): 462-65. Danbom explains that the Country Life movement was as paradoxical, contradictory, and diverse as the larger Progressive movement that some historians (such as William L. Bowers and Merwin Swenson) claim it was a part of. For additional information about the Country Life surveys, see Olaf F. Larson and Thomas B. Jones, “The Unpublished Data From Roosevelt’s Commission on Country Life,” *Agricultural History* 50, no. 4 (October 1976): 583-99. Larson and Jones contend that even though the questionnaire was flawed, the final report and the original responses are valuable tools for historians studying rural response to the Country Life movement. Information on women’s role in the movement can be found in Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Joyce Mae Thier, “The Country Life Movement and Rural Women, 1908-1931,” (Ph.D. Dissertation: Kansas State University, 1994), 8-9 and Mary Hoffschwelle, “Better Homes on Better Farms: Domestic Reform in Rural Tennessee,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 22, no. 1 (2001): 51-73. For the role of education in the New South, see James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 21.

a modern enterprise, which would in turn transform the farmer and his wife into consumers as well as producers. They would then be able to “uplift” their own rural society.⁴

In terms of practical application, the Country Life movement also facilitated a curious relationship between the emerging field of secular sociology and the religious social gospel. Influential clergymen such as Presbyterian Warren H. Wilson joined forces with academic sociologists to seek remedies for the supposed malaise of country life, especially in staple crop farming areas such as the tobacco and cotton weary South. Operating under the premise that the social life of any community (be it urban or rural) adapts to the primary system of labor, Wilson claimed that, unlike their urban counterparts, rural inhabitants did not associate socialization with recreation. He argued that the “moving-picture shows, saloons, billiard halls, and lodge rooms” associated with the commercial environment of the towns and villages created an “artificial social life” that lured farmers away from their natural, more-solitary forms of recreation such as fishing and hunting. Wilson and other Country Lifers proposed to stop this trend by building up the traditional rural social institutions of the school, the household, and particularly the country church. Although he acknowledged that the American countryside was “overchurched” with too many small churches, Wilson maintained that the “social enterprises of the women of the country churches have great social value” and could both “harness the play spirit” and “do the moral work of the rural community.” In the process, rural inhabitants would return to a social life more closely associated with their labor system and traditions.⁵

⁴Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 4.

⁵Warren H. Wilson, “Social Life in the Country,” *Country Life* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1912): 119-30. On the role of the church in rural regeneration, see Merwin Swenson, “The ‘Country Life Movement’ and the American Churches,” *Church History* 46, 3 (Sept., 1977): 358-73.

Surfacing first in the Midwest and Northeast, the Country Life movement eventually reached the South and found a receptive audience among southern Progressives. Nellie Peters Black became the feminine embodiment of the Country Life movement in Georgia. Due largely to her father's experience as a planter, Black also became interested in agricultural education and reform. As it was compatible with the social gospel, Black believed in an agrarian myth that presumed "farmers were close to nature and nature was as close as human beings could get to God, therefore, agriculture was a spiritual endeavor and a calling."⁶

Practical Experience: Farmer Black

In 1847, Richard Peters purchased a 1500 acre farm in Gordon County in northwest Georgia. He became well known in the region for his innovative farming methods and experiments in livestock breeding.⁷ Many organizations and publications sought his opinions and advice on current agricultural issues. In 1885, journalist Henry Grady visited the Peters Farm and observed the diversified techniques employed on the farm. Taking the opportunity to voice both Richard Peters' optimistic vision for the region, as well as his own, Grady wrote in a detailed article for his *Atlanta Constitution* that "Mr. Peters is very hopeful of the future of the south Atlantic states . . . There is no better country in the world he holds, than the state of Georgia, and he predicts in the next ten years a wonderful progress of farming."⁸ Even though

⁶Thier, "The Country Life Movement and Rural Women, 1908-1931", 8-9. Country Lifers believed in the Jeffersonian agrarian myth that idolized the farmer as the savior of republican virtues and American values.

⁷To support his livestock breeding, Peters experimented with different varieties of grasses and grains, importing from places as far away as China. In addition to growing traditional southern cash crops such as cotton and sugar cane, Peters experimented with a diverse group of fruits, importing varieties from Japan and France. He also pioneered the introduction of Georgia peaches to California. "Management of Peters Farm is Told by Mrs. Lamar Rucker," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 October 1923. For a detailed description of Richard Peters's agricultural activities see Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 55-71.

⁸Richard Peters was by no means the only prominent Georgia farmer whose progressive activities were covered by the press. David Dickson of Hancock County and Farish Furman in middle Georgia, as well as others in various

Richard Peters had sons, it was his daughter Nellie who inherited his avid interest in agriculture. Following his death, the farm became part of his large estate that was administered by the Peters Land Company. The supervision of the farm was shuffled between two of Richard Peters's sons until Nellie offered to take over the management of it in 1889, one year after her father's death. She wrote on the first page of the farm journal she would keep for many years, "for the love of him [her father] and because of his unceasing interest in the farm I have assumed management of it."⁹ Her primary goal was to prove that the farm could again be profitable so that other members of the Peters family would agree to keep the property intact within the family, rather than breaking it up and selling off plots.¹⁰

Nellie Black's first order of business was to dismiss the farm's two managers and promote long-time field hand Lee Fox to the position of overseer and herself to manager. There is no doubt that Black considered herself the official manager of the Peters Farm. When the farm account contained a surplus, she paid herself a salary of \$25 per month and reimbursed herself for farm expenses, such as postage stamps and train tickets. Although Black ran most of the affairs of the farm from her Atlanta residence, she visited the farm at least once a month and maintained frequent communication with her overseer by letter, telegram, and eventually telephone. Identifying herself on the farm letterhead only as "N. P. Black, Manager," most customers believed they were conducting business with a man. Black intentionally perpetuated

parts of the state, participated in similar or even more aggressively progressive activities. For an overview of progressive farming in Georgia during this period, see Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 68-90. Henry Grady, "Forty Years All Told Spent in the Live Stock Experiments in Georgia: Richard Peters' Experiments in Live Stock Farming," 1886. Pamphlet, NPB Papers.

⁹Farm Journal, NPB Papers.

¹⁰Granddaughter Nellie Rucker recalled hearing of much dissension between the northern and southern branches of the Peters family. This tension was apparent at the annual meetings for stockholders of the Peters Land Company in Atlanta. Author's interview with Nellie Peters Rucker Walter, 15 April 1998, Savannah, Georgia.

the pretense with good humor and found it amusing when appreciative customers came to the farm bearing gifts such as cigars for “Mr. Black.”¹¹

During her tenure as manager, Nellie Black attempted to modernize the farm. She replaced broken machinery with newer, more efficient equipment and constructed additional buildings. In an attempt to manage the farm business in a more businesslike manner, she lobbied the Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph Company in 1901 to place an exchange in the town of Calhoun. When Black offered to run a private telephone line at her own expense from her farm to the exchange, the company superintendent in Atlanta informed her that this was not possible because exchanges could not be established for the benefit of one individual and Calhoun could only produce twenty of the fifty required subscribers. He further suggested that when an exchange could be established, it would make better financial sense for her to share a party line, rather than have a private line. The superintendent also made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that the telephone company, not individual subscribers, owned all telephone lines, public or private.¹²

Nellie Black personally kept the farm accounts, as well as the construction and maintenance records for all of the buildings on the farm. She utilized her own bookkeeping system, initially recording all payables and receivables in a small memorandum book, then later transferring the information to large ledger books that served as the official farm records. Under her efficient administration, Peters Farm regularly produced profits through crop sales, the rental of pasture land, and the sale of stock animals and their byproducts, such as eggs, milk, and

¹¹Farm records, NPB Papers. Farm records show that for the first two years under Nellie Black’s management (1898-99), Black paid “the manager” a salary of \$30 per month. In 1900, the salary is listed as \$25 per month. Records indicate that Black made at least 46 round trips between Atlanta and Calhoun between the years 1897-1901. Also tax records for the years 1901-1904 record “N. P. Black” as manager of the Richard Peters Estate or Peters Farm. See Tax Records for Calhoun County, Microfilm collection #225, Georgia Department of Archives & History, Morrow, Georgia (hereafter cited as GDAH).

¹²R. C. West to NPB, 2 August 1901, NPB Papers. Telephone bills indicate that a telephone was installed at the farm sometime after 1902.

butter. The farm filled orders for crops and livestock from buyers throughout Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Virginia. Black was unable, however, to sustain her father's reputation for agricultural innovation. She investigated the possibility of cultivating exotic fruits and vegetables and also tried her hand at breeding animals not native to the region. When she inquired about the feasibility of growing the more exotic quince instead of peaches that had become associated with the region, Lee Fox responded that "quinces is worth more than peaches, but it takes quinces a good deal longer than peaches to come in."¹³ Although Black was eager to utilize current scientific information from the agricultural colleges and publications, she deferred to the experience and common sense of her workers and the farm produced marketable crops. Part of the farm's success was no doubt attributable to the fact that Black had access to credit not available to most small farmers. When the farm accounts experienced deficits, Black borrowed funds from the Peters Land Company in order to meet expenses and fill orders. On the average, Black's record as a farm manager could be viewed as a success because she demonstrated that the farm could consistently break even and sometimes show a profit.¹⁴

Nellie Black faced problems that had not troubled her father, including severe labor shortages and increasing freight rates. During the antebellum period, Richard Peters had run the plantation with a mix of slave and free labor.¹⁵ After the war, farm tenantry and sharecropping replaced slavery as the primary agricultural labor systems in the South. Various types of

¹³Lee Fox to Black, 9 January 1899, NPB Papers.

¹⁴Farm records indicate that, more often than not, the annual amounts of receivables exceeded the amounts of payables. Tax records show that the taxable value of the farm did not substantially increase or decrease between 1897-1901. Tax records, Gordon County, Microfilm Collection #225, GDAH.

¹⁵Richard Peters never maintained more than 16 slaves on his Gordon County property. The Gordon County Tax Digest (1851) indicates that Richard Peters owned 13 slaves. See *Abstracts of 1851 Tax Digest Gordon County Georgia* (Georgia State Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 1982), 33. See also Shingleton, *Richard Peters*, 70.

tenantry existed, but farm records indicate that white tenants on the Peters Farm were at the top level of the “hierarchy of tenantry.” They paid cash rent for their land (which was primarily used for cotton) and some earned cash wages as “hands” on the Peters Farm.¹⁶ Black assumed a maternal role towards the tenant families living on her farm. She kept up with the news of each family and presented them with gifts at Christmas time. She made sure they were well cared for by keeping an abundant supply of hams and sausage in the smokehouse and vegetables in the root cellar.¹⁷ As she considered herself a working farmer, she sometimes joined her workers in tasks such as collecting chicken eggs, making jelly, and churning butter. Some of Black’s tenants later recalled that she insisted the farm be kept clean and sanitary. In keeping with the progressive obsession with cleanliness, she regularly inspected the grounds for standing water, rotting vegetation, and animal scraps.¹⁸

Modest in comparison with the family’s city residences, Nellie Black’s farm house was intended to demonstrate her belief that genteel, refined modern life was indeed compatible with rural life. Directly adjoining the original one-story farmhouse on the hill where the overseer lived, Black built a larger but unpretentious two-story home. She furnished the home in a simple style with walnut furniture, a piano she had played in her youth, and plain matting on the wooden floors. Her private space in the house consisted of a sparsely furnished bedroom and office.

¹⁶Farm Records, Scrapbook, NPB Papers. For information about the “hierarchy of tenantry” in the South, see Kenneth Coleman, *A History of Georgia* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1977), 226-31. Regarding various types of tenancy throughout the United States, see George K. Holmes, “Tenancy in the United States,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, I, 1 (Oct., 1895): 34-53.

¹⁷Bell Bayless, “Mrs. Black’s Home,” *Calhoun Times*, 23 October 1919. When Black died in 1919, eight white tenant families lived on the farm.

¹⁸Terry Brumlow, “Peters Plantation,” *Southwind: A Reminiscence of Local History and Culture* printed by students of Calhoun High School (Calhoun, Ga.: Bob Linn, 1982): 17. For information about the progressive obsession with cleanliness, see Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 85-92 and 129-36.

Despite the rustic charm of the farm, Black maintained the lifestyle to which she was accustomed in Atlanta and continued to enjoy her regular social activities, such as teaching Sunday school, attending to club matters, and entertaining. Invitations to the Peters Farm were highly sought after by the townspeople of Calhoun and Nellie Black often obliged them. Near the house, Black had a wooden platform constructed in the cool woods on a hill overlooking a stream. She named the spot “Buzzard’s Roost” and when weather permitted, she entertained guests there with afternoon tea. Dressed in a white coat, the butler Tom would set the table with a white linen tablecloth, silver tea service, and china, just as if they were in the parlor on Peachtree Street.¹⁹

Agricultural Reformer: The Farm Rallies

In private Nellie Black may have been the feminine version of a “gentleman farmer,” but in public she became an ardent proponent of practical and businesslike approaches to agriculture. As chairman of the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs’ (GFWC) Country Life Committee, she carried her personal crusade for agricultural diversification into the public forum. Chairman Black developed a “Live at Home” campaign that championed the advantages of a diversified home garden and pantry. Even though so many groups were willing to work together, there was no single solution to the farmers’ problems. Contending that merchants should not import food products when they could procure them locally from farm surplus, she suggested that Georgia farmers and merchants work together to make the South more self-sufficient. If public demand for Georgia products did not exist, Black and the GFWC’s Canning Clubs Committee suggested that clubwomen all over the state should create it by specifically requesting that their local vendors procure home grown fruits and vegetables.²⁰ The GFWC’s agricultural activism

¹⁹Bell Bayless, “Mrs. Black’s Home.” See also Nellie Rucker Walter, *Grandmother Nellie’s Stories* (Springfield: by the author, 1979), 92.

²⁰GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 20.

supported the Georgia Chamber of Commerce's campaign to encourage "home markets for home crops," which called for farmers to diversify their crops, utilize modern agricultural methods, and adhere to production and shipping standards.²¹ Acting as a mediator between farmers and merchants, the Chamber attempted to "find food markets" by persuading dealers to give preference to Georgia-grown grain, hay, and other foodstuffs. Farmers, in turn, would theoretically agree to produce crops equal in quality and price to their out-of-state competitors. As part of this economic development plan, bankers offered financial aid to farmers who adhered to the agreement.²²

Several factors worked against crop diversification in Georgia, as elsewhere in the lower South. Many farmers who raised easily perishable food products, such as fruit growers and dairymen, did not live close to rail lines and those who did faced increasing rates. Often, long-time cotton farmers did not have the experience or knowledge necessary to grow new crops. Nellie Black acknowledged all of these problems, especially her own experience with the lack of local markets, which she claimed was the primary problem facing farmers who attempted to truck farm. In a 1914 letter to the editor of the *Constitution*, farmer Black recounted her unsuccessful attempts to sell winter oats to large grain dealers in Atlanta who refused her product on the grounds that ". . . we prefer to buy western oats." Black complained that 1,200 bushels of "perfectly good heavy oats" sat in the grain house at the Peters Farm waiting for a purchaser. Explaining that the few existing local markets only offered paltry prices for many crops, Black wrote that "unless a farmer [was] near enough to a big city like Atlanta where he can carry his produce by wagon direct to customers he cannot get more than 14 cents a pound for Jersey butter

²¹"Georgians Pushing Georgia Products," *Madisonian*, 5 March 1915.

²²"Finding Food Markets," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 January 1915.

at the country store, 50 cents for a bushel of apples, and 60 cents a bushel for his potatoes. We all know these prices are doubled when sold from city stores.”²³ As unfortunate as the situation was for Nellie Black, she realized that the problem was much worse for tenant farmers. In one of her speeches she used a fictitious character to describe the vicious cycle of tenancy and debt: “Uncle Josh . . . complains that ‘de Ducks’ absorbed all crop when the merchant showed how much had to be ‘de ducked’ for advances.”²⁴ Tenant farmers often fell deeper into debt when they had to be advanced cash or credit to purchase supplies. Although Black remained an advocate for diversified farming, she realized that farmers planted cotton as a staple because it could be sold for “ready money” and buyers were easy to find.

In spite of economic depressions, boll weevil infestations, and lack of access to European markets during World War I, cotton remained the “bread and butter” staple of the South. Hoping to relieve the economic crisis caused by this dependence upon cotton, the GFWC attempted to persuade members attending the 1914 convention in Albany that the use of cotton could be fashionable and patriotic, as well as practical. On “Cotton Day” the women constructed a miniature exposition displaying every conceivable use for cotton from bedspreads to corsets. One convention speaker accused American women of having been “unconscious snobs for many years in their slavish subservience to the word ‘imported’” and encouraged them to substitute cotton for silk in their dress-making. Of course, the women were in agreement that the cotton would have to be very high quality to produce a fabric “dainty” enough to replace silk. In her convention speech, Nellie Black suggested that fellow clubwomen join her “Buy a Cotton Petticoat Movement” and pledge to purchase not only one but two of the necessary

²³“Prominent Woman Farmer Gives Experiences, Saying No Market For Food Crops” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 November 1914. The same disappointment confronted Black when she attempted to sell baled hay.

²⁴Address, 19 April 1916, NPB Papers.

undergarments. To illustrate her earnest appeal to women to wear cotton fabrics, she modeled a dress constructed entirely of fabric made from Georgia cotton and woven in Georgia mills. The outfit was accompanied by a hat sporting a cotton boll, rather than a flower. A photograph of Black in the costume appeared in newspapers across the state.²⁵

Improving Georgia's complex agricultural situation proved frustrating for Black. She closed a 1914 letter to the editor of the *Constitution* by requesting "helpful information" from "those who counsel farmers." She received plenty of it. Less than one month after the publication of her letter, the *Constitution* printed a response from W. S. Witham, an Atlanta banker and small planter. Witham implied that Black and other farmers possessed poor judgment regarding the harvesting, selling, and marketing of their crops. According to Witham, "the trouble with most of our [Georgia] farmers is that they are short above the eyes in disposing." He alleged that when marketers told her they preferred western oats, they were merely "dickering" for a better price. Insinuating that Black was not aggressively seeking markets, he suggested that, if necessary, "she sell her butter to hotels in Chattanooga and her hogs at the front gate."! He accused Black of downplaying the necessity of diversification and declared that "Witham banks will lend money to plant oats, wheat, corn and hay, but for cotton - not one cent." Responding to Witham, the always polite Black thanked him for his valuable suggestions but conceded no ground by asserting that "you are so close to a market town [Atlanta] you can hardly appreciate what a difference freight, express and mail rates make for the farmer." Black stood firm on her freight

²⁵"Mrs. Black in 'Made in Georgia' Costume," *Atlanta Journal*, 1 November 1914. These views coincided with Black's conservative views on feminine appearance. A large woman, Black always dressed very simply with little adornment from jewelry or other accessories. It is not known whether Black ever wore the dress again.

rate point, but wielded her usual charm and wit when she wrote that she was “very much flattered that a busy man like [Witham] would take time to write [his] farmer friend.”²⁶

Two days after Witham’s letter appeared in the *Constitution*, columnist James Calloway applauded Nellie Black’s efforts in the *Macon Daily Telegraph*. “Gratified” to see Black arouse “the Atlanta papers to the importance of finding cash markets for the surplus products of the family,” Calloway placed the responsibility of finding markets with the individual towns, rather than the farmers. He suggested that each town “organize a firm that would handle country produce as brought to town.” However, Calloway placed the responsibility of market preparedness on the farmer and advocated that commodities and their packaging should conform to uniform standards. The maintenance of such standards would be possible if there was an adequate number of food inspectors, perhaps supplied by women’s clubs. Calloway admitted that handling surplus farm products was a new challenge for the South, but one that it would have to meet in order to compete with the Northeast and West for a share of the market. Like Black, Calloway understood that southerners could no longer be merely “a cotton people.”²⁷

Rising freight rates had been a contentious political issue in the South since the Civil War, but by the time Nellie Black was managing the Peters Farm, they had become a significant problem for farmers, as well as urban middle class consumers who sought locally grown fruits and vegetables. In order to make the most of the constantly changing rates, Black instructed her overseer to vary the weights and timing of shipments. The existing network for marketing and shipping southern products was designed largely for the convenience and financial benefit of

²⁶“Farmer Black and Farmer Witham Discuss Need of Farmer Market” *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 December 1914. In his preface to the letter, the editor of the *Constitution* defended Black by writing that she “spoke from experience, herself being an owner and manager of a large plantation in Gordon County.”

²⁷James Calloway, “Casual Conversations and Observations” *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 18 December 1914.

northern investors and railroads that maintained their monopolies by instituting “rate differentials” that kept southern producers from competing in the northern market. Historian C. Vann Woodward claimed that the so-called New South maintained a “neomercantilist” relationship with the “Northeastern banker” that, by comparison, made the colonial mercantile relationship with British merchants seem fair. The state of Georgia had established a relatively powerful commission to regulate the railroads, but many felt it was part of the corrupt system because it failed to enforce uniform freight rates or passenger fares. When elected governor in 1906, Hoke Smith did manage to win some battles with the railroads, but fighting freight rates remained difficult because large planters often held substantial investments in the railroads and were reluctant to debate rates. As Woodward surmised, “In the lexicon of the reformers, the locomotive came to replace the steam roller as a symbol of oppression.”²⁸

Nellie Black attempted to circumvent the transportation problem by encouraging truck farming to regional markets. This would, however, require additional railway connections and new and improved roads - both of which had been recommended by Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission. Truck farming developed much more gradually in the South than in other parts of the country because it required not only adequate well-connected transportation venues, but also uniform quality standards for crops that were produced in large quantities. More importantly, it

²⁸C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1971, 1995), 312-17, 379-84. Woodward, who made the classic case for the South’s colonial relationship with the North, claimed that freight rates remained 39% higher for the South during this period. Regarding the “colonial” thesis of post-Reconstruction industrial development in the South, Gavin Wright claims that the “conspiratorial version does not hold up.” He argues that the South remained too isolated (socially, politically, and economically). Outside capital did flow into the region, but it was not followed by people, which according to Wright was the “time-honored American way of colonization.” Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolution in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1986), 13-14. Likewise, historian Edward Ayers makes the point that the reasons for the lack of industrial development in the South are various and that historians should look beyond “blame” and focus on the actual industrial experience in the region. For a brief historiography of the colonial debate, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992), 105.

required crops that were desired by urban consumers. Although south Georgia developed a thriving watermelon truck crop in the 1890s, farmers throughout the state were reluctant to turn any of their attention away from cotton. Once railroads realized the profits to be gained from truck farming, they attempted to ally themselves with both farmers and reformers like Black by sponsoring test farms, agricultural clubs, and traveling libraries. The Central of Georgia and other railroads employed agricultural agents or “soliciting” agents to persuade farmers to implement experimental agricultural methods proposed by the Agricultural College. By guaranteeing the test farmers protection against losses, the railroads were able to accomplish what the government and progressive reformers could not. The farmers did all of the work and received the profits; in return, the railroads shipped more crops.²⁹ Even though these programs were designed to counteract the crippling effects of ever-increasing freight rates, they offered only minimal relief to those farmers who could barely make a living. Because of the railroad monopolies and persistent increases in shipping costs, maintaining a “diversified pantry” for self-sufficiency did not necessarily translate into diversified commercial farming.

Nellie Black’s growing reputation as an agricultural activist and her prominent public persona in both rural and urban areas earned her invitations to speak to groups all over the state about the problems facing Georgia’s farmers. In April 1917, the Agricultural & Mechanical School in Americus invited her to make their annual commencement address, an honor never before extended to a woman. The president of the school wrote Black

²⁹For an academic study of the development of truck farming in the South, see James L. McCorkle, Jr., “Moving Perishables to Market: Southern Railroads and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of Southern Truck Farming,” *Agricultural History*, 66, 1 (Winter, 1992): 42-63. For information about the efforts of the Central of Georgia to promote truck farming, see “Results of Test Farm Work and Four Crop Contests of the 1914 Season,” Central of Georgia Agricultural Department, Mss.# 1362-AD-90, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia (hereafter cited as GHS).

. . . your reputation is such that we feel that although we have had governors and men of distinction deliver our literary addresses heretofore, yet we have never been more greatly honored by any of them than we would be if you deliver this address for us.³⁰

Black received a similarly prestigious invitation when she was asked to participate in a conference addressing the problems of marketing Georgia crops held at the State College of Agriculture in Athens during January 1915. Guy Firor, Secretary of the Georgia Department of Agricultural Extension, personally wrote Black requesting that she deliver a twenty minute paper on “The Producers View of the Marketing of Georgia-Grown Farm Crops.” To insure good attendance, Firor had strategically scheduled the conference to coincide with the annual meetings of the Georgia Breeders Association, the Georgia Dairy and Live Stock Association, and the Georgia Horticultural Society. Black, along with the Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, representatives of Atlanta produce firms, and the chief of Marketing for the United States Department of Agriculture, spoke to a crowd composed of farmers, merchants, businessmen and college students about the need for uniform quality standards for products and increased home markets.³¹

Encouraged by the spirit of cooperation between government agencies and private business demonstrated at the meetings in Athens, Nellie Black determined that Georgia’s organized clubwomen could play a significant role in disseminating the information delivered at the Athens conference to farmers statewide. Two days after the Athens meeting, Black met with the Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, J. D. Price, and told him of her plan for a series of

³⁰Obviously proud to receive the invitation, Black showed it to her son Ralph. She told him that although it was “a very complimentary invitation, that date in my book is already taken.” Ralph advised her to change her schedule so she could “speak to the boys at the college.” Letter from J. M. Collum to NPB, 16 April 1917 (with note from Ralph attached), Scrapbook of Agriculture Rallies, NPB Papers.

³¹Guy Firor to NPB, 15 December 1914, Scrapbook on Agriculture Rallies, NPB Papers. See also Virginia Griggs Perry, *The Life of Nellie Peters Black* (M. A. thesis: University of Georgia, 1945), 50-53.

agricultural rallies to be sponsored by the GFWC and held in each of the congressional districts throughout the state. State officials passed a resolution agreeing to support Black's plan.³² Despite the federal government's commitment to agricultural reform, which was manifested in the passage of the Morrill Land-Grant Act (1862), the Hatch Experiment Station Act (1887), and the Smith-Lever Act (1914), state governments were slower to commit resources.³³ Black and other agricultural reformers at the grassroots level had to aggressively campaign for state support. Assuming her chances of receiving aid were greater if the rallies represented a cooperative effort, Black enlisted the support of numerous statewide agencies and local organizations including: the Georgia Department of Agriculture, the State College of Agriculture, Georgia Experiment Stations, Georgia State Fair Association, the state Board of Health, local public schools, district agricultural schools, market associations, Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Georgia Fruit Exchange, railroads, and the United States Department of Agriculture. The participation of so many groups guaranteed a "program out of the ordinary designed to advise and assist the farming class in the improvement of rural conditions."³⁴

According to the GFWC, the primary purpose of the rallies was to "put the federation in a position where it [could], through district and individual clubs, assist in bringing about better home conditions in the country" by acquainting the farmers of Georgia with the various

³²*Ibid.* The rallies were planned for the congressional districts for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, as the GFWC was also organized by congressional districts, it would make rally planning much more efficient and effective. Secondly, politicians were likely to cooperate and pay more attention to the rallies in their districts.

³³The Morrill Land-Grant Act furnished land and annual monetary support to the states for the establishment of agricultural colleges. The Hatch Experiment Station Act supported the Morrill Land-Grant Act by providing funds for agricultural experiment stations for the land grant colleges. The Smith-Lever Act established the Cooperative Extension Service. For background on the passage of these acts, as well as the establishment of the United States Department of Agriculture, see Centennial Committee on Agricultural History, *Century of Service: the First 100 years of The United States Department of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1963).

³⁴Guy Firor to NPB, 15 December 1914, Scrapbook on Agriculture Rallies, NPB Papers.

resources available to them. It is likely that Nellie Black and fellow organizers chose the rally locations based on the availability of those resources, support of local networking contacts, and accessibility. Rallies were planned for the following towns: Tifton, Valdosta, Montezuma, Sylvania, Dublin, Sparta, Macon, Rome, Decatur, Gainesville, Madison.³⁵ All of the towns (except for two) were county seats and had some type of women's club that could serve as a host organization. Officers in those clubs were responsible for arranging locations, creating "local interest" and securing publicity. A consummate organizer, Black quickly and efficiently deployed her statewide network of clubwomen. The social graces with which she had been raised served her well in dealing with local clubwomen. Rather than imitate the political fetes of the Democrats, she planned the rallies as if she were hosting a social function or chairing a club meeting. Often, as an incentive to get local women to attend and participate, the meetings included picnics or luncheons and coincided with weekly meetings of the local women's clubs. Club members were expected to attend the rallies, as planners thought that the opportunity to mingle with prominent town women might attract women from the countryside.

As it was becoming the agricultural crossroads of southwest Georgia and was accessible by direct rail line from Atlanta, Tifton was a logical choice for the inaugural rally. Nellie Black relied on her friend and fellow clubwoman, Bessie Tift, to help with local arrangements and publicity. As president of the Twentieth Century Literary Club and wife of Tifton's founder and most prominent businessman, Bessie Tift had at her disposal the means and resources to launch an aggressive publicity campaign. Posters were placed in strategic locations throughout the town and announcements ran in the *Tifton Gazette*. On the morning of February 10, 1915, the first rally took place in Tifton and was reportedly a success. The exact numbers in attendance were

³⁵Race was not likely a consideration in choosing rally locations. Out of the eleven counties originally targeted for rallies in 1915, six had majority- white populations and five were predominately black.

not recorded, but the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that “great crowds” attended both the morning session at the school auditorium and the afternoon session at the courthouse. Audiences were composed of farmers, clubwomen, businessmen, and merchants who had closed their stores after lunch in order to attend. Nellie Black spoke on the relationship between practical farming methods and civic improvement. Other speakers focused on a variety of topics including civic work, crop diversification, rural hygiene, and the raising of poultry. Various representatives from state and federal agencies explained the services they could provide farmers and their role in rural regeneration.

Subsequent rallies followed the program format established at the Tifton meeting. Advertised in local newspapers as an “institute” or “school,” the rallies offered a diverse, but generally formulaic program that focused on issues they assumed would be helpful to the farmer and his family, including more efficient ways to produce, preserve, and conserve foodstuffs. Audiences were always welcomed by local government officials and the district president of the GFWC. Following the opening invocation from a local minister, Nellie Black or another prominent officer of the GFWC took the podium and explained the motivation for coordinating the rallies. Always quick to emphasize the success of their rural reform efforts, the urban women highlighted their work with the Tallulah Falls School, traveling libraries, and canning drives. Afterwards “experts” representing the state-supported agencies and institutions espoused the importance of diversity, modernization, cleanliness, and efficiency to the success of rural life. Sometimes in an attempt to connect the farm household with the larger market economy, agricultural agents employed by railroads and members of marketing associations also joined the panels.

Following Tifton, rallies were held in Montezuma (Macon County) and Sylvania (Screven County). On February 19th, the fourth meeting took place at the Hancock County courthouse in Sparta. Although the first four meetings had generally been considered successful by organizers, both Nellie Black and the press acknowledged that the educational value of the fifth rally held in Macon (Bibb County) one week later had been limited. Although farmers did attend the sessions, the *Macon Telegraph* reported that the audience was composed of “advanced and skilled farmers who required the least expert advice.”³⁶ In other words, the farmers who most needed the information did not - for whatever reason- attend and progressive reformers were once again preaching to the choir. Due greatly to the aggressive publicity efforts of the local women’s clubs, the next two rallies held in Newnan (Coweta County) and Rome (Floyd County) proved more successful. Even though Black considered the experience at the eighth rally in Decatur (DeKalb County) to be similar to that of the Macon rally, *The Constitution* reported that it drew “big crowds.” The next two rallies, in Commerce (Jackson County) and Madison (Morgan County), were also considered successful. However, due to misinformation contained in the pre-rally publicity, the final rally in Valdosta (Lowndes County) was called off when crowds failed to show at the appointed time. When she learned that some farmers arrived at a later time, Nellie Black issued both an explanation and apology to the farmers in an article in the *Valdosta Times*.³⁷

Traveling by car and train, Nellie Black generally adhered to the rigorous rally schedule. Throughout the entire two-month tour, she missed only one rally, which was held in her former

³⁶*Macon Telegraph*, 24 February, 1915.

³⁷I reconstructed the 1915 rally schedule based on information garnered from club records, newspaper articles, and Nellie Black’s own notes. See Agricultural Scrapbook, NPB Papers and Perry, *The Life of Nellie Peters Black*, 50-62.

hometown of Sylvania. Obviously the driving force behind the rallies, Black not only coordinated the schedule; she also served as a program speaker. Thoroughly researching her topics, Black developed an impressive knowledge of the most current agricultural trends. She scribbled notes for her carefully drafted speeches on any scrap of paper available at the time of inspiration. Her finished products were uplifting messages replete with the rhetoric of Protestant reform and her reputation as an enthusiastic and effective speaker grew in both the country and the city.

As coordinator of the rallies, Nellie Black had to work amicably with whoever held the position of Commissioner of Agriculture in Georgia - not an easy task considering the controversial social and political issues that lay beneath her seemingly simple reform recommendations. A powerful and influential force in state politics, the Commissioner of Agriculture decided issues that affected the everyday existence of residents in both the town and country, such as the inspections of crops, animals, and fertilizer, as well as the regulation of freight rates. Georgia's county-unit system, which disproportionately favored rural districts in legislative apportionment, insured the electoral advantage of the rural areas over the more progressive urban communities, thereby institutionalizing the existing urban-rural tension. Whoever controlled the county politically controlled the vote, and votes controlled the Commissioner of Agriculture.³⁸ Black's skillful appeals to commissioners produced tangible results. In 1916, J. J. Brown (president of the Georgia's Farmers Union) defeated incumbent James Price in a hotly contested race for reelection. Holding many of the same beliefs concerning crop diversification and market availability as Nellie Black, Brown supported her

³⁸For an explanation of Georgia's county-unit political system, see Arnold Fleischmann and Carol Pierannunzi, *Politics in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 28-30. An interesting case-in-point regarding the strength of the county-unit system can be found in James C. Cobb, "Not Gone, but Forgotten: Eugene Talmadge and the 1938 Purge Campaign," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LIX, 2 (Summer 1975): 197-221.

efforts and instructed his State Food Inspector to attend as many rallies as possible. In March 1917, Black wrote to Commissioner Brown thanking him for his support and requested that he grant members of local women's clubs the authority to serve as assistant food inspectors. This innovation would increase the speed and efficiency of getting crops to market. Not long after Black's request, the first assistant food inspector appointed by a local women's club was commissioned at a rally in Waynesville.

In organizing the rallies, Black and her fellow clubwomen also had to work with federally funded and state trained demonstration agents to teach women improved methods for accomplishing their diverse chores. Demonstration programs included instruction in every chore perceived to be the responsibility of the farm wife, from canning fruit to fixing screens and feeding chickens. Some farm wives resented the intrusion by the so-called experts. Younger women, however, viewed the agents as role models who were working to raise the status of women's work on the farm. In an attempt to circumvent urban-rural tensions and the resistance of the older generation to technology, extension agents often appealed first to female children by encouraging them to farm their own small garden plots. Theoretically, once the young girls got their produce into their mothers' kitchens, their farmer fathers would take notice. *Country Life* advocates understood the role of children in the rural farm family economy. In a speech to clubwomen at the Chautauqua of the South in Macon, Black explained in her pragmatic fashion that children working on the farm should be financially motivated, just like their counterparts working in urban mills. "There is no use to try to get Johnny to raise a calf as long as papa claims the cow when the calf is grown." To make her point, Black recounted a conversation that she had had with one farm boy. "What do get for your work?" she asked. He responded "If I do my

work well, I get nothing; if I don't, I get hell.”³⁹ In her speeches Black often acknowledged the contributions that young people could make to farm life, through both their household chores and participation in girls' canning clubs and boys' corn clubs. In return, she also placed the responsibility of nurturing America's youth squarely on the shoulders of the southern farmer, as she declared agriculture to be “both a science and an industry which could lay our children at Mother Nature's feet.”⁴⁰ As Black viewed children as an integral part of the farm economy, she was especially pleased when local schools encouraged children to attend the rallies by dismissing school early.

Gender was clearly a divisive issue within the national extension program, but in the paternalistic South it was even more rigid.⁴¹ Following the government's lead, clubwomen also segregated their reform efforts and focused many of their reform efforts on the plight of the white farm wife. Evidence gathered by Roosevelt's Country Life Commission revealed that nearly all of the farm wives surveyed suffered from “indifference of the husband to home conveniences, isolation, lack of money, and lack of recreation.”⁴² Even though for most Country

³⁹“Canning Problems Before Clubwomen” *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 1917.

⁴⁰Nellie Peters Black, Address delivered to the Southern Conference of Education and Industries, 19 April, 1916, NPB Papers.

⁴¹Not wanting to jeopardize their national program, the United States Department of Agriculture assigned a separate Office of Extension Work South which created a program hierarchy based on race and gender, instead of one based on gender alone. The Office of Extension Work South remained a separate administrative agency until 1921. Kathleen Hilton, “Both in the Field, Each With a Plow: Race and Gender in USDA Policy, 1907-1929,” *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, Virginia Bernhard, et. al., eds. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 115-33. Hilton offers a thorough explanation of the race and gender based programs of the Southern Extension Office.

⁴²Nellie Peters Black, “Address Delivered in New Orleans Before the Southern Conference of Education and Industries,” 19 April 1916, NPB Papers. Suffragist, social reformer, and farm wife Rebecca Latimer Felton also argued that gender relations, not agricultural methods, needed reforming on the farm. She concluded that post-Reconstruction poor white farm women were no better treated than plantation slaves and that the farmer would never be free from slavery to markets until he could emancipate his wife from her domestic bondage. See LeeAnn Whites, “Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife's Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, 2 (Summer 1992): 354-72.

Lifers, improving the quality of rural life for farm families did not indicate a change in family status for farm women, Nellie Black acknowledged that changes were needed. In an address she delivered to the Southern Conference of Education and Industries in April 1916, Black recited an often heard complaint from farm wives: “My husband improves his barns, his machinery, his cattle, but I am keeping house with just as little comfort as my great-grandmother did before me.”⁴³ This was indeed a common complaint among farm wives. Advances in farm technology and the re-organization of work on the farm had contributed to a devaluation of women as workers. Farmers who were financially able to modernize their farm equipment were most often reluctant to spend money on upgrading the farmhouse, which some historians of rural women have nicknamed “woman killers.”⁴⁴ Black held that the farmer and his wife should act as “helpmates” to each other, just as she and her husband had done. As a team, their primary concern should be the survival of the farm that, according to Black, depended on both the reforms proposed by Country Lifers and tranquility and satisfaction within the farm household. Once again, Black offered a simple yet pragmatic remedy

What we need is to make life on the farm bright, interesting and happy, with an adequate system of paydays for the wife and each child who bears a share of work on the farm.⁴⁵

⁴³Nellie Peters Black, “Address Delivered in New Orleans Before the Southern Conference of Education and Industries,” 19 April 1916, NPB Papers.

⁴⁴A review of the literature on rural life and technology can be found in Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, “Women, Technology, and Rural Life: Some Recent Literature,” *Technology and Culture* 38, no. 4 (Oct., 1997): 942-53. For information on women’s work on the farm, see Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) and Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵NPB, “Address Delivered in New Orleans Before the Southern Conference of Education and Industries,” 19 April 1916, NPB Papers.

However, Black may have been somewhat naive when she declared in the same speech that “each state is looking after these faithful [farm] women, with more or less enthusiasm.”⁴⁶

The rallies represented a collective effort among volunteers and state officials, but Nellie Black carefully kept the clubwomen in the forefront. Maintaining a cooperative relationship between the club women, government officials, rural inhabitants, and newspaper editors required striking a delicate balance between the needs of the farmer and the rhetoric of the reformers. Black understood that positive publicity in the local papers was critical for the success of the rallies. During the rally in Rome, the local newspaper, the *Tribune Herald*, hosted a luncheon for all of the visiting clubwomen. (It is interesting to note that the male rally speakers were entertained by the local Rotary Club.)⁴⁷ In a 1917 editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution Magazine* Black courted newspaper editors statewide by remarking “. . . the press is our strongest ally and we feel helpless without such publicity.”⁴⁸ Her flattery paid off. During an address at Tifton in 1919, Black boasted that nearly all of the newspapers “are in line with clubwomen and the objects for which they strive.”⁴⁹ Yet even praise in the state’s newspapers was tempered by couched criticism of the clubwoman movement in general. After praising the women for “taking a hand” with the rallies, the editor of the *Macon Daily Telegraph* patronizingly wrote

If through their club organization they can arouse interest, stimulate attendance, and add the right social touch after their arrival, it might do well to drop the woman’s suffrage, pro and con, historical essays, higher criticism, and the minor poets, Ibsen and Tagore,

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷“ROME, GA,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 February, 1915.

⁴⁸*Atlanta Constitution Magazine*, 26 August 1917.

⁴⁹“Mrs Black’s Tifton Address,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 April 1917.

billboards and park benches, and all such for the time, and devote themselves to vicariously tilling the soil.⁵⁰

He concluded that the women would “make a success of this angle if they persevered.”⁵¹

One small rural newspaper was even more hostile to the clubwomen. In 1916, former Populist politician turned newspaper editor Tom Watson criticized Nellie Black’s labors in his county paper, the *Jeffersonian*. An “agrarian rebel,” Watson had been an outspoken critic of Henry Grady’s New South idealism since the 1880s.⁵² During the economically depressed 1890s, he stumped for agricultural reform, rallying Georgia Alliance men against the evils of urban industrialism and the “Northern capital” supposedly flowing into the South. Over two decades later, Watson portrayed Black’s work as evidence of the continuing attempts by town elites to control rural areas. Commenting on her rallies, he wrote

I notice that these city farmers carry some ladies along in their rotary movement; and that these benevolent Atlanta ladies are endeavoring to lift the farmer’s wives to a higher plane . . . Now, it is mighty nice of these people to be rotating around at their own expense, telling the country people how to behave . . . Us country people have no pride and no self-respect and no sense and no experience; and therefore we gladly welcome these city folks who modestly take it upon themselves to come out into the country and teach us how to farm and our wives how to keep house.⁵³

Black understood that Watson’s criticisms were aimed directly at her, but she also knew that tact and good manners could be powerful weapons, especially against a man who had become so embittered after numerous political failures that he was considered by many to be unhinged.

⁵⁰*Macon Daily Telegraph*, 24 February 1915.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²For an explanation of Watson’s agrarian views, reform activities, and political career, see C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, Second Edition (Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1973).

⁵³Clipping, *Weekly Jeffersonian*, n.d., Scrapbook of Agricultural Rallies, NPB Papers.

Following the biblical advice to “turn the other cheek,” she wisely refrained from responding publicly to Watson’s sarcastic remarks.⁵⁴

Watson’s words highlight what historian William Link has referred to as the “paradox” of southern Progressivism - the underlying animosity between the paternalistic reformers (including in particular the Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, and women’s clubs) and the reluctant locals who resented urban do-gooders. In the late nineteenth century, some New South proponents, donning what Paul Gaston dubbed “the emperor’s new clothes,” maintained that no such animosity existed. Like Nellie Black, who optimistically perpetuated this myth, the editor of the *Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer* wrote in 1890, “We are cognizant of no antagonism between the man who lives in the town, and the man who lives in the country.” He claimed the real root of the tension to be the “middleman” who bought from the producer and sold at a high profit to the consumer, a situation created by the lack of direct market opportunities for farmers.⁵⁵

Watson’s criticisms, as well as the exchange of letters between Witham, Black and Calloway in 1914, illustrate the contradictory nature of Black’s agricultural work in that she saw

⁵⁴*Ibid.* Scrapbook of Agricultural Rallies, NPB Papers. Black wrote on the clipping “I am one of these ladies. The scrapbook also contains an undated newspaper clipping from the *Madisonian* in which Mrs. J. L. Brownlee, Press Reporter for the GFWC wrote

What a pity the splendid talents of Thomas E. Watson are not put to greater use, in this instance at least! . . . Mr. Watson could render his state a distinct service by joining this splendid band of patriots. . .

⁵⁵William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xiii. Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 188-214. The *Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer*, December 1890, p 582. Mss. 1361, GHS. For more on “urban-rural cooperation” (or the supposed lack thereof), see Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, Second Edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 103-26 and Rebecca Montgomery, “Lost Cause Mythology in New South Reform: Gender, Class, Race, and the Politics of Patriotic Citizenship in Georgia, 1890-1925” in *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing With the Powers That be* Janet Coryell, et al., ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 174-98. For an explanation of urban/rural political tension, see Gordon E. Baker, *Rural Versus Urban Political Power: The Nature and Consequences of Unbalanced Representation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955).

herself as an “everyday practical farmer,” a business woman, and a reformer, but, like Tom Watson, she resented the interference of non-farmers. As Black wrote, “So often these worthy counselors have never been on a farm in a working capacity and are more facile with their pens than with their hoes and give counsel from theory and not from experience.”⁵⁶ Although Black failed to recognize herself as a member of the agricultural establishment, it probably would have been impossible for her to prove otherwise to farmers already suspicious of “uptown elites” and their programs of rural uplift.

Many attempts by Progressives and Country Lifers to uplift the countryside involved keeping farmers (especially African Americans) in the country. Nellie Black did not publicly identify or focus on any one particular group of farmers, but some reformers reminded blacks that “educated young colored men have few opportunities in large cities.” Blacks might leave the farm to seek an education, but reformers urged them to return to the farm afterwards. Attempting to make those who did not return feel guilty, the editor of the *Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer* wrote

. . . my heart sickens at the sight of their conduct. Many of them are even loath to meet in company the faithful mothers and fathers who toiled to make them what they are. Shame! Shame! Shame! Forever brand such men!⁵⁷

Instead of advocating the improvement of farm life, some Country Life dissenters discouraged rural flight by arguing that contemporary farm life was already much better than millwork and urban life. Commenting on the already polluted air in the mills, one such proponent, C. R. Pendleton, editor of the *Macon Daily Telegraph*, praised the farmer who “might

⁵⁶“Prominent Woman Farmer Gives Experiences, Saying No Market For Food Crops” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 November 1914.

⁵⁷“Our Young Colored Farmers” editorial in the *Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer*, August 1891, p. 419, Mss. #1361, GHS.

have hayseed in his hair, [but] at least he didn't have soot in his nose." Expressing concern over the undesirable element he believed was often found in cities and extolling the virtue of the farm family, Pendleton wrote that it was better to seek companionship with "march-snipes, who teach no bad habits" than with "gutter-snipes" who "demoralize with cuss words."⁵⁸ Tom Watson, heaping even harsher criticism on northern industrialists, exploited the 1915 murder of fourteen-year-old Mary Phagen in an Atlanta pencil factory to exemplify what would happen if the South abandoned its pure agrarian values for those of evil industrialism, which he reported was controlled by northern Jews.⁵⁹

Some southerners also feared another component of northern industrialism - immigration. Yet Nellie Black and other progressive reformers presumed that increased agricultural opportunities would in turn attract to the region European immigrants, who shared with southerners "Saxon kinship." Attempting to persuade those suspicious of foreign labor, Black argued that immigrants - the right sort, of course - could prove vital to the South's plan for economic development. Not only did industry need immigrant labor, but she claimed farmers could also benefit from their "knowledge of the value of soil and variety of product, skill, and

⁵⁸C. R. Pendleton, "Attractions on the Farm," *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 18 December 1914.

⁵⁹Walter J. Brown, *J. J. Brown and Thomas E. Watson: Georgia Politics, 1912-1928* (Thomson: Watson-Brown Foundation, 1988), 10-11. The fascinating and intertwined relationships between politicians Tom Watson and J. J. Brown, reformer Rebecca Latimer Felton, and clubwoman Black effectively exemplify the contradictory nature of southern Progressivism and Georgia politics. J. J. Brown, although a one-time political protégée of Tom Watson, shared many of Black's views on agricultural reform. Although Black and Felton agreed on woman's suffrage and education rights, they disagreed on the politics of Tom Watson, the issue of lynching, and the progressive policies of Woodrow Wilson. Felton and Watson advocated lynching, whereas Black was more tolerant in her attitudes regarding race, religion, and immigration than either Felton or Watson. Watson vehemently spoke out against what he considered Hoke Smith's liberal coverage of the Leo Frank case in his newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal*. Smith, Henry Grady's successor as New South spokesman, generously covered Black's club activities and agreed with her ideas about agricultural reform. Watson led a slanderous and abusive campaign against Smith's paper and Governor John Slaton, who commuted Leo Frank's death sentence to life in prison. Slaton appointed Black's son-in-law, Peyton Wade, to a judgeship and the two families traveled in the same social circles.

efficiency.”⁶⁰ Although Black did not convey the notion in her messages, some southern reformers thought sufficient numbers of European immigrants would decrease the region’s dependence on African-American labor. Like the New South advocates before them, the women of the GFWC continued to seek ways to attract immigrants to the region. At their annual meeting in 1917, the clubwomen resolved to “make a special effort” toward “persons of foreign birth, many of whom do not speak other languages, follow un-American standards of living, and who do not possess American citizenship.” Teaching English and citizenship in the public schools would bring immigrant children “into touch with American life” and help create “clean, wholesome citizens.”⁶¹ Fearing the loss of quality laborers and valuable consumers, the GFWC worked to keep the “thriftiest element we have” by encouraging harmony between the rural population and the immigrants. Black’s club speeches often contained pleas for cooperation and understanding between the two groups. Georgia clubwomen were not the only progressives in the South to recognize the value of immigrant labor. Virtually all southern states established commissions and agencies to encourage European immigration to the region, but due to the stagnant economic situation and prevailing racism, these attempts proved generally unsuccessful.⁶²

Encouraged by increasing governmental participation in agricultural reform during the Wilson years, Black and others working in the Country Life movement failed to realize that the immediate effects of their work were minimal. As evidenced by the passage of the Smith-Lever

⁶⁰“A Great Opportunity for Georgia,” *Atlanta Journal*, 1 November 1914.

⁶¹Resolution put forth by Mrs. Howard. H. McCall. GFWC, *Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 9.

⁶²Carl N. Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 115-17. See also C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 297-99 and Rowland T. Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” *The Journal of Southern History* 17, 3 (Aug., 1951): 328-360.

Act (1914), progressive efforts did help draw the South into national politics and the federal government into rural reform.⁶³ Proposed by Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Representative Asbury F. Lever of South Carolina, the bill earmarked federal funds for cooperative agricultural extension work to be disbursed to states according to the size of their rural population. Even though Georgia's rural population slowly decreased during the Progressive period, 83% of the state's total population was identified as rural by the federal census. Such a high percentage of rural inhabitants qualified the state to receive significant funding for cooperative agricultural education projects such as Black's rallies.⁶⁴ Yet the success of the rallies is debatable. At Macon and Decatur, Black and the other speakers were merely "preaching to the choir." Most of the farmers who needed persuading to modernize and diversify were either unable or unwilling to leave their farms to attend the rallies.⁶⁵

Successful or not, the rallies continued for several years. Over a three-year period Black addressed nearly 20,000 people, traveled over 5,000 miles, and wrote more than fifty articles for

⁶³Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Congressman Asbury Frank Lever sponsored the bill, which created the USDA Extension Service and provided state land-grant colleges with control over the county agents. Both men had rural roots with urban connections. Smith's involvement is one indicator of southern political influence during the Wilson administration. The ideas behind the bill were not original to Smith and Lever. They were actually continuing the work of Seaman Knapp, who at the turn of the century had pioneered the model for the federal-state Agricultural Extension Service. See George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana e University Press, 1967), 15-17.

⁶⁴This percentage was obtained by averaging the total rural population figures for Georgia during the census years 1890, 1900, and 1910. United States, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States taken in the year 1910. Abstract of the census. Statistics of population, agriculture, manufactures, and mining for the United States, the states, and principal cities, with supplement for Georgia containing statistics for the state, counties, cities, and other divisions.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), 570.

⁶⁵Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 21-22, 115-33. Kirby surmised that "middle class goals, no matter how ardently preached or generously funded, make little headway among a people without capital."

newspapers.⁶⁶ On the national level, Black's rallies became part of a campaign to encourage farmers to diversify their commercial crops not only to promote self-sufficiency, but also to help feed starving Europeans victimized by the World War.⁶⁷ With patriotic zeal, Black urged her fellow Georgians to accept their national responsibility. She claimed that "When the soil of Georgia is made to produce what it ought to yield, after scientific and preserving methods are used, she can feed not only her own people but many others besides."⁶⁸

As her diagnosis of the South's problems was, more often than not, informed, pragmatic, and potentially effective, why wasn't Nellie Black successful in her attempts to reform agricultural practices and revitalize rural life in the South? The answers to that question are varied. In terms of her own perspective, she no doubt underestimated the intensity of urban-rural tensions and ignored the consequences of racism on the rural economy. As long as African Americans (who made up over one-half of the population in the South) were denied access to education, suffrage, credit, and land ownership, the region would remain economically stagnant. Nellie Black was naive in thinking that the southern politicians, railroad executives, and business elites would look beyond their deeply entrenched economic interests and operate within her social gospel guidelines. To Black it was simple: one should treat others as he or she would like to be treated and help others along the way. These ideals were not incorporated into the business ethics of those constructing the New South. When Black's experiences are viewed through a gendered lens, her failure to achieve many of her goals reflects the limitations of female power in

⁶⁶NPB Papers. Some notes for speeches in Black's handwriting are written on the backs of household bills and train tickets. Jane Bonner Peacock, "Nellie Peters Black: Turn of the Century 'Mover and Shaker,'" *Atlanta Historical Journal* 22, 4 (Winter 1978-1980): 14.

⁶⁷"Address Delivered in New Orleans Before the Southern Conference of Education and Industries," 19 April 1916, NPB Papers. See also farm rally clippings, NPB Papers. Phil Campbell, Director of Extension Service to Black. NPB Papers.

⁶⁸"History of Agricultural Rallies Told by Mrs. Rucker," *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 September 1925.

the era of voluntary reform associations, particularly in the South where women had to work within a strict patriarchy.⁶⁹ As reformers, she and her contemporaries were most effective in areas such as education and social welfare issues where they could invoke their traditional maternal authority. Whether speaking on religious responsibility, agricultural reform, or social justice, Nellie Black often incorporated the biblical and somewhat feminine reference to planting seeds and nurturing plants. Although Black tried to persuade the powers-that-be that the traditional female roles of “wife and mother” were naturally compatible with those of “farmer and producer,” she was unsuccessful.

The major social and economic transformations on the scale that Black envisioned came only with the New Deal and World War II. As historian Numan V. Bartley noted, “the quest for a diversified agriculture foundered on the same shoals that grounded the search for rapid industrial growth.” “County governing elites” fiercely guarded the old paternalistic labor system, and the “uptown elites,” who depended on their rural counterparts to help maintain social stability and market networks, went along. Encouraging “farm wives to stock their pantries” did not overtly threaten that relationship.⁷⁰ Nellie Black never intended to upset such patriarchal traditions of the rural South. To do so would have violated her strategy of non-confrontational reform. Her motivation was much like that of government agencies and commissions - “to

⁶⁹Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 174-86. For an historiographical review of the debate on the effect of racism on the rural economy, see, Harold D. Woodman, “Economic Reconstruction and the Rise of the New South, 1865-1900,” *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 254-307. Although they had begun to deteriorate during the Civil War, the Old South patriarchal traditions founded on the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender continued to influence the actions of women, blacks, and poor whites in the so-called New South. One example of this would be the relatively late endorsement of suffrage by southern white women. For information on the continuing influence of the patriarchy in the South, see: LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); and Rebecca Montgomery, “Lost Cause Mythology in New South Reform,” 186-88.

⁷⁰Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 125-26.

stabilize, not to disturb” local conditions.⁷¹ Nonetheless, Black’s efforts were significant in that she identified and articulated problems that were stifling not only Georgia’s economic advancement, but also that of the entire South. By utilizing her statewide network of women’s clubs and positioning herself as both a farmer and a reformer, Black was able to open up a dialogue between urban and rural groups who had previously been unable to find common ground. On the local level, Black’s attempts to bring the town and country together did produce tangible results. After her death in 1919, the Atlanta Woman’s Club carried on efforts to open new markets to farmers by organizing a curbside market. Within a year, they were lobbying the Atlanta City Council to take over the endeavor. Due in part to the persistence of the clubwomen, the Atlanta Municipal Market opened in 1925. The market furnished Atlanta housewives with several advantages, including shopping convenience and a variety of competitively priced products. It also provided farmers in the region with a local market for crops, thereby encouraging the truck-shipping industry.⁷² The immediate effects of the market may have been locally limited, but Nellie Black and her fellow clubwomen had succeeded in securing government cooperation in the establishment of progressive reform.

⁷¹*An Adventure in Democracy: A Bulletin for Speakers*, Bulletin No. 2, (Government Printing Office: Washington, D. C., 1917), 2. NPB Papers, UGA.

⁷²For information on the city market see John R. Hornaday, *Atlanta Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (USA: American Cities Book Co., 1922), 368 and Franklin Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, Vol. II (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1954), 802.

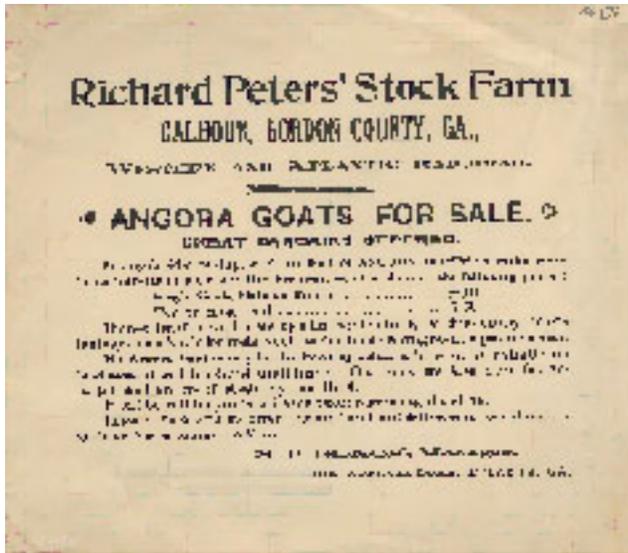


Figure 7-1. This is an undated advertisement for the Peters' Farm. Note "N.P. Black" is listed as the "Manager." (photo courtesy of Hargrett Book and Manuscript Collection, University of Georgia Libraries, electronic version, <http://www.libs.uga.edu/hargrett/rarebook/broadside/index.html>)



Figure 7-2. Nellie Black and her nephew playing croquet at Peters' Farm (1903). (photo courtesy of Georgia Department of Archives and History)

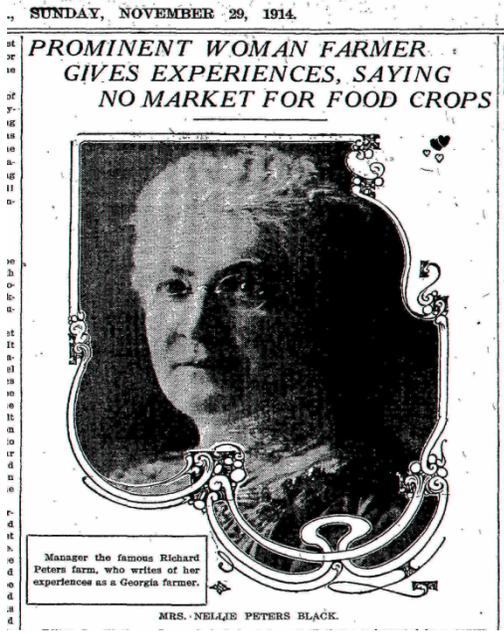


Figure 7-3. (Atlanta Constitution)



Figure 7-4. Nellie Black in her cotton costume from the convention. (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 1 November 1914)

CHAPTER 8 CREATING A “CHRIST-NATION”: THE WAR PRESIDENT AND WORLD WAR I

. . . When the result of all of our unselfish work is known, we think of the merging of all of those [rainbow] colors into the great white light that will shine around the throne of God in heaven, and all of the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory and their honor to it.¹

Confident in the righteousness of her cause, Nellie Peters Black rallied Georgia clubwomen in 1917 with this evangelical message that applauded both the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) and American intervention in the war raging in Europe. Influenced by her admiration for President Woodrow Wilson (who she publicly declared to be “the finest man in the world”) and the social gospel, Black viewed the war as both a patriotic and a religious mission. She became known in the GFWC as the “war president.” The uplifting rhetoric of her speeches and letters to the clubwomen resembled those of Protestant clergymen mustering their congregations to Wilson’s cause. Indeed, it seemed to many social gospel reformers that World War I offered an opportunity for America to fulfill its destiny as the “Christ-Nation.”²

However, Nellie Peters Black and other members of the GFWC had not always supported the war. In the early years of the conflict, they commended President Wilson’s determination to keep the United States out of the war in Europe. In 1916, GFWC president Mrs. Z. I. Fitzpatrick praised Wilson for his desire “to establish the Golden Rule as a canon of American affairs,” thus ensuring “God’s work and the mother’s work first.” Wilson had won the soul of the American

¹“Report of the President,” *Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs, 1917-1918*, 20.

²For Nellie Peters Black’s (NPB) comment on Wilson, see “Mrs. Black’s Tifton Address,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 April 1919. The phrase “Christ Nation” can be found in Richard M. Gamble, “Savior Nation: Woodrow Wilson and the Gospel of Service,” *Humanitas*, 14, 1 (2001): 4-23. See also Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*. As religion historian Donald Gorrell has noted, until the United States assumed a lead role in the war effort, a world dimension was not generally characteristic of the social gospel during the years it achieved official recognition and status. Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 280.

mother by not sending her boy “to a useless war to be maimed and sacrificed.”³ The GFWC was so devoted to keeping the peace that they established a “Committee of Peace” to support “rational alternatives to war.”⁴ Nellie Black, like clubwomen throughout the country, called for official days of “prayer for universal peace.”⁵ By the following year, the GFWC had reversed its position. Most of its annual convention in 1917 was devoted to war-related issues and how clubwomen could “answer the call to service.” The “Committee on Peace” passed resolutions praising Wilson’s entry into the war as “the only safe foundation for progressive world civilization.”⁶ Why then did Nellie Black, who had been so devoted to the Christian ideals of non-violence and peaceful reconciliation, change her perspective within the course of one year?

The answer to that question can be found partially in the changing attitudes of social gospel clergymen. At the beginning of the European conflict, calls for prayers, peace, and isolationism dominated Protestant sermons. Once America entered the war however, social gospel clergymen (and progressive philanthropists and politicians such as Andrew Carnegie and Woodrow Wilson) had to reconcile the seemingly paradoxical relationship between the teachings of Christ and their country’s democratic and increasingly militaristic mission. In a 1918 article for a religious journal, social gospel theologian Shailer Mathews explained that “Christianity has

³“Report of the President,” *Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs: Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 24.

⁴The chairman of the committee, Miss Alice Baxter, did note however that at the national Convention of the World Congress League (which she attended) there was a “decided drift in opinion in favor of some sort of military preparedness in view of a warring world...” In other words, the peace committee would wait to take a decisive stand until they could determine what Wilson would do. *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵“A Call To Prayer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 August 1914. The pre-war and wartime activities of white clubwomen in Atlanta were similar to those in other southern cities, see Anastasia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women’s Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 149-54; Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Woman’s Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and Ida Clyde Clark, *American Women and the Word War* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1918).

⁶“Resolutions,” *Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs: Yearbook, 1917-1918*, 11.

never included opposition to war” and that “it [Christianity] has been both the servant and defender of war.” Not only was Mathews granting American Christians permission to support the war, he charged them with a holy mission to stop Germany’s “un-Christian” use of war “as a means of national development.”⁷ Mathews emphatically claimed that “a policeman protecting social ideals from maniacs and thugs is an exponent of more efficient social service than a Good Samaritan binding up the wounds of victims of civic neglect!”⁸ In terms of progressive reform, joining the war effort served several purposes: it promoted inter-denominational cooperation in that Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish reformers all participated in “umbrella” relief organization such as the Red Cross; it brought the churches into national service; and it united urban and rural populations in a common cause.

Recognizing the window of political opportunity opened by both the national need for experienced and efficient organizers and the simultaneous re-emergence of southern influence in national politics, the GFWC quickly and successfully appropriated the national war relief agenda to fulfill their own complex economic, political, and social objectives.⁹ Confident in the Federation’s ability to succeed on all levels, one officer of the GFWC declared: “The war work asked of American women coincides so closely with much of our own Federation work as to be distinguishable only by greater publicity and wider appeal.”¹⁰ Armed with Wilson’s

⁷Shailer Mathews, “Religion and War,” *Biblical World* 52 (Sept., 1918): 163-76.

⁸Shailer Mathews, “Ethics for an International Policeman,” *Biblical World* 48 (July, 1916), 1-2. Cited in Gamble, *The War For Righteousness*, 134-35.

⁹Wilson’s election, along with the Democratic control of both houses of Congress and key committees, guaranteed the re-emergence of southern influence in national politics. Born in Virginia and raised in Georgia and South Carolina, Woodrow Wilson exhibited many of the paradoxical attitudes concerning race and reform held by southern Progressives, including white clubwomen like Nellie Black. He once commented that “the only place in the world where nothing has to be explained to me is the South.” Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1948), 312.

¹⁰Mrs. John F. Neely, President of the First District, GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 20.

philosophies of patriotism and thrift, the organizational framework established by the GFWC, and the social gospel call to serve, Georgia clubwomen used war work (which they easily incorporated into their existing reform agenda) as both a tool for economic development and an avenue through which to bring the South onto the national stage.¹¹

The Politics of Food

“Food will win the War!” So claimed Herbert Hoover, head of the United States Food Administration during World War I. Although his statement may have sounded somewhat simplistic, Hoover did not overestimate the powerful role of food as America’s primary weapon in the war. Not only did the United States supply Britain with more than half of its bread and flour and some 80% of its meats and fats during the last two years of war, American loans supplied the Allies with funding to purchase the food. The responsibility for the strategy and implementation of this “hold over Allied stomachs” fell to Hoover and his Food Administration.¹² Getting the average American to recognize the need for increased food production and conservation proved to be a monumental task, requiring effort from both the public and private sectors. Hoover found willing and capable volunteers in America’s clubwomen. With over 2½ million members, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs formed

¹¹Even before Wilson’s declaration of war, citizens of Georgia supported his call for “preparedness” and began to mobilize their resources for the war effort. In January 1917, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce met with representatives from the United States Army to select an 800 acre site on which to establish a southeastern cantonment. Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, Vol. II (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1954), 712-14. For an overview of southern political attitudes regarding the war, see George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 33-69.

¹²Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1989), 376-77.

one of the largest and strongest of the “women’s war machines” and Georgia clubwomen eagerly answered their country’s call.¹³

When food production and preservation became a wartime priority, the GFWC’s “war president” Nellie Peters Black, was already in a unique position to serve the cause. As she was both a farmer and an agricultural activist, Black persuaded the GFWC to sponsor a series of agricultural rallies in each congressional district throughout the state. (See chapter seven) Her “Grow at Home” campaign became part of the GFWC’s campaign to encourage Georgia farmers to diversify their crops not only to promote economic self-sufficiency in the South, but also to help feed starving Belgians victimized by the war.¹⁴ Black’s optimism about state activism on behalf of the farmers was affirmed when America officially entered the war and President Wilson appealed “to the farmers of the South to plant abundant foodstuffs. . .”

They [southern farmers] can show their patriotism in no better or more convincing way than by resisting the great temptation of the present price of cotton and helping, helping upon a great scale, to feed the nation and the peoples everywhere who are fighting for their liberties and for our own. The variety of their crops will be the visible measure of their comprehension of their national duty.¹⁵

Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia initially supported Wilson’s proposed food control legislation because of the increased federal funding for farmers, but he disagreed with the bill’s authority to restrict distribution and control the prices of raw materials - namely cotton. When Smith publically opposed the legislation he was branded in the press by many Wilson supporters

¹³Membership estimates for the all white General Federation vary. See Ida Clyde Clark, *American Women and the World War* (1918).

¹⁴See page 189 of this dissertation for Black’s ideas about soil conservation and crop diversification. Also see “History of the Agricultural Rallies Told by Mrs. Rucker,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 September 1925.

¹⁵President Woodrow Wilson, *Why We Are At War: Messages to the Congress, January to April, 1917*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. (Electronic version, http://world.std.com/~raparker/exploring/books/why_we_are_at_war.html. Jan. 2005) See also “President Wilson Joins the Hog and Hominy Campaign,” *Tifton Gazette*, 20 April 1917.

as unwilling to heed the president's call ". . . to substitute patriotism for profits."¹⁶ While she never called anyone by name, Nellie Black often publicly chastised Wilson's critics. In a speech to clubwomen in Tifton, Georgia, Black said that she could understand "a crowd of schoolboys, willfully making a noise and disturbing public gatherings, but not how gray-haired old men could be deliberately and persistently following the tactics of a spoiled child." She further railed that

When I think of a few little old congressmen and misfit senators opposing our president and trying to handicap his work, it makes me ashamed to realize that we have sent such men to misrepresent us.¹⁷

Although Black was most likely referring to the "Two Toms" (Wilson "obstructionists," senators Thomas Hardwick and Thomas E. Watson), Wilson supporters and Georgia veterans considered anyone critical of the war "unpatriotic."¹⁸ Perhaps succumbing to public pressure or perceiving it as politically beneficial, two months after he had vowed to not vote for the bill,

¹⁶For information about: Hoke Smith's opposition to and support for Wilson, his role in the passage of WWI food legislation and the attacks on Smith, see Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 311-29. Smith agreed to the amended bill because raw materials (namely cotton) were removed from its control. In regards to wheat production, he agreed that the federal government should have the authority to restrict markets, but as a result, it should be required to guarantee the farmers a minimal price for their crop. Smith claimed that cotton was not a necessity for life and government subsidization of it would be too expensive for the tax payers. "Speech of Hon. Hoke Smith of Georgia," July 19, 1917 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917).

¹⁷The editor of the *Tifton Gazette* was quoted as saying "Men would enthusiastically welcome women into politics if they were all as patriotic, as single-minded and as public-spirited as the president of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs." "Mrs. Black's Tifton Address," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 April 1919.

¹⁸Political allies Hardwick and Watson constantly tried to obstruct Wilson's wartime measures. "Hardwick's actions were so aggressive that President Woodrow Wilson, himself, addressed an appeal to the people of Georgia that Hardwick not be returned to his seat in the Senate." Joseph M. Toomey, *Georgia's Participation in the World War and the History of the American Legion* (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke Co., 1936), 168-69.

Hoke Smith appealed to his colleagues in the United States Senate to pass the proposed food control legislation.¹⁹

Viewing her position as similar to Wilson's, Black incorporated the president's patriotic call for "Victory Gardens" into the GFWC's wartime agenda.²⁰ Clubwomen expected the gardens to generate a unifying patriotism that would surmount differences between urban and rural, black and white, and North and South. Victory Gardens also exemplified the progressive ideologies of economic self-sufficiency and agricultural diversity promoted at Black's rallies. Not only did they offer a solution for wasted, weed-filled urban lots, successful home gardens might also inspire farmers to turn away from "King Cotton" and grow a variety of food crops. This would in turn allow the farmer to feed his family out of the garden and possibly create surplus to sell at market. In terms of the war effort, farmers and their families would be perceived as soldiers and the gardens as weapons.

In 1918 Nellie Black was appointed the Director of the School Garden Army of Georgia by the Bureau of Education of the United States Department of the Interior. This appointment provided her with an opportunity not only to associate with state and federal government officials, but also to interact with school children.²¹ Black interpreted the three-fold mission of the School Garden Army program as: "to educate the child in the great secrets of Mother Nature,

¹⁹"Importance of food control legislation as an aide to victory in the War urged; speech of Hon. Hoke Smith, of Georgia, in the Senate of the United States, August 7, 1917" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917).

²⁰For an analysis of the wartime role of civilian victory gardens and canning, see Amy Bentley, *Eating For Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 114-41.

²¹Certificate from Department of Interior, October 12, 1918, box 9, folder 11, Nellie Peters Black Papers, Mss.#235, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia (Hereafter cited as NPB Papers). Black's appointment was what was known as a "dollar a year" position. Essentially volunteers, the appointees salary of "\$1 per annum" provided them with some official authority.

promote health and happiness, and to aide in the character building of the child.”²² She reasoned that creating and maintaining the gardens would help make the children more self-sufficient and instill in them a patriotic sense of duty. Club members from various committees and departments visited schools, donated seeds, and sponsored contests that, according to the women, added enjoyment for the children and encouraged them to be more productive. The chairman of the GFWC’s Country Life committee proclaimed “our aim this year is to standardize every school, put a pig in each school, and encourage the planting of war gardens and an acre of wheat on every campus.” The education committee of the GFWC secured and provided scholarships for deserving youths to learn more about agriculture. Boy recipients attended the district agricultural schools throughout the state and girls went to the State Normal School in Athens. To ensure widespread participation, some clubs donated funds to both black and white school fairs.²³

Once produced by either farmers or their children, foodstuffs required adequate preservation. Thus, the GFWC began an aggressive canning campaign. Federation clubs had for several years supported their education project, the Tallulah Falls School in North Georgia, with donations of canned food products. When the war came, clubs expanded their canning efforts to include donations to soldiers in military hospitals throughout Georgia, including Fort McPherson and Camp Gordon. The women proposed “setting aside every tenth jar of material put up for the soldier’s shelf.”²⁴ Always encouraging the clubwomen to take credit when it was due them,

²²Appeal letter from Nellie Black, n.d., box 3, folder 10, NPB Papers.

²³“Five Dollars was given to negro school fair for prizes,” GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 45.

²⁴“Newsletter of the Woman’s Committee Council of National Defense,” March 12, 1918 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 6. The clubwomen organized canning drives among rural women, while railroads and schools sponsored patriotic livestock and farming competitions among children and young adults. See

President Black arranged with the Red Cross for the 30,000 jars of fruit and jelly donated by clubs in 1918 to be marked with club labels. She vowed that no jars would be delivered without a “proper club label!”²⁵

Fastidious about details, President Black requested that individual clubs submit “canning accounts” to her that specified not only the total amount of quarts preserved during a particular period of time, but also a breakdown of the amounts of various fruits and vegetables. In her 1917 presidential report Black reported that the clubwomen had “conserved: 6,132,963 quarts of fruits and vegetables; 81,731 glasses of jelly; 152,842 pounds of dried fruit; 7,697 bottles of grape juice, catsup; 368 gallons in brine, 22 barrels of vinegar, 45 dozen eggs salted.” Although the amount seems impressive, Black surmised that the report probably represented only two percent of the women (“both white and colored”) of Georgia. In her sometimes paternalistic fashion, she then remarked that 270,000 quarts of the total were reported by the “negro” women which proved that they were “doing their part to help the government by feeding themselves.”²⁶

Competition between the districts was encouraged and clubs generally approached their campaigns with similar enthusiasm. One GFWC officer stated in the 1918 Yearbook, “Our

“Results of Test farm Work and Four Crop Contests of the 1914 Season,” Central of Georgia Agricultural Department, Mss. #1362-AD-90, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia (hereafter cited as GHS).

²⁵GFWC *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 10. See also “War Affects Federation,” *Savannah Morning News*, 25 April 1918. To help meet wartime shortages, Black also organized towel drives for the hospitals. She personally delivered 800 of the 4,000 towels raised by the women to Fort McPherson in Atlanta.

²⁶Report of the President, GFWC, *Yearbook, 1917-18*, 18. Even before the war, the GFWC had a canning campaign. For example, in October 1913, the Woman’s Club of Guyton proudly reported that their members had canned 6,676 quarts. Tomatoes appear to have been the most popular choice, with 2,033 quarts reported. Jelly, jam, and preserves came in second place, with a combined total of 1,363 quarts. Pickles scored a distant third, with 754 quarts “put up.” Due either to scarcity of crop or personal taste, the Guyton club recorded only 2 quarts of green peas. Canning Account of the Guyton Woman’s Club, box 9, folder 3, NPB Papers.

district has had an epidemic of conservation kitchens and demonstrations of the latest methods for canning and preserving.”²⁷

In addition to tracking club performance, Nellie Black also monitored merchants in order to determine which stores did or did not stock adequate canning supplies. Those who demonstrated their patriotism by complying with the campaign received public accolades. Merchants who did not risked being reported to the Chamber of Commerce and publicly condemned in local newspapers and club publications.²⁸ Urban clubwomen maintained that the combined efforts of members in the country and the town would not only provide the large-scale participation necessary to guarantee the success of the canning drives, but could also possibly offset some of the urban/rural tensions that stifled the efforts of the so-called progressive politicians in Georgia.

Unlike its food strategy in World War II, the federal government chose not to institute mandatory rationing among the civilian population during World War I. As one historian has stated, they preferred instead to “let America’s ‘spirit of self-sacrifice’ ensure that all citizens received adequate food supplies.”²⁹ To make the effort seem official, the Food Administration distributed pledge cards to various groups and organizations so their members could show their commitment. Clubwomen were ahead of the federal government on this initiative, as they had distributed similar cards to their members two years earlier. The government urged Americans to voluntarily observe one “meatless” and one “wheatless” day a week, and to limit their

²⁷GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 23.

²⁸“War Affects Federation,” *Savannah Morning News*, 25 April 1918.

²⁹Bentley, *Eating For Victory*, 20.

consumption of fats and sugar. However, in order to preserve as much food as possible, allowances were made to civilian women who needed sugar for purposes of home canning. Unlike retailers or businesses, women who canned could purchase sugar in twenty-five pound quantities.³⁰

Although Black and her fellow clubwomen understood the seriousness of food conservation, they often approached it with a sense of humor. At a luncheon in Augusta, a clubwoman who knew of Black's famous sweet tooth jokingly questioned her loyalty to Hoover's food conservation program. When questioned about the government's intention to limit the candy supply, Black's face immediately clouded and she responded

Now all of this should not be carried too far. I do not mind the meatless Tuesdays and the wheatless Wednesdays, but I like candy and I like a stick of peppermint candy everyday after my dinner and I know those soldier boys like it too. . . Of course everything the government tells us to do, we will do, but I hope they won't cut out candy!

Club members promised not to start rationing at the luncheon and presented Black with a box of old-fashioned stick candy.³¹

In her annual address of 1918, President Black reminded her fellow clubwomen that although the war was coming to an end, the crisis was not over and that food remained as "vital a factor in maintaining peace as it had been in winning the war."³² Black may have exaggerated the continued political necessity of a national food conservation policy, but she reminded everyone of the GFWC's original goal to make the state of Georgia more self-sufficient, which she claimed was being fulfilled. She offered the following observation

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹"Complexity of Club Leaders," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 November 1917.

³²Nellie Peters Black, "Report of the President," GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 91.

In a recent inspection of vegetables in a leading local grocery store, we find that Georgia has sent to the daily market potatoes, sweet and Irish, butterbeans, onions, parsnips, turnips, beets, collards, bell peppers, spinach salad, [and] mushrooms. This is a decided gain over 1915, when our State was represented only by turnip greens.³³

Although she presented no statistics from the Department of Agriculture to support this conclusion, Black persuaded her fellow clubwomen of their success. More so than at any other time in her public career, Black's wartime messages were especially effective. After having spoken at a district meeting, one newspaper described Black's address as a "resplendent gem of patriotism surrounded by sparkling jewels of wit, all set in a background of the aluminum of common sense."³⁴

Conservation, Motherhood, and Morality

With the same ease that it adopted Wilson's war relief agenda, the GFWC adjusted its reform efforts to suit the challenges of peacetime and a period that it referred to as "reconstruction." Clubwomen (especially those like Nellie Black who adhered to the social gospel) viewed wartime food measures as a part of a larger conservation movement that paralleled perfectly the biblical condemnation of excess and the encouragement of moderation. While the early conservation movement in the United States focused solely on natural resources, clubwomen, like progressive reformers in general, employed the concept of conservation within a much broader context. During the Progressive era, conservation came to mean "the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time."³⁵ Having suffered the shortages and

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴"Mrs. Black's Tifton Address," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 April 1919.

³⁵That definition originated with the "father" of American Conservation movement Gifford Pinchot. See Gifford Pinchot, "Conservation," *Proceedings of the First National Conservation Congress* (Washington, D.C.: 1909), 75. Cited in Priscilla G. Massmann, "A Neglected Partnership: The General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Conservation Movement, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1997), 111. Pinchot also claimed that "There is no interest of the people to which the principles of conservation do not apply. *Ibid.*, 112.

deprivations that resulted from World War I, clubwomen applied the term to natural resources (food, land, water); human resources (children, morality); and fiscal resources (thrift). By doing so, they were able to address most of their concerns under the umbrella cause of conservation. Like war relief work, conservation was an area of reform that required southern clubwomen to interact with all levels of government: local, state, and federal.³⁶

Focusing on making the state of Georgia “ready and worthy” for her returning soldiers, the GFWC turned its attention to land reclamation, a cause already taken up by state boosters and health reform advocates. While it was a relatively new campaign for the clubwomen, their interest in soil conservation had evolved naturally from both the southern concern for the soil depletion that resulted from cotton-intensive agricultural policy and the wartime emphasis on increased food production. A champion of the movement, President Black claimed that only one-tenth of Georgia’s available land was under cultivation. Identifying the swamp land of middle and south Georgia as a target for drainage and reclamation, she espoused how “quickly and economically swamp and stumpy land could be transformed into profitable and healthful acreage” that would no longer serve as the breeding grounds for the malarial mosquito.³⁷

To demonstrate her point, Black appeared in a public service film in the summer of 1918 to educate the public about the necessity of land reclamation. Sponsored by Southern Bell Telephone, Dupont Powder, and International Harvester, “Putting Idle Acres to Work” featured prominent Georgia citizens demonstrating efficient methods of clearing land and mechanical

³⁶For an analysis of the relationship between conservation movement and the General Federation of Womens Clubs, see Massmann, “A Neglected Partnership.” Throughout the progressive era and WWI years, annual reports of the GFWC contained addresses concerning various aspects of American society that needed “conserving”: “food”; “personal power”; “childhood”; “materials now going to waste”; “helpful birds, insects, and animals”; “right living”; “patriotism”; “pure milk”; “hardwoods”; “time and labor”; “daylight”, etc.

³⁷“Mrs. Black in the Movies,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 July 1919.

farming at East Lake in Atlanta. The film depicted Nellie Black chopping a stump that had been safely and efficiently “blasted” with dynamite.³⁸ Governor Hugh Dorsey, Mayor James Key of Atlanta, Chief Justice Fish, and Associate Chief Justice Gilbert were also featured. In one scene, “little” Bobby Jones the golfer demonstrated how “easily modern dynamite could turn a mud-hole into a golf tee.”³⁹ Special showings of the film were organized by various organizations throughout the city and state (such as women’s clubs and chambers of commerce) as part of the campaign to “reduce the high cost of living.” The Atlanta school board encouraged all white public schools to have their students attend a showing. Black’s name and face became familiar to a group of Georgians that may not have been aware of her work.⁴⁰

The land reclamation campaign exemplified how the postwar GFWC shifted their focus from wartime duties of the citizenry to promoting a new civic responsibility that would help meet the contemporary social and economic needs of their region. In a similar effort, city federations transformed their victory gardens back into “Civic Gardens” that not only beautified the city, but also enabled urban children to experience both the wonders of nature and civic responsibility. The gardens represented a collective effort among the clubwomen, city officials, and the community. The administration of the gardens mirrored the organizational hierarchy of

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Companies that manufactured farm explosives hoped the film would counteract any negative effects of the Federal Explosives Act (1917). Administered by the Department of the Interior, the act required anyone who wanted to use explosives to obtain a license (at a cost of .25¢) from their county. Throughout 1918 and 1919, advertisements promoting the safe and easy use of farm explosives ran in a variety of publications. For instance ads from Atlas Farm Powder reminded farmers and gardeners to “Get the Hun out of your cornfield” and that the sole object of the explosives licensing law was “to protect not to hinder.” See *Southern Ruralist*, October 1 1918 and 15 September 1918.

⁴⁰ Information about the film is scant and was pieced together through newspaper articles. See: “Clearing Up Land By Dynamite Will Be Shown on Film,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 June 1919; “Dynamite Movies to be Shown Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 July 1919; “Farm Reclamation Work Shown in Film,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 July 1919; “Mrs. Black in the Movies,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 July 1919 and “Many Prominent Atlantans Shown in Film at Strand,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 March 1920; and “Dykes Wants Every Student to See Movie,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 March 1920.

the GFWC. The chairman of the regional Federation Civics department oversaw the Civic Garden committee, which in turn supervised the volunteer clubwomen, who in turn assigned a committee of larger and older children to oversee all of the young gardeners, each of whom was responsible for his or her own uniformly measured plot. Administering the garden project with their characteristic efficiency and organization, the clubwomen faithfully recorded both the attendance and productivity of the children, hoping all the while to plant seeds “of an ethical and spiritual nature” in their young gardeners.⁴¹ In accordance with the GFWC’s postwar interpretation of thrift and conservation, planting civic gardens became a measure of family economy and community improvement, rather than national security.

Nellie Black agreed with Hoover’s denouncement of American postwar culture as a “regular debauch of extravagance and useless spending.”⁴² In her instructions to Georgia clubwomen, Nellie Black stressed the moral and patriotic significance of the Wilson administration’s conservation program and the necessity of both collective and individual sacrifices.⁴³ Black prayerfully reflected that there was “no sacrifice too great to make as a proof that we are worthy of what our American boys have suffered for us.”⁴⁴ In the annual report for the same year, Miss Annie Lane, chairman of the GFWC Conservation committee, proudly proclaimed that most of the clubwomen had realized the meaning of sacrifice. She did note,

⁴¹The garden established by the Savannah Federation of Women’s Organizations served as an early model. After securing land from the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, surveying services from the City of Savannah, publicity from the Savannah Morning News, and financial contributions from members of the community-at-large; the Savannah clubwomen successfully established a civic garden that accommodated 228 children, aged 8 to 16 years. Savannah Federation of Women’s Organizations, *Yearbook, 1913-1916*, 22-28.

⁴²Letter, Kate Lumpkin, chairman of the GFWC Thrift and Savings committee, to GFWC president, 15 September 1919. Stewart-Huston Collection, GHS.

⁴³GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 52.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

however, that there were a few who did not remember the great sacrifice made by Christ or acknowledge his direction to “do likewise in order to establish a worldwide Christianity.” Likening these women to “Nero of old who fiddled as Rome burned,” Lane chastised them for “buying luxurious purple and fine linen and living as well or better in the time of war as in peace.” Offering evidence of the “real sacrifices” club leaders were making daily to achieve their conservation goals and set a good example for the rest of society, she relayed how one committee chairman gave up her annual trip to Tate Springs in order to fulfill her obligation “while fruits and vegetables were in season.” Another chairman made do with last season’s apparel in order to spend her clothing allowance on canning supplies for the rural women in her district who had fruit, but no means by which to preserve it.⁴⁵

According to the federal government, matronly clubwomen, such as Nellie Black and the majority of GFWC members, were exactly the women who could inspire others to take up their cause. From the point of America’s entry into the war, policy makers understood that mothers were the ultimate symbols of sacrifice and could prove invaluable as a mobilizing force.⁴⁶

Placing the future of democracy squarely on the shoulders of mothers willing to make patriotic sacrifices, the chairman of the GFWC conservation committee wrote in her annual report that

⁴⁵GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 52.

⁴⁶While federal and state governments were willing to employ the symbolism of motherhood, the War Department did not approve of “godmothering” (the practice of women to adopt individual servicemen on the fronts and write them letters). As a result, the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense was forced to issue a statement declaring that it could no longer furnish names for “godmothering.” The WCCND would investigate the continued domestic practice of “godmothering” in terms of camp activities. See Ida Clyde Clarke, *American Women and the World War* (1918), part III, chapter. XXIX. Although motherhood was appropriated by women like Black who supported America’s involvement in the war, it was also used by those who opposed it. See Nancy Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996). See also Kathleen Kennedy, “Casting an Evil Eye on the Youth of the Nation: Motherhood and Political Subversion in the Wartime Prosecution of Kate Richards O’Hare, 1917-1924” *American Studies* (1998): 105-29. Kennedy argues that the political activity of women was repressed by the American government, as evidenced by the prosecution of Kate Richards O’Hare, a socialist who spoke out against the war and claimed that it corrupted motherhood. The Justice Department prosecuted her and she received an unusually harsh sentence of five years in a federal prison (instead of the customary six months).

“slacker mothers breed slacker sons, but brave mothers rear brave sons.”⁴⁷ Wartime culture in America presented the public with a dual construction of motherhood. Popular culture, as well as politicians such as Woodrow Wilson, celebrated the patriotic mother who willingly sacrificed her son for the cause, just as Nellie Black had done when her son Ralph Peters Black went to fight in France. On the other hand, selfish or “slacker” mothers who were unwilling to part with their sons were condemned as unpatriotic, or worse.⁴⁸ The United States Food Administration wanted mothers, sisters, and wives to envision themselves going off to war with their men folk.

In addition to war relief work, the GFWC deemed it critical to keep morale up on the home front and preserve so-called American values for the boys to come home to. During World War I, patriotism and morality were closely linked.⁴⁹ Encouraged by the federal government and concerned with the increased wartime population of the city, Atlanta clubwomen (black and white) worked to encourage “public morality” by interesting young women in war relief work and soldiers in wholesome recreation and entertainment. In an attempt to regulate male behavior on the military bases, GFWC members supplied the soldiers of each the military camps in Georgia with entertainment that they deemed appropriate, particularly reading materials. They

⁴⁷GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 54.

⁴⁸Susan Zeiger, “She Didn’t Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War,” *Feminist Studies* 22, 1 (Spring, 1996); 6-39.

⁴⁹Speeches and reports of GFWC officers reveal that they believed firmly that both ideals could be “taught” In an address at the annual GFWC convention, Mrs. Z. I. Fitzpatrick, the State Chairman of War Relief for the General Federation of Women’s Clubs rendered the following instructions

. . . Stress community and public school singing of patriotic songs.
See that people stand during the singing or playing of national anthems. . . Make scrap-book collections of stories, essays, poetry, and particularly jokes for the use of military camps and hospitals. . . teach children patriotism by placing portraits of American heroes in schools.

See GFWC, *Yearbook, 1917-1918*, 22.

donated “dear familiar novels of ye olden days” and subscriptions to Readers Digest to “the home sick boys.” Claiming that the response of the soldiers was overwhelmingly positive, Black noted that “It was interesting to see how many men read good, substantial books and would tell you confidently that it was the first time they had read anything above a dime novel.”⁵⁰

Even before America entered the war, civic reformers had been concerned about the easy availability within the city of what historian Sarah Mercer Judson identifies as “commercial leisure.”⁵¹ According to the GFWC, both the new working class of girls who were employed in Atlanta’s numerous factories, office buildings, and department stores, as well as unemployed women were daily exposed to “physical and moral danger” that was present around drinking halls and movie houses.⁵² In particular danger were the unemployed and “undirected” or “unreachable” girls who needed to be “protected from the temptations of travel” which could lead them to a life of degradation and disease.⁵³ Such girls were put to work on war relief activities like canning and knitting. While the national campaign focused on protecting soldiers from immorality, Judson notes that white and black clubwomen in Atlanta “offered a different

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 10. Other groups such as the Red Cross , YWCA and Patriotic Leagues also provided the soldiers with alternative activities.

⁵¹“Commercial leisure” refers to various paid amusements available in Atlanta during the period, including dance halls, movie houses, and beer parlors. Sarah Mercer Judson, “‘Leisure is a Foe to Any Man’: The Pleasures and Dangers of Leisure in Atlanta During World War I,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, 1 (Spring, 2003): 92-115. For an analysis of the evolution of leisure, see Kathy Peiss *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁵²Mrs. A. P. Coles, report of the committee on Social and Industrial Conditions of Women and Children, GFWC, *Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 58.

⁵³GFWC, *Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 36.

version of the sexual politics of wartime” by arguing that young women needed to be protected as well.⁵⁴

As GFWC president, Nellie Black received a letter from the director of the Department of Public Information describing the appalling “percentage of venereal disease among the flower of the land” and requesting help from the clubwomen in distributing their “graphic but accurate and sane publicity material.” Perceiving venereal disease as a threat to national security, the War Department claimed that the dissemination of such “frank” information could no longer be left to “the sensational press, the obscene story, or gutter gossip.”⁵⁵ Clubwomen agreed that “the so-called social evil” was a “great hydra-headed monster” that needed to be slain and their rhetoric closely associated social purity with patriotism and civic responsibility.⁵⁶

“Blessed are the Peace Makers. . .”

Most southerners supported Wilson’s treaty to end the war and his proposal for a League of Nations.⁵⁷ Just as Nellie Black had encouraged mobilization for the war effort, she

⁵⁴Sarah Mercer Judson, “Building the New South City: African American and White Clubwomen in Atlanta, 1895-1930” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997), 139-40.

⁵⁵“Letter to Mrs. Black,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 July 1919.

⁵⁶In her annual report, the chairman of the GFWC’s committee on Social and Industrial Conditions of Women and Children, Mrs. A. P. Coles claimed that

The so-called “social evil” is a great hydra-headed monster that needs a great deal of killing before it ceases to be an ever-present menace in our midst. But the time is coming fast when he will be slain, and I believe the coming generation of children being taught the principles of right living, self-control and self-support will demand and obtain protection from the social leper.

GFWC, *Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 58.

⁵⁷Although southern Democrats did generally support Wilson’s domestic and foreign proposals, Georgia Senator Hoke Smith refused to ratify (just as he had done earlier with the food bill) the treaty as it was presented to the Senate. He sided with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and the “reservationists” who called for changes that would protect American interests. Wilson’s refusal to compromise and make the changes allowed for the defeat of the bill by the isolationists. Smith was one of only three southern senators who did not support the treaty as originally proposed by Wilson. See Grantham, *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South*, 337-43.

aggressively worked for peace when the end of the war was near. In 1918 Georgia Governor Hugh Dorsey chose Black to serve as a delegate to the “Win the War for Permanent Peace” convention in Philadelphia. On behalf of Georgia clubwomen, Nellie Black sent “a letter of congratulation” to President Wilson upon “his presentation of the fourteen principles which would have to be complied with by Germany to secure an Armistice . . .”⁵⁸

In order to secure support for Wilson’s peace proposals that were being contentiously debated by the house and senate, the League to Enforce Peace sponsored a series of regional conferences during the winter of 1919. Headed by ex-President William Howard Taft, speakers on the tour included prominent intellectuals and leaders of various national movements who would appeal to a broad array of reform interests. The final stop on the League of Nations “road show” was scheduled for Atlanta during the last weekend of February.⁵⁹ Sponsored primarily by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, boosters in the city hoped the Southern Conference for a League of Nations would bring much-needed revenue to a variety of businesses, including railroads, restaurants, and hotels. White clubwomen in the city were particularly excited because Mrs. Philip Moore (president of the National Council of Women) and Anna Howard Shaw (Methodist minister and president of the National Suffrage Association) were scheduled to speak. As both GFWC president and a delegate to the conference, Black urged her fellow clubwomen to attend. In a letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Black wrote that

the building should be packed to its utmost capacity at each session, for we are to be taught how we can uphold our president in his great ideal for universal peace, and it will

⁵⁸“Report of President,” GFWC, *Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 10.

⁵⁹Prior to Atlanta, “congresses” had been held in New York, Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and St. Louis. See *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 February 1919.

open a broader vision of what the American nation stands for before the people of the world.⁶⁰

Months after the conference and the disappointing results for Wilson, Black appealed to the members of the GFWC to “rise en masse and say that we are behind our President and demand that the Peace League be ratified!”⁶¹

War’s end and the promise of peace offered clubwoman the opportunity to focus on their domestic agenda. Due much in part to their role in the success of the war effort, white clubwomen in the South began to more-aggressively pursue their own goals and speak out about issues on which they had previously been silent. This particularly seems to be the case with Nellie Peters Black. In an address she gave at a GFWC district meeting in the spring of 1919, Black concluded that, “The war [gave] woman a new vision; taught her to forget little things and appreciate great things more.”⁶² Although she did not identify those “little” or “great things,” a review of GFWC records for the war years reveals exactly how much the war experience had changed southern white clubwomen. One significant example of this evolution is the GFWC’s stand against “mob violence.” At the November 1917 GFWC convention in Augusta, Nellie Black introduced a resolution condemning “lynching as a means of punishment for crime of any character. . .” In the resolution, she explained that

. . . lynching substitutes the violent passions of the mob for the orderly processes of the courts of justice, thus creating . . . a disrespect for all law . . . The fair name of our state

⁶⁰“Full Attendance of Women Urged,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 February 1919. Black also exclaimed that “We need a dozen Tafts going over the country to form public opinion!” See, “Mrs. Black’s Tifton Address,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 April 1919.

⁶¹“U. S. Senators Like Spoiled Children,” *Tifton Gazette*, 11 April 1919. Without the Treaty of Versailles ever being passed, President Warren G. Harding officially ended America’s role in the conflict in 1921. Black did not live to suffer the disappointment of the defeat of Wilson’ League of Nations. She died three months before the Senate rejected Wilson’s version of the Versailles Treaty in November 1919.

⁶²“Mrs. Black’s Tifton Address,” *Atlanta Constitution* (13 April 1919).

has been grievously injured and its development retarded by the publication abroad of lynching statistics which misrepresent the overwhelming majority of our law-abiding and peace-loving citizens . . .⁶³

The anti-lynching resolution had been endorsed by the executive board in January and “adopted by a rising vote” of the membership at the convention.

It is likely that the timing of the GFWC’s decision to officially condemn the practice of lynching coincided not with any collective social justice epiphany experienced by the federation, but rather with the confluence of various political, economic, and social factors that occurred in 1916. First and foremost, the resolution refers to the “publication abroad of lynching statistics,” which no doubt generated a negative foreign image of the American South. The statistics that Black referred to were probably compiled by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Hoping to encourage support for anti-lynching legislation at the

⁶³Because the issue was significantly more controversial than those traditionally addressed by the GFWC, the entire resolution is reproduced in this footnote

Whereas, Lynching substitutes the violent passions of the mob for the orderly processes of the courts of justice, thus creating in the minds of our people disrespect for all law; and, Whereas, The fair name of our State has been grievously injured and its development retarded by the publication abroad of lynching statistics which misrepresent the overwhelming majority of our law-abiding and peace-loving citizens; and Whereas, It is in the power of the enlightened women of the State to create a public sentiment in favor of law and against the continued blight of mob violence. Therefore, be it Resolved, That the Executive Board of the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs hereby records its unqualified condemnation of lynching as a means of punishment for crime of any character; and, Resolved, further, That we request the officers of the clubs throughout the State to bring this matter to the attention of their members and urge them to use their influence in every proper way to remove this curse from Georgia.

GFWC, *Yearbook 1917-1918*, 12-13.

federal level, the NAACP began publishing lynching statistics in 1912.⁶⁴ Doubtless this information was made available overseas through various channels, including newspapers and African-American servicemen. It did not bode well with the Allies for the United States to be trying to make the world safe for democracy while tolerating social injustices at home. Not only could such damning publicity be detrimental to the Allied war effort, it also threatened the post-war southern economy. Due to the declining rate of immigration into the United States during the war years, northern industries experienced labor shortages and began to aggressively court southern black workers. The South had already experienced labor shortages in agriculture and industry because of its inability to attract immigrants to the region. While it would peak almost a decade later, the Great Migration to the North by African Americans seeking economic opportunity and protection against lynching actually began in 1915.⁶⁵ In an effort to both stem this outgoing tide of labor and counteract the negative national publicity garnered by the Leo Frank case, urban boosters launched a campaign to promote the “Atlanta spirit” which included the condemnation of lynching. Commercial elites feared the loss of cheap labor, but not enough to support federal anti-lynching legislation. However, there was no denying that with over 359

⁶⁴Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 27. The NAACP’s exhaustive compilation of statistics was published seven years later. See NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1919). Individuals such as Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglas had also collected lynching statistics in an attempt to dispel white myths about lynching and demonstrate the pervasiveness of the crime throughout the South. See *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., (New York: Bedford / St. Martin’s, 1997).

⁶⁵For information on black and white southern responses to lynching prior to World War I, see: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 208-43; Donald L. Grant, *The Anti-Lynching Movement, 1883-1932* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1975), 116; and Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*, 22-50. Specifically on migration as a black response to lynching, see Grant, *The Anti-Lynching Movement, 1883-1932*, 108-19.

lynchings documented by the NAACP between the years 1889-1916, the reality of race relations in the state of Georgia did not support the racial compatibility claims of New South boosters.⁶⁶

As Black was influential in the creation (or at least in the promotion) of the GFWC's anti-lynching resolution, some of the original interest in the topic could lay with her social gospel leanings.⁶⁷ When Black returned to Atlanta in the late 1880s, she became involved with nationally-affiliated charitable organizations that focused on social justice causes more than local groups. One of those organizations was the Southern Sociological Congress (SSC).⁶⁸ The SSC was an outgrowth of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, a northern-based charitable organization of which Nellie Black was also a member and officer in the Atlanta

⁶⁶Statistics from the "Chronological List of Persons Lynched," in NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*, 56-62. Georgia passed an anti-lynching law in 1893, but enforcement was left to county governments. This meant that for all intensive purposes the legislation did not provide increased prosecution of lynchers or protection for African Americans. See Grant, *The Anti-Lynching Movement, 1883-1932*, 65-72.

⁶⁷Rebecca Montgomery, "Lost Cause Mythology in New South Reform: Gender, Class, Race, and the Politics of Patriotic Citizenship in Georgia, 1890-1925," *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing With the Powers That Be*, Janet L. Coryell, Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., Anastatia Sims, and Sandra Gioia Treadway, eds. (Columbia, MS: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 174-98. Montgomery's assumption about the GFWC's condemnation of "racial violence" is somewhat optimistic. True, the anti-lynching resolution probably came about in part as a reaction to the Leo Frank lynching in 1915, but their primary concern seems to have been the preservation of law and order and the protection of Georgia's reputation. The words "race" and/or "Negro" are not mentioned in the resolution. For analysis of the Leo Frank lynching in terms of the anti-lynching movement, see Nancy Maclean, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Lynching: The Leo Frank Case Revisited in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 158-88; and Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

⁶⁸For information about the Southern Sociological Congress, see: E. Charles Chatfield, "The Southern Sociological Congress: Organization of Uplift" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XIX (March, 1960): 328-48; E. Charles Chatfield, "The Southern Sociological Congress: Rational of Uplift" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XX (1961): 51-64; L. L. Bernard, "The Southern Sociological Congress" *American Journal of Sociology* 19 (July, 1913): 91-93; and Elizabeth Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to World War I* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 128-37. The greatest primary sources are the published convention reports edited by the General Secretary of the SSC, James McCulloch: *The Call of the New South* (1912), *The South Mobilizing of Social Service* (1913), *Battling for Social Betterment* (1914), *The New Chivalry-Health* (1915), *Democracy in Earnest* (1918) and "Distinguished Service" *Citizenship* (1919). The SSC did not publish the proceedings of the meetings held in 1916 and 1917. For information on the National Charities (the predecessor of the SSC), see Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South*, 124-30 and Georgina Hickey, "Disease, Disorder, and Motherhood: Working-Class Women, Social Welfare, and the Process of Urban Development in Atlanta," in *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930*, Elna C. Green, ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 181-207.

branch. Held in Nashville, Tennessee in May 1912, the initial SSC served as a “challenge” for the New South. Philanthropists, clergymen, politicians, reformers, academics, and professional social workers met to not merely research, but find practical solutions to issues such as child labor, just laws, civic righteousness, and racial justice. Described by one historian as “the southern version of the social gospel . . . ,” the SSC serves as proof of the existence of an active social gospel movement in the South in that it focused specifically on the Church’s right and obligation to “social ministry.”⁶⁹ As meeting speeches and reports “sounded the note of crisis, but not despair,” the SSC also reflected the optimistic Progressive movement at work throughout the entire country during the period.⁷⁰

Held in Atlanta during late April 1913, the second SSC attracted over a thousand attendees, white and black. The city was full of newsworthy visitors because the SSC meeting, Mary Phagan’s murder, and opera singer Enrico Caruso’s visit all occurred within the same week.⁷¹ Nellie Black and many of her social and religious contemporaries were part of the 254-member delegation from Georgia.⁷² For four days, in prominent churches throughout the city, distinguished white and black clergymen, academics, and reformers spoke candidly about “race

⁶⁹James McCulloch: *The Call of the New South* (1912), 16-17. The SSC also validates the prominent role of women in the social gospel as social worker Kate Bernard originated the concept and initial funding was provided by philanthropist Anna Coles.

⁷⁰John Lee Eighmy, “Religious Liberalism in the South during the Progressive Era,” *Church History*, 38, 3 (Sept., 1969): 359-72 (quote appears on page 366).

⁷¹It is somewhat ironic that the 1913 SSC was chaired by Alexander McKelway, prominent member of the National Child Labor Committee. On the last day of the SSC, McKelway stated “If children of such tender years were not forced to work, Mary Phagan might be living.” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 April 1913. Outstanding headlines were awarded more often to Caruso’s visit and the Phagan murder than to the SSC.

⁷²Georgia members included many people that NPB came into regular contact with in her religious and civic activities. Included were: Episcopal clergymen Bishop C. K. Nelson and Reverend Henry D. Phillips; clubwomen Mrs. Sam P. Jones, Mrs. P. F. Ottley; Mrs. W. G. Raoul, and Mrs. L. B. Thompson; and anti-Tuberculosis Association supporters Joseph Logan and Rosa Lowe.

problems.” They focused on causes, remedies, and the social ramifications of ignoring them. As expected, most of the speakers cloaked their objections to lynching in religious rhetoric and metaphors. However, some boldly addressed the topic of lynching and challenged the thinking of the audience. Referencing “the horrible lynchings taking place in the South,” Dr. W. D. Weatherford (secretary of the race relations committee) called for all “churches, schools and associations” to join a crusade against the racism “that flowers forth in bloody lynchings.” In an even bolder speech, Professor W. O. Scoggs of the University of Louisiana confessed that “lynching is the evil *par infamie* of the Southland” and produced statistics that disproved the primary defense of lynching as a means to protect “Southern womanhood.”⁷³ The average white southerner (Nellie Black included) was not normally exposed to such frank discussions on lynching and they surely made a lasting impression on those who heard them or read the SSC papers. The 1913 meeting in Atlanta appears to have been the apex of the SSC’s interest in race relations. Black continued to serve as a member of SSC, but as American involvement in the European war became more certain the focus of the organization changed from southern uplift and social welfare to war preparedness and the responsibilities of citizenship.⁷⁴

⁷³According to the published collection, several speakers directly addressed the topic of lynching. However, a survey of the *Atlanta Constitution* for the week of the SSC reveals that, not surprisingly the white Atlanta newspaper chose not to mention it. W. D. Weatherford, “How to Enlist the Welfare Agencies of the South for Improvement of Conditions Among the Negroes,” *The South Mobilizing of Social Service: Addresses Delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress, 1913*, 352. W. O. Scoggs, “Desirable Civic Reforms in the Treatment of the Negro,” *The South Mobilizing of Social Service: Addresses Delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress, 1913*, 418-19. Interestingly, when the *Atlanta Constitution* printed Professor Scogg’s remarks, they included none of his more inflammatory remarks and did not use the word lynching. They did note his relatively harmless observation that “Such injustice is an outward sign of a lack of inward grace.” “Gov. Mann Made President,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 April 1913.

⁷⁴The organization also lost its regional focus and the headquarters moved for Nashville to Washington, DC in 1916. In 1919, the SSC split into two groups and in 1920, the SSC became Southern Co-operative League for Education and Social Service. Membership waned and interested petered out. By the mid-1920s, the SSC ceased to exist. See Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South*, 134-36.

As historian Ronald Schaffer surmises, the “. . . great world war was very compatible with particular elements of the national reform movement.”⁷⁵ Reformers like Nellie Black who had influence and determination were in a unique bargaining position with state and federal governments. Initially thrust upon them because of their traditional domestic role in society, southern white clubwomen quickly and efficiently organized war relief and appropriated the work to further their own, long-term goals. Viewed through a contemporary perspective, their efforts to produce food and conserve resources may appear to have been mundane tasks. However, they proved to be a crucial component of America’s war and peacetime geo-political strategy. By organizing agricultural rallies, victory gardens, food pledge drives, and canning clubs, clubwomen achieved both national recognition and increased their political influence within the state of Georgia. To Black, one of those “great things” that women had learned to appreciate during the war was an increased awareness of one’s place in the international community. She optimistically maintained that “the war had aroused in Georgians a patriotism that would carry over into peace-times a permanent interest in national affairs.”⁷⁶ Unfortunately, Nellie Black’s social gospel ideals did not fare as well after the war. In the end, as historian Susan Curtis surmised, World War I proved to be a “pentecost of calamity for the social gospel.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 107. Schaffer allows that not all reform movements benefited “equally” nor were all progressives pleased. For example, those who objected to intense national regulation (southern progressives) would be dissatisfied with wartime measures. Yet, Black welcomed the national recognition and access to federal resources.

⁷⁶“Mrs. Nellie Peters Black Wins Laurels at General Federation,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 May 1918.

⁷⁷Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture*, 194.

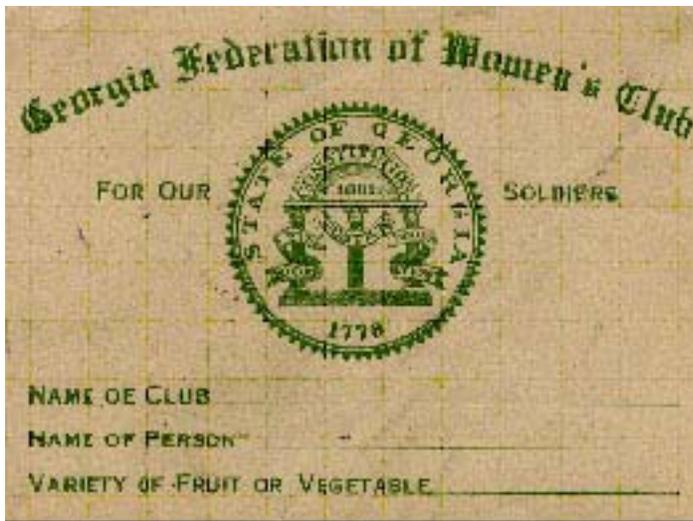


Figure 8-1. GFWC Canning Label. (photo courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia)



Figure 8-2. The patriotism of canning. (photo courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, <http://fax.libs.uga.edu/wwpost>)

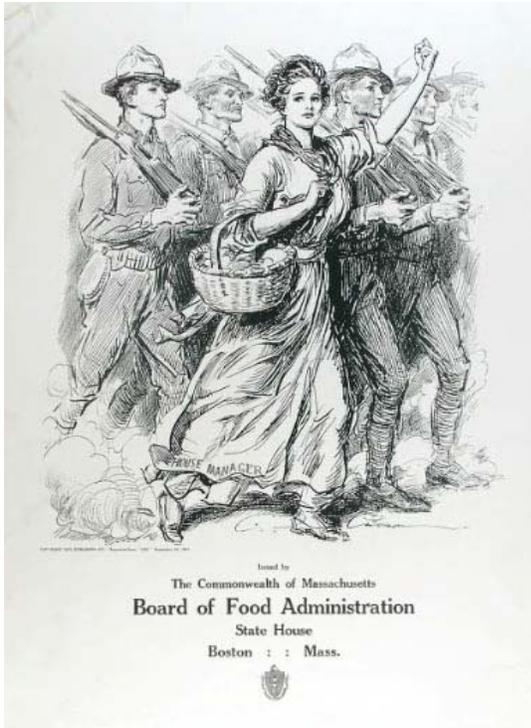


Figure 8-3. Patriotic appeal from the US Food Administration. (Life, 13 September 1917, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, <http://fax.lib.uga.edu/wwpost>)

CHAPTER 9

EPILOGUE: “DEPART, O CHRISTIAN SOUL, OUT OF THIS WORLD. . .”

A devout Christian, Mrs. Black’s belief in the life to come was the strongest motive power of her existence and showed not only through the printed word, but through the spiritual currents, crystal clear, which mingled in her daily life and overflowed in the pathway of love, and love’s earthly handmaid whose name is service.

Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs Yearbook, 1918-1919.

So wrote the executive committee of the Georgia Federation of Womens Clubs (GFWC) in a memorial to their recently deceased president. While still very much involved in her reform work, Nellie Peters Black died of heart failure in August 1919 at the age of sixty-eight.¹ Having served three terms as president and named a Director For Life, she had secured her place in the history of the GFWC. According to popular legend, she passed away immediately after dictating her final message to the GFWC.

Black’s death afforded many organizations and individuals a final opportunity to perpetuate her image as an icon of southern womanhood in a cult of feminine virtue. As W. J.

¹Chapter title quote taken from “A Commendation at the Time of Death,” *The Book of Common Prayer: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 464. NPB’s will is representative of her social gospel belief that one should work to help their fellow man while on earth. She left most of her estate, valued for tax purposes at \$154,801, to her three children with a few bequests to god children and stepchildren. She made only one bequest to charity - a gift of one thousand dollars to the Bishop Nelson School for Girls. She left no endowments to the churches and missions she had supported so diligently in her lifetime, but in her handwritten will dated 12 June 1912, she encouraged her children to “give in proportion as they are able, systematically and cheerfully to the Church and to the cause of philanthropy so that a continued blessing may descend upon them as it has done upon their ancestors, who have been ready to give time and money to God’s work in this world.” Will Book F, 476. Fulton County Court of the Ordinary, Fulton County Courthouse, Atlanta, Georgia. NPB’s two daughters divided equally between themselves her jewelry (values at \$200), silver, and various pieces of furniture. In addition, Louise received her mother’s 1913 Cadillac automobile (valued at \$300) and Nita her sewing machine, a copy of “Corragio’s Madonna,” and the Steinway grand piano. NPB’s son Ralph inherited his great-grandfather Robison’s mahogany desk and his grandfather Peters’s tall clock, “with the hope that they would be held in trust for his first-born son.” Practicing the wartime thrift and patriotism she advocated, NPB held, at the time of her death, five United States Liberty Bonds and one United States Savings Bond. The majority of her estate, \$128,927 worth of stock, consisted of shares in Peters Land Company, Exposition Cotton Mills, the Fourth National Bank, and the Black Realty Company. Loyal to the perpetuation of her father’s professional reputation, NPB stipulated in her will that her children were not to sell or dispose of their shares in the Peters Land Company. As the city of Atlanta would only continue to undergo development, she also considered the stock “a wise investment for the future.” Her property assets, valued at \$23,146.66, included her home at 519 Spring Street, one-sixth interest in her mother’s home at 652 Peachtree Street, and a lot on the southwest corner of Gilmer and Piedmont Avenues.

Cash later explained, the southern mind still identified white women like Black “with the very notion of the South itself” and as such, descriptions of the two sometimes proved similar.² In grand eulogies and obituaries, editors of small town weekly and city daily newspapers, identified Black’s life with the birth of the New South and praised her “essential womanliness, high type of motherhood, broad-minded citizenship, and devotion to the up-building of that which is holiest and best in her state.”³ While most tributes highlighted her feminine virtues, some praised her tangible accomplishments. The editor of the *Savannah Evening Press* claimed “had Mrs. Black been a man, she would have been in the United States Senate from Georgia.”⁴ Another claimed that “she was perhaps the best known and most universally beloved woman in the state, if not in the South.”⁵

Public acclaim continued for decades after Black’s death. Fifty years later she was recognized as one of Atlanta’s most significant “movers and shakers” of the twentieth century. In 1976 she was honored as one of “Georgia’s 25 Historic Mothers” for her “gift of persuasion” and “knack for public speaking.” That same year, the Atlanta Branch of the American Association of University Women featured her in their publication *Georgia Women: A Celebration*. Proclaiming Black “a woman for all seasons,” they wrote that “her energy and dedication fairly took one’s breath away.”⁶ In 1997, Black was inducted into Georgia Women of

²Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 115-16.

³“Press of Georgia Laments the Death of Mrs. Black, *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 August 1919.

⁴The editor of the *Savannah Evening Press* included this compliment in his eulogy for Black, clipping, Black Papers, UGA.

⁵“Press of Georgia Laments the Death of Mrs. Black, *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 August 1919.

⁶Barbara Reitt, ed., *Georgia Women: A Celebration* (Atlanta: American Association of University Women, 1976), 28-29.

Achievement.⁷ In spite of such accolades, her name is no longer recognized by most of the inhabitants of the city she and her family helped build.

During Nellie Black's lifetime, the state of Georgia experienced some of the most turbulent political and social crises in its history: race riots, populist revolts, the rise of Tom Watson, the segregated society created by Jim Crow, the scourge of lynching, and the struggle for women's suffrage. Yet, Black did not march in the streets for prohibition, suffrage, or any social justice cause. In fact, she was conspicuously silent on most of these volatile issues. Her silence speaks volumes and reveals that she understood the social limitations of her place and time and devised a strategy to work within the existing power structures of race, class, and gender to accomplish her goals. She chose her battles carefully and fought only those in which her talents could be most useful.

Nellie Peters Black played a significant role in shaping the social and religious life of the Atlanta that exists today. She bridged the gap between the religiously grounded activism of the Victorians and the state-focused activism of the progressives. As the world in which she lived changed, so did her reform goals. Yet, her guiding vision remained the social gospel. Where there were no Episcopal churches, she established missions and in the process expanded the role of women in the church. The five Episcopal churches that she was instrumental in establishing and/or strengthening in Atlanta are still in existence and have active community and social outreach programs, as well multiple chapters of Episcopal Church Women (ECW) that raise the funds to carry out their missions.⁸ Where there were no schools for young children, she helped

⁷Georgia Women of Achievement is a non-profit organization that honors the political, cultural, and social contributions of Georgia women to their state. For information about NPB's induction, see *Seventh Annual Induction Ceremony*, Wesleyan College, Macon, Georgia, 26 March 1998.

⁸The five churches are: St. Philips Cathedral; St. Luke's Church; All Saints Church; The Church of the Incarnation; and Holy Innocents Church. Information on each of these churches can be found on the website for The Episcopal

create free kindergartens that brought the need for government supported schools to the public's attention. When Georgia farmers were caught in a cycle of dependence on a one-crop economy, she rallied for diversification, lower freight rates, and local markets. And when her country faced world war, she brought the full force of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs to bear on the crisis. In the process, she used the war to bring her region onto the national stage.

Like Nellie Peters Black, the social gospel also left a legacy. Appropriately identified by Susan Curtis as an "all consuming faith," the social gospel became part of secular mainstream thought in post-World War I America.⁹ Within the next decade, its focus on uniformity and collective experience collided head-on with Christian fundamentalism and helped give birth to the mass consumer culture of the 1920s. However, such success may have also heralded its demise. Once the religious foundation was extracted from the social gospel message, the movement lost much of its tenacity and was absorbed into the strictly secular social welfare agenda of the 1930s.¹⁰ Remarkably, aspects of the social gospel ideology survived. Some historians have found traces of its influence in the struggles for civil liberties and labor rights throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. As one historian noted, "Walter Rauschenbusch, the most prominent Social Gospel advocate and writer, is only two generations removed from the

Diocese of Atlanta, <http://www.episcopalatlanta.org>. The mission statement for St. Luke's Church proves that the social gospel is alive and well in Atlanta: "We believe that God's mission for St. Luke's calls us, as a united community to be. . . a symbol of Christ's active presence, in downtown Atlanta and in the larger world, as an advocate for the poor and a leader in the cause of social justice." See <http://www.stlukesatlanta.org>.

⁹Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 228-43.

¹⁰For information on the continuation and legacy of the social gospel, see: Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*; Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958); and *The Social Gospel Today*, Christopher H. Evans, ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

civil rights and social concerns movement of the 1960s.”¹¹ Nellie Peters Black and her social gospel contemporaries sought the church’s help in getting government to recognize their responsibility in meeting the social welfare needs of citizens. Today that trend is reversed as politicians seek to relieve federal and state governments of the financial burden of those needs with help from churches and religious organizations through “faith-based initiatives.”¹² Obviously, religion and reform are still very much linked in contemporary American society.

¹¹Janet Forsyth Fishburn, *Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 3.

¹²Issues addressed by such initiatives include substance abuse, transitioning from homelessness, child care, community food banks, and public school vouchers. For information see, “The Center For Faith-Based Initiatives” at the website for the United States Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.hhs.gov/fbci/opp.html>, Feb. 2007.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carey Olmstead Shellman began her college career in earnest when she earned a bachelor's degree in history at Armstrong State College in Savannah in 1992. After working at a historical society for a few years, she decided to continue her education and focus on southern history. Having completed an M.A. in history in 1998, she pursued a Ph.D. at the University of Florida, in Gainesville. Studying under such insightful professors as Fitzhugh Brundage, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, and Anne Goodwyn Jones, she developed a deeper understanding of the complex and paradoxical history of her native region. The author earned her doctorate in history, with a specialization in the American South, in 2007.