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## Nothing Comes to Her Who Sits and Waits: The League of Women Voters and Citizenship After Woman Suffrage, 1920-1940

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NOTHING COMES TO HER WHO SITS AND WAITS: THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS AND  
CITIZENSHIP AFTER WOMAN SUFFRAGE, 1920-1940

by

Emily Lefebber

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the History

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Spring 2020

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
History have been completed.

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**“Nothing Comes to Her Who Sits and Waits”<sup>1</sup>**  
**The League of Women Voters of Iowa and Citizenship**  
**After Woman Suffrage, 1920-1940**

**Emily Lefeber**  
**Honors Thesis in History**  
**Fall 2019**  
**Advisor: Professor Landon Storrs**

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<sup>1</sup> Pauline Adeyitt, “President’s Address” in “History: Iowa League of Women Voters Book 1, 1919-1940,” Iowa Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

## **Abstract**

Rather than viewing the Nineteenth Amendment as an endpoint of the woman suffrage movement, this amendment should instead be viewed as a stop along the way. No one piece of legislation guaranteed all women the right to vote, nor did the Nineteenth Amendment grant women equal citizenship status with men. Founded in 1919, the League of Women Voters of Iowa became the successor of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, carrying on a legacy of activism and resistance to gender-based discrimination. While the right to vote made up a large part of what most suffragists thought of as citizenship, many women quickly realized there were other legal and social discriminations against women that limited women's autonomy. The League of Women Voters of Iowa (LWV of Iowa) continued to fight for gender equality, capitalizing on the existing organizational structures left behind by the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association. Moving into the 1920s and 1930's, the League of Women Voters of Iowa participated in the enduring women's movement, focusing primarily on women-specific legislation and reform, as well as voter education and educated suffrage. This paper utilizes primary archival sources to argue that the LWV of Iowa's activity between 1920 and 1940 demonstrates the continuation of the women's movement post-Nineteenth Amendment during a period many scholars view as a silent period for women's activism. In cooperation with the National League of Women Voters, the LWV of Iowa worked to define and redefine citizenship throughout the 1920s and 1940s at both the state and national levels.

## The Woman Suffrage Movement in Iowa

The idea of women suffrage first gained momentum in Iowa after the Civil War as more white settlers began making their homes in the Midwest. According to historian Dorothy Schweider, white settlers displaced indigenous tribes in Iowa beginning in the late 1820s.<sup>2</sup> Many indigenous groups called Iowa their home for hundreds of years before the arrival of white settlers, including the Ioway, the Sauk, and Meskwaki. The federal government responded to demands for more land by white settlers with the Indian Removal Act, which set aside all lands east of the Mississippi for white settlers. A few years later, the line of demarcation was moved to the Missouri River, forcing the relocation of all tribes residing in Iowa.<sup>3</sup> The last tribe to relinquish land in Iowa was the Santee Sioux, who relocated in 1851.<sup>4</sup> White American-born and immigrant settlers alike began moving to Iowa in waves.

White American-born families moving westward from the Northeast brought with them their liberal ideas. The woman movement in the Northeast had already been organizing since the mid-1800s, so these settlers had likely already been exposed this ideology.<sup>5</sup> These white, middle-class, Protestant Northeasterners privileged participation in the community and social obligations as essential to citizenship, though the actual tenets of citizenship remained unclear.<sup>6</sup> Immigrants

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Schweider, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> According to Nancy F. Cott, “nineteenth-century women’s consistent usage of the singular *woman* symbolized, in a word, the unity of the female sex. It proposed that all women have one cause, one movement.” The movement underwent a shift into the twentieth century in which suffragists refrained from using the old-fashioned and grammatically incorrect name from the nineteenth-century movement. Cott notes that the new language of feminism in the twentieth century marked a new era for women’s activism, ending the woman movement and beginning a new, modern agenda. Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Egge, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870-1920*, Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 7.

from Northern Europe, particularly Germans, also moved to the Midwest to build a new life, bringing with them ideas that conflicted with those of Northeastern settlers. Immigrants to the Midwest during this period tended to practice chain migration: settling in separate towns, marrying within their particular group, and preserving their traditions.<sup>7</sup> Germans, most of whom were Catholic, in particular, came into conflict with Protestant, American-born settlers, who wanted immigrants to assimilate quickly. Instead, German immigrants continued to practice their traditions, cultivating “distinct ethnic neighborhoods.”<sup>8</sup>

At the time of settlement, Iowa women sought to increase their public standing through religious work. For both native-born women and immigrant women, the church represented a place where the public and private spheres became blurred. Churches allowed women to engage in public affairs for religious reasons.<sup>9</sup> Many Iowa women actively participated in their communities through church groups. In native-born majority settlements, women became politically active for community improvement. At a time when civic duty and participation were so entrenched in citizenship ideals, women began to approach woman suffrage as a responsibility to the community.<sup>10</sup> During this period, it was common for Protestant women’s church groups to host suffragist leaders and other political activists to speak in the church.

While newly settled Iowans struggled to define citizenship within their communities, the United States faced the challenge of redefining citizenship to include freed people after the Civil War. The woman suffrage movement had emerged back into the national consciousness after a period of silence during the Civil War. As the woman’s movement had been closely entwined with the abolitionist movement, many activist women, white and black, saw this as their chance

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 48.

to achieve suffrage not only for former slaves but also themselves. The Iowa Legislature held a convention in 1866 to amend voting qualifications in Iowa's constitution. The Legislature proposed striking "white" from the state constitution. Advocates for women's rights argued that the word "male" should also be removed. According to historian Louise R. Noun, the Farmer's Legislative Club, a group of lawmakers who met once a week during the legislative session, debated at length over the woman suffrage question in 1866.<sup>11</sup> Some legislators argued that "not one in ten women desire [suffrage]"<sup>12</sup> or that exposure to politics would degrade women.<sup>13</sup> In response, suffragist Phoebe Palmer argued that the "habits of submission make women, as well as men, servile-minded," disputing the fact that "women's nature" made them unfit for politics.<sup>14</sup> Palmer's essay argued against common ideas spread by the opposition to woman suffrage, including the idea of the domestic sphere. "What right have you men to prescribe the sphere of any human being?" Palmer declared in writing. "Did God give woman faculties she must not use, powers which she must not possess, rights which she must not exercise?"<sup>15</sup> Although many legislators showed interest in eliminating sex as a restriction to voting rights, the "Negro-Suffrage Amendment" was adopted into the Iowa Constitution, striking "white" but leaving "male" in Iowa voting law. Iowa women would have to wait for the vote.

Tensions around the same issue rose at the national level as some woman suffragists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, protested the notion of enfranchising black men before educated white women. According to Lisa Tetrault, "the [American] Anti-

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<sup>11</sup> Louise R. Noun, *Strong Minded-Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa*, (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1969), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Senator Wharton quoted in Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Wilberforce P. Gaylord quoted in Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> Phoebe Palmer quoted in Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Slavery Society's support for black voting rights generally meant black male suffrage. Whereas white women in the [American Equal Rights Association] who demanded women's voting rights generally meant white female suffrage."<sup>16</sup> The tension between women's and black suffrage highlighted the ambiguous space in which black women found themselves. Arguments on both sides tended to assume that black suffrage meant black men and woman suffrage meant *white* woman suffrage, leaving black women out of the picture.<sup>17</sup> The predominantly white group of women activists split into two groups over this issue, a divide that would last twenty years.<sup>18</sup>

Activity at the national level inspired women in Iowa to get involved. A group of women from Dubuque, Iowa founded the first woman suffrage association in Iowa in 1869 after attending a woman suffrage convention in Illinois. Speeches by the national leaders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, moved the Dubuque women to start a state organization in Iowa. Henrietta Wilson hosted the first known Iowa suffrage meeting in her home on April 17, 1869; this meeting resulted in the organization of the Northern Iowa Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>19</sup> The Iowa women called for more organizations to form throughout Iowa, but this ambition was slow to be realized. Native-born Iowans were more likely to join or organize suffrage groups, while immigrants tended to favor traditional gender-roles in which women inhabited the private sphere, away from politics. Because immigrants were reluctant to join the woman movement, suffragists began to harbor hostile feelings towards immigrants, particularly Germans, whose Catholic beliefs were grounded in traditional and conservative values.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of Northern Carolina Press, 2014), 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>19</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Egge, *Woman Suffrage*, 75.

Millions of Germans immigrated to the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century, many choosing to settle in Iowa.<sup>21</sup> At the turn of the century, German Americans represented one of the greatest oppositions to woman suffrage in Iowa; male voters in German townships rejected woman suffrage at more than a four to one ratio, though it is unclear what German American women believed.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the connection between the temperance movement, and the woman suffrage movement alienated many German Americans, particularly at the local level.<sup>23</sup> The Woman's Christian Temperance Union enjoyed support throughout Iowa and "shaped public life tremendously."<sup>24</sup> The temperance movement threatened a social cornerstone of the German community: beer and social drinking. According to Hansen, "drinking was a way of life for the German Culture. It was (...) an integral part of many social gatherings."<sup>25</sup> National suffrage leaders struggled to separate woman suffrage from temperance to gain the favor of immigrant groups, but many suffragists were also active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, making it difficult to make the distinction between the two groups. Despite efforts to separate the causes, Germans continued to view the two movements as connected.<sup>26</sup> In the eyes of German Americans, if woman suffrage passed, a temperance amendment was sure to follow.

In 1870, the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association, later renamed the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association (IESA) in 1874, was formed at a convention held in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. This organization as the first nationally recognized organization for woman suffrage in Iowa and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas G. Ryan, "Male Opponents and Supporters of Woman Suffrage: Iowa in 1916," *The Annals of Iowa* 45 (1981), 542-544.

<sup>23</sup> Egge, *Woman Suffrage*, 79.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>25</sup> Hansen, "God is Listening Only to the English Tongue," 60.

<sup>26</sup> Egge, *Woman Suffrage*, 76.

would lead Iowa suffragists' efforts until 1920. The first IESA convention attracted large, curious audiences who filled each session. The new state association formed with membership open to all people, regardless of race, color, or sex, although this was nominal; the majority of IESA were white, middle-class, Protestant, and native-born.<sup>27</sup> IESA continued to struggle ideologically with immigrant German American communities, who were eventually written off by NAWSA as “never being able to support woman suffrage” because of their conservative beliefs and resistance to the woman suffrage cause.<sup>28</sup> According to Egge, these foreigners perplexed suffrage organizations, causing many to question their fitness for citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

The first annual convention of IESA, held in October 1870 in Des Moines, asked all “friends of woman suffrage [to] organize and rally for one combined effort.”<sup>30</sup> Compared to neighboring states, the woman suffrage cause flourished in Iowa.<sup>31</sup> Amelia Bloomer, pioneer of the Bloomers movement, formed the Council Bluffs Woman Suffrage Society that same year, appointing herself as president.<sup>32</sup> Between 1889 and 1890, Carrie Chapman Catt (then known as Carrie Lane Chapman) began traveling in support of woman suffrage throughout Iowa. Trying her hand at club organization, Catt organized many Political Equality Clubs, including societies in Cherokee, Aurelia, Alta, Fonda, Harlan, and other Iowa towns.<sup>33</sup> After marrying George Catt, a resident of New York, however, the newlywed Catt rescinded her Iowa residency. She

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<sup>27</sup> Noun, *Strong Minded Women*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Egge, *Woman Suffrage*, 76.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Annie Savery quoted in Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 188.

<sup>31</sup> Egge, *Woman Suffrage*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> In 1851, Amelia Bloomer began wearing a new type of outfit while delivering public lectures. The outfit featured trouser-like garments under a knee-length skirt. The outfit became known as bloomers and became a revolutionary, but radical, alternative to dresses. Many woman activists adopted bloomers into their everyday wear, though the movement was short-lived. Many reformers abandoned dress reform, and their bloomers, in favor of focusing efforts on suffrage and women's rights. Kate Clarke Lemay, “Radical Women, 1832-1869” in *Votes for Women! A Portrait of Persistence*, ed. Kate Clarke Lemay (Princeton University Press, 2019), 105.

<sup>33</sup> Harlan Political Equality Club, August 1892, Shelby County Courthouse Cornerstone Time Capsule Collection, Wayne Alwill Research Center, Shelby County Historical Museum, Harlan, IA.; Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 234.

remained an active suffragist on the national level, going on to become president of NAWSA in 1915. After 1920, Catt continued to serve as the honorary president of the NLWV for the rest of her life, though her subsequent activism focused on international suffrage and peace. Catt continued to stay in contact with her fellow activists in Iowa, but she no longer played a direct role in the Iowa women's movement.

Many of the newly organized woman suffrage groups in Iowa were largely white, not solely because of racism during the period but also because of the failure of single-issue suffrage groups to accommodate the many interests of black women. The record of black women's involvement in the mainstream suffrage movement in Iowa is limited. The separation of the white women's suffrage movement and the black civil rights movement during this period represented many lost opportunities for cooperation between white and black activists. According to historian Leslie A. Schwalm, records of the Polk County Woman Suffrage Association indicate a handful of meetings between white suffragists and black women in the mid- to late-1880s. At these meetings, the two groups attempted to forge alliances for the future, but not all Iowa suffrage organizations shared the progressive ideas of the Polk County Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>34</sup> Black women eventually chose, after failed cooperation with white suffrage groups, to form separate organizations to fight for both civil and political rights. Even though cooperation between white and black women failed, Schwalm argues that "the act of reaching out to white suffragists suggests a gendered political consciousness and an effort to seek new forms of activism on that basis of that consciousness."<sup>35</sup> Because these black women occupied an intersection of race and gender, they found their needs unfulfilled in white women's

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<sup>34</sup> Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 210.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

suffrage organizations. Through groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Association of Colored Women, black women took on a broader agenda which included education, violence against blacks, underemployment, and more.<sup>36</sup> Suffrage was one concern among many for black women, unlike the single-issue woman suffrage groups white women typically joined.

Moving into the twentieth century, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) became the leading organization for the suffrage cause across the nation. IESA allied themselves with NAWSA, becoming a state-level organization of NAWSA. According to Cott, twentieth-century women activists inherited the woman movement at a time when women's activities were becoming increasingly public and the number of employed women was growing quickly.<sup>37</sup> As women became a larger part of the 'public sphere,' the need for suffrage became "a more pressing need for women, and diverse kinds of women could see the vote as a concrete goal around which to form a coalition."<sup>38</sup> The cause quickly became the battle-cry of large groups of women across a spectrum of class, race, and status and created strong, but temporary, coalitions. When Carrie Chapman Catt became president of NAWSA in 1915, she refocused the organization's efforts on a federal amendment with her "Winning Plan." Under Catt, NAWSA "sought to give women the same capacity as men so they could express their differences."<sup>39</sup> The National Woman's Party (NWP) also burst onto the suffrage scene after a controversial split from NAWSA in 1913.<sup>40</sup> While the two groups overlapped in their goals, their tactics varied. NAWSA committed itself to a national amendment and support for the Great War; the NWP

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<sup>36</sup> Lindsay E. Shannon, *Women's Suffrage in Iowa 90 Years After the Winning Plan*, 2009, Iowa Women's Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women's Archive, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism and the 1920s* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 5.

used more headline-catching tactics. Under the leadership of Alice Paul, the National Woman's Party employed militant strategies inspired by the British woman suffrage movement, including parades, picketing the white house, and hunger strikes.<sup>41</sup> NAWSA repudiated many of the NWP's attention-grabbing tactics.

Throughout the battle for suffrage, suffragists enumerated their high expectations for what women would do with the vote. Politics was a dirty business, some suffragists proclaimed, so who better to clean it up than women? Employing an ethic of care rhetoric, suffragists proclaimed that they were going to "clean out the house," and make politics more honest, more suitable for "ladies."<sup>42</sup> Additionally, NAWSA and other organizations proclaimed that women would not vote like men, but in a "woman's bloc," determined by policy and not by party loyalty. Women were not loyal to parties, according to many activists, but concerned with issues such as health, education, child welfare, and maternity and infancy protection, and thus would vote independently and unpredictably.<sup>43</sup> These claims reach back to the very beginning of the suffrage campaign when suffragists were just beginning to deal with the conflict between women as human beings and women as a separate class. The movement would consistently argue that women deserved enfranchisement both because they had the same "intellectual and spiritual endowment as men," but also because the female sex differed from the male in their moral, philosophic, nurturing, and pacifist characteristics.<sup>44</sup>

After decades of lobbying, IESA celebrated victory when Iowa Governor William L. Harding called a special session of the Iowa legislature on July 2, 1919. In just two hours, the

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<sup>41</sup> Kate Clarke Lemay, "Compelling Tactics, 1913-1916" in *Votes for Women! A Portrait of Persistence*, (Princeton University Press, 2019), 167.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 19.

general assembly unanimously voted to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment presented white women suffrage organizations with extinction, but many women knew their work was not done. According to J. Stanley Lemons, many of the leaders of the former suffrage movement felt that “the ballot was only a tool and that it must be



Figure 1: Elmer Andrews Bushnell, *The Sky Is Now Her Limit*, October 1920, line photoengraving, 3 ¾ x 3 ¼ in (9.5 x 8.3 cm), Reprinted in *Votes for Women! A Portrait of Persistence*, ed. Kate Clarke Lemay (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 219.

utilized for the good of society.”<sup>45</sup> Figure 1 demonstrates the climb these leaders felt ahead of them. Titled *The Sky is Now Her Limit*, illustrator Elmer Andrews Bushnell’s work shows a woman with a shoulder yoke looking up at a ladder that reaches endlessly into the sky. Each label on the rungs of the ladder presents an obstacle woman must overcome to achieve gender equality, all while balancing the weight on her shoulders. The climb to suffrage is only three-quarters of the climb to equality, where the final rung (cut off in the reprinted illustration) reads, “Presidency.”<sup>46</sup> While the climb appears endless, historian Kate Clarke Lemay notes that the image is optimistic, suggesting that “one day, she will make it to the top.”<sup>47</sup> To complete the climb, women would need a new organization to facilitate their efforts.

From this sentiment, the leaders of NAWSA saw a winding road ahead of them: a “woman crusade for the liberation of the mothers of the race.”<sup>48</sup> In 1919, at the Jubilee Convention for NAWSA celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the organization, Carrie Chapman Catt proposed a new “League of Women Voters” that would be concerned with three goals:

“(1) to use its utmost influence to secure the final enfranchisement of the women of every state in our own Republic and to reach out across the seas in aid of the woman’s struggle for her own in every land; (2) to remove the remaining legal discriminations against women in the codes and constitutions of the several states in order that the feet of coming women may find these stumbling blocks removed; (3) to make our democracy so

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<sup>45</sup> Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> As the 2020 presidential campaigns are getting serious now in 2019, it is worth noting that the ladder rung for “President” still has not been reached. The idea of a woman president, 100 years after the publication of this illustration, is still controversial. Is the presidency the glass ceiling that refuses to break? Women have been running for the presidency for over 100 years, yet only one has received the nomination of a major party: Hilary Clinton. Because the “presidency” ladder rung in the illustration is not cut off in the original print at the Library of Congress, the question remains if cutting off “presidency” in *Votes for Women* was intentional or simply a printing error. Does the cut off rung symbolize that the presidency is out of reach for women still? Is a woman president too controversial for a Smithsonian printed book?

<sup>47</sup> Kate Clarke Lemay, “The Nineteenth Amendment and It’s Legacy, 1920 to Today” in *Votes for Women! A Portrait of Persistence*, ed. Kate Clarke Lemay, (Princeton University Press, 2019), 219.

<sup>48</sup> National American Woman Suffrage Association, *Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and Congress of the League of Women Voters*, 16.

safe for the Nation and so safe for the world that every citizen may feel secure and great men will acknowledge the worthiness of the American republic to lead.”<sup>49</sup>

Gender-based discrimination did not disappear after the Nineteenth Amendment. Women were still barred from serving on a jury and taking public office in some states. A married woman's nationality was determined by her husband's; she also faced more difficulty in filing for divorce than her husband would, in addition to holding limited guardianship rights of her children. A woman earned less than a man in the same job with the same experience, an issue which was perpetuated by the "pin-money" myth.<sup>50</sup> Women lacked independent citizenship, an issue which the NLWV leaders hoped to face head-on.<sup>51</sup>

Two months after Iowa ratified the Nineteenth Amendment and four months before the official founding of the NLWV, IESA founded the League of Women Voters of Iowa (originally named the Iowa League of Women Voters) in Boone, Iowa on October 2, 1919, with Flora Dunlap as the new league's first president.<sup>52</sup> That same meeting, IESA dissolved under the following resolution:

“Resolved, that the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association does, now, change its name to the Iowa League of Women Voters, and that the Iowa League of Women Voters succeeds to all the rights and privileges of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Handbook of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and Proceedings of the Jubilee Convention,” March 24-29, 1919, ed. Justina Leavitt Wilson, Box III:58, League of Women Voters (U.S.) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>50</sup> According to historian Janice Traflet, pin money refers to “a small amount of money possessed by a woman to be used at her own discretion and for her own enjoyment.” In short, the prevailing assumptions created a myth that women worked so they could buy non-necessities, like the newest fashion trends, for themselves. Employers often used the idea of pin money as justification to pay women less than men, stating that women worked to buy things for themselves while men worked for their family. While this myth was largely untrue, it remained pervasive throughout the twentieth century and still affects the gendered wage gap today.

Janice Traflet, “Gendered Dollars: Pin Money, Mad Money, and Changing Notions of a Woman’s Proper Place” in *Essays in Economic and Business History*, Vol. XXVI, 2008, 189.

<sup>51</sup> Lemons, *The Woman Citizen*, 63.

<sup>52</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Flora Dunlap, “The Iowa League of Women Voters” in “History: Iowa League of Women Voters Book 1, 1919-1940,” Iowa Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 1.

The LWV of Iowa set to work educating the newly enfranchised masses of women in Iowa and lobbying for women's rights.

As with the other state Leagues, the LWV of Iowa was an organizational point to funnel information from the National League down to the local levels. As the LWV of Iowa began its work, continuing discrimination became increasingly clear. The LWV of Iowa continued supporting protective legislation for women to gain equal citizenship status with men after 1920.

While the NLWV and LWV of Iowa proclaimed their actions reflected the ambitions, wishes, and needs of all women, their efforts largely focused on the rights of white women. The disparity between words and action highlights the fact that some women had more rights than others. As historian Martha S. Jones states in her article, "The Politics of Black Womanhood, 1848-2008," the Nineteenth Amendment mandated that sexism no longer restricted voting rights, but racism still barred most black women from the polls until the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>54</sup> During this period, mainstream organizations were largely restricted to white women, leaving out women of color, who subsequently formed separate organizations. Black women and white women had banded together in the past under the banner of anti-slavery, but when it came to women's rights, black women were largely left out of the mainstream movement.<sup>55</sup> Because this paper focuses on the work of the League of Women Voters, both at the national level and in Iowa, this analysis will apply mainly to the activism of white, middle-class women.

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<sup>54</sup> Martha S. Jones, "The Politics of Black Womanhood, 1848-2008," in *Votes for Women! A Portrait of Persistence*, ed. Kate Clarke Lemay (Princeton University Press, 2019), 30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

## Efforts to Expand Women's Citizenship

The Iowa state constitution still limited full suffrage to male citizens in 1919. IESA secured presidential suffrage for women in Iowa on April 25, 1919, thanks to support from Governor Harding. However, this limited women to voting only for the president.<sup>56</sup> To vote for other elected offices, Iowa women had to wait along with most of the rest of American women. Iowa women did not gain full suffrage until Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment on August 18, 1920, which officially granted suffrage to women nationwide by a margin of just one vote. The fact that Iowa women founded a women's voting organization before they became full-fledged voters portrays the confidence felt by suffragists during this period. A quote from Pauline Adeyitt, last president of IESA, illustrates both the optimism and sense of accomplishment felt by IESA women: "Had it not been (...) for the undaunted efforts of a few untiring women who knew too well that nothing comes to her who sits and waits, we women of Iowa, despite the passage of the Federal Suffrage Amendment would be today, almost as far from actual representation as we found ourselves last year."<sup>57</sup>

The LWV of Iowa organized primarily around a goal to educate women before they voted in the 1920 election, utilizing the existing organizational structure left behind by IESA.<sup>58</sup> Their first platform focused on voting techniques, election laws, getting-out-the-vote, party policies, and candidate histories to prepare women to vote for the first time.<sup>59</sup> According to the minutes of a September 1920 meeting, the LWV of Iowa believed they were entering "an era of

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<sup>56</sup> "Suffrage Calendar," Box 53, Folder: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Miscellaneous (Folder 5) 1969, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

<sup>57</sup> Pauline Adeyitt, "President's Address" in "History: Iowa League of Women Voters Book 1, 1919-1940," Iowa Women's Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Flora Dunlap, "The Iowa League of Women Voters" in "History: Iowa League of Women Voters Book 1, 1919-1940," Iowa Women's Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

political responsibility for woman-kind.”<sup>60</sup> The challenge for the LWV of Iowa largely was how to engage these new women citizens. Much of the League’s activity focused on education of eligible voters on the function of government; The league selected primarily issues “of interest to women” and demonstrated how these issues could be solved through government.<sup>61</sup> The education initiatives included citizenship schools, lectures, and the distribution of publications, such as giving out copies of the United States Constitution. While the LWV of Iowa educated their listeners, they did not attempt to push them towards one party view or another.

According to Kathryn H. Stone, a woman joining the League of Women Voters would quickly realize the ideological differences among members, each “holding varying points of view and exhibiting many shades of opinion.”<sup>62</sup> While the LWV of Iowa, like its parent organization, lobbied and worked for legislation in favor of women, the organization took a staunchly nonpartisan stance. Carrie Chapman Catt supported this stance from her position as a national leader, and in her proposal to form the NLWV in 1919. The LWV at all levels operated as a women’s interest group, using their resources to influence public opinion for or against specific issues, rather than as a political party, or as a woman’s voting bloc as some opposition leaders feared. New York Governor Nathan Miller lashed out at the LWV organizations, declaring the idea of a “league of women voters” to be just as improper as a “league of men voters.”<sup>63</sup> Hostility towards state and local leagues continued, as politicians feared the future of the two-party system if a women’s party began running candidates for office. Governor Miller

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<sup>60</sup> September 23, 1920 Minutes. “League of Women Voters minutes, 1920-25,” Iowa Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women’s Archive, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 4-5.

<sup>61</sup> Kathryn H. Stone, *A History of the League Program*, 1949, Box 44: Folder: National League History; Platform and Program (2) 1940-1964, League of Women Voters of Iowa records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 107.

captured the view of many others when he declared the political mobilization of women to be a “menace to our free institutions and to representative government” in the United States.<sup>64</sup>

The opposition’s fears were to be unfounded, as the LWV organizations across the country took Catt’s advice to remain nonpartisan, and refrained from “endorsing or opposing particular candidates, concentrating [instead] on voter education and political issues, research, publicity, and lobbying.”<sup>65</sup> The LWV of Iowa followed this idea as it moved forward into this new era of women’s political participation. Some former suffragists scorned the NLWV’s policy of education, feeling that simply educating and not mobilizing women put them in the hands of the pre-existing major parties.<sup>66</sup> This, however, was exactly what the NLWV intended. From the beginning, LWV leaders at all levels of organization “urged [their] members to enroll in the political parties.”<sup>67</sup> The LWV of Iowa, along with other state leagues, prepared women to assimilate into the existing political structure rather than construct a new one. The LWV of Iowa insisted “the homes of the land are still normally intact, and the polls are not unfit for women to attend. (...) This is (*sic*) women make good voters – they [can] do their own voting.”<sup>68</sup> Women’s political presence in the 1920s did not reflect the unity that many suffragists had predicted.<sup>69</sup> Just as today, Women “did not constitute a single unified group but were, in fact, divided.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>67</sup> National League of Women Voters, “From ‘*History, Principles, and Policy*’ Leaflet of the National League of Women Voters,” Box III:47, Folder: Political Parties, League of Women Voters (U.S.) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>68</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 7, July 20, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 265.

<sup>70</sup> Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, 93.

Among the most pressing concerns to the LWV of Iowa was the disappointingly low percentage of eligible voters who went to the polls. In 1924, the LWV of Iowa began a campaign across the state, endorsed by Iowa Governor Nathan E. Kendall, to "combat political ignorance and apathy."<sup>71</sup> According to the LWV of Iowa, a government could not operate to its full capacity if citizens were not interested, did not sacrifice, and were not proud of it.<sup>72</sup> In conjunction with their education initiative, discussed in greater detail later, the LWV of Iowa began their "Get Out the Vote" state program, including a publicity campaign emphasizing the general election in the coming November as well as exhibitions at various county fairs and the Iowa State Fair on league activities and the importance of voting.<sup>73</sup> While the League wanted to increase voter participation, political scientist Allan Lichtman notes that their campaigns "did not target typical nonvoters but focused on white, native, middle class Americans as ideal voters, shutting out allegedly less-qualified 'problem voters.'"<sup>74</sup> LWV of Iowa archival sources do not demonstrate that the LWV of Iowa purposefully avoided attracting minorities to the polls. However, the state and county fairs were likely segregated during this period. Throughout their various activities, the LWV of Iowa refrained from using any partisan stances in their educational materials to reach out to a wider group of people, male and female.

The LWV of Iowa also utilized its bulletin to educate audiences about the issues they viewed as most pressing. The LWV of Iowa published its first monthly bulletin on January 26, 1922, three years after the group first formed. Iowa LWV members imagined the bulletin would

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<sup>71</sup> Bulletin of the Iowa League of Women Voters; Volume 1, No. 1, 1924, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Allan J. Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America: From the Founding to the Present*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 126.

“contain the national, state, and county information for the benefit of the people in the state. The Iowa women should be the BEST informed group in the United States on legislative questions.”<sup>75</sup> Much of the content found in these bulletins relates to the activities of State LWV of Iowa leaders, including updates on citizenship schools led by the League. Additionally, the bulletin reveals the positions held by the LWV of Iowa on National and State legislative measures. While the bulletin underwent many iterations, legislative priorities remained the same: education, public health, public morality, and international peace.<sup>76</sup>

Above all, the League believed that each specific discrimination against women in the law and the workplace would have to be considered and acted upon independently. According to Kathryn H. Stone, a League member writing in 1949, the League argued that "society has always considered the differences between the sexes in the making and application of laws and must continue to do so." The National Woman's Party, led by Alice Paul, believed differently. Paul officially introduced the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to Congress in December 1923, which, if ratified into the Constitution, would have acted as a blanket amendment to guarantee equal rights for men and women in the United States.<sup>77</sup> The NLWV and the state Leagues almost immediately opposed it because an ERA would "invalidate sex-based labor legislation – the laws regulating women's hours, wages, and conditions of work" which women labor activists had passionately advocated for in the preceding decades.<sup>78</sup> The LWV of Iowa discussed the issue in its bulletin in 1922, before the ERA was officially proposed, stating, "at first thought, this sounds

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<sup>75</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 1, January 26, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 1.

<sup>76</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 7, July 20, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

to most women like a reasonable bill. A little consideration, however, will show its dangers. Such an amendment would endanger any state laws now in existence for the protection of women.”<sup>79</sup> As a result, the LWV of Iowa, following the NLWV’s lead, strongly opposed the ERA, favoring instead a point-by-point approach to removing gender-based discriminations.

According to Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, president of the LWV of Iowa from 1935 to 1937, the legal limitations on Iowa women quickly became evident.<sup>80</sup> Women, the LWV of Iowa realized, faced a long road towards equality. According to Stone, leaders of LWVs nationwide intended to remove “specific discriminations against women whenever laws could be written which were enforceable.”<sup>81</sup> The Nineteenth Amendment had only removed one of many legal discriminations against women. The State of Iowa still barred women from many of the basic rights that people today view as essential to citizenship. To begin with, women in Iowa still could not run for legislative office at the state level. The Iowa Constitution, adopted in 1857, stated “No person shall be a member of the House of Representatives who shall not have attained the age of twenty-one years, be a male citizen of the United States, and shall have been an inhabitant of this state one year next preceding his election.”<sup>82</sup> As a consequence, the Iowa constitution rendered Iowa women unable to represent themselves, despite most women having

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<sup>79</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 1, January 26, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Kathryn H. Stone, *A History of the League Program*, 1949, Box 44: Folder: National League History; Platform and Program (2) 1940-1964, League of Women Voters of Iowa records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 15.

<sup>82</sup> “Iowa Constitution 1857,” Iowa Publications Online, State Library of Iowa, [http://publications.iowa.gov/9996/1/iowa\\_constitution\\_1857002.pdf](http://publications.iowa.gov/9996/1/iowa_constitution_1857002.pdf).

the ability to vote for their representatives. Instead, they had to rely on men to sympathize with their needs.

The LWV of Iowa quickly began to organize to correct this inequality. The issue is first mentioned in the minutes of a meeting held in September 1920. The secretary records the belief of the organization that “as women and mothers our voices are needed where ever women and children are concerned.”<sup>83</sup> The LWV of Iowa arranged for a bill to be presented to the Iowa legislature in 1920 that would correct the “oversight” and ensure that “proper care may be given to our sex and to the coming generation.”<sup>84</sup> The LWV of Iowa also cooperated with other state women’s organizations and clubs to form a committee to support legislation allowing Iowa women to run for office. In 1925, legislators passed the Fifteenth Amendment to the Iowa Constitution, striking the word “male” from Section four of Article III, finally allowing women to run for the state legislature.<sup>85</sup>

Additionally, women still could not serve on a jury in many states. Nationwide, women faced a jury not of their peers, but men. Many women on trial and their supporters, believed that a trial could not be fair without women serving on the jury because men did not understand women’s actions in the same context. The United States Supreme Court ruled in *Strauder v. West Virginia* (1879) that it was legal under the Constitution to limit the selection of jurors “to males, to freeholders, to citizens, to persons within certain ages, or to persons having educational qualifications.”<sup>86</sup> While the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional to exclude men from jury duty based on race, the states could still exclude women. States excluded women on many

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<sup>83</sup> “League of Women Voters minutes, 1920-25,” Iowa Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women’s Archive, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Iowa Official Registrar, “Amendments to the Constitution of Iowa, Iowa Publications Online, State Library of Iowa, <http://publications.iowa.gov/135/1/history/7-8.html>.

<sup>86</sup> *Strauder v. West Virginia*, 100 U.S. 303 (1880).

grounds, mostly based on stereotypes that placed women in the home with their children or that women should be shielded from the horrors of crime. The LWV of Iowa supported the efforts of women in other states for women's jury service, though women in Iowa were not specifically barred from serving on a jury.

LWVs around the nation, including in Iowa, also worked to win independent citizenship for women. According to Cott, "the right of suffrage based on the concept of individual independence (...) was still, in 1920, self-contradictory for wives."<sup>87</sup> Under federal law, a woman's nationality, or citizenship status, depended on that of her husband. While immigrant women benefited from this law, an American woman who married an alien lost her American citizenship status.<sup>88</sup> Men's citizenship was not affected in the same way by marriage. The NLWV president, Maud Wood Park observed, "a woman is as much an individual as a man is, and her citizenship should no more be gained or lost by marriage than should a man's."<sup>89</sup> LWV women working for this issue concerned themselves mainly with American women who lost their citizenship by marriage, and thus "became subject to the disabilities imposed on aliens."<sup>90</sup> Losing her citizenship could limit a woman in several ways. An LWV of Iowa bulletin informs readers that "[loss of citizenship] may deprive a woman of professional responsibilities (...) and deprive her of land holdings in certain states and the rights of public benefits."<sup>91</sup>

The LWV of Iowa approached the issue of citizenship from a national perspective, believing that it was the domain of the federal government, not the states, to amend women's citizenship. Instead of lobbying within Iowa, the LWV of Iowa declared their support for

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<sup>87</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 185.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 1, January 26, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 1.

legislation that would give women independent citizenship from their husbands. LWV of Iowa bulletins published in 1922 illustrates continued support for multiple bills relating to women's citizenship status. The LWV of Iowa first supported a bill proposed by Senator Charles of Kansas which provided that American women who married foreigners and remained in the United States would not lose their citizenship. This proposal never passed Congress.<sup>92</sup> The Cable Act, proposed by Ohio Congressman John L. Cable, passed on September 22, 1922, "removing the old standard that a married woman's citizenship followed that of her husband."<sup>93</sup> The act was a step in the right direction; however, it had limitations. Women who married a foreign man of Asian descent still lost their citizenship status. Because of this, and other limitations, the Cable Act of 1922 did not completely separate women's citizenship status from her marital status. The LWV of Iowa continued to express support for amendments to the Cable Act in its monthly bulletin.<sup>94</sup> The revised Cable Act of 1930 officially made a married woman's citizenship fully independent from that of her husband.<sup>95</sup>

At the state level, the LWV of Iowa worked tirelessly to defeat numerous bills that would have discriminated against women based on gender or marital status between 1920 and 1940. The first discrimination against women based on sex to be removed included striking the word "male" from the Iowa constitution as a requirement for candidacy for state legislature in 1925. The next victory for the LWV of Iowa did not come until 1933 when they helped defeat a bill discriminating against married women in public employment. In the following years, the LWV

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 99.

<sup>94</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Iowa League Bulletin, Vol. 1, No. 4, October 6, 1931, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922 – 1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

of Iowa helped shoot down other similar measures, including a bill discriminating against women in taxpayer-supported positions, or government jobs, in 1935 and a bill discriminating against women's employment based on marital status in 1937.<sup>96</sup> These victories show the slow chipping away at discriminations against women in the workplace, but also men's resistance to allowing women into these workplaces. If men had been openly accepting women into public workplaces, these bills would not have been introduced. These hostilities reflect a continuing belief in the pin-money myth; the belief that a woman did not need a job as much as a man affected the legislation proposed to the Iowa legislature. The LWV of Iowa rejected the idea that women simply worked for spending money, arguing that most women in the workforce worked to support their families to buy necessities, not the newest fashion trends.

Interestingly, an LWV of Iowa Program of Work shows active support for the establishment of a permanent women's bureau in city police departments, a sharp departure from the traditional role of women in public life. According to LWV materials, each women's bureau would be staffed with well-trained policewomen who would handle cases involving women and children, loosely connecting women's activity within the bureau to the home.<sup>97</sup> Placing women in an authoritative position reflects the ambition to raise women's status in the public sphere. While some Leagues across the nation were successful in establishing a women's bureau within their police departments, the women who were hired as police officers did not enjoy the same authorities as their male counterparts. Woman police officers were restricted on the types of cases they could handle – mainly cases involving specifically women or children. Cases

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<sup>96</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 5.

<sup>97</sup> "Fourteenth Annual Convention in Estherville, Iowa, 1934, Box 10, Folder: Convention Minutes 1927-1945 (Folder 1), League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.

involving men were left to male police officers. Whether this was in the interest of protecting the female officers or to prevent woman police officers from having direct authority over men is up for debate. Regardless, the LWV of Iowa supported the idea of including women within the police force to protect their communities, though it appears there were no woman's bureaus established in Iowa. In light of this activity, it appears that not only was the LWV of Iowa working to eliminate discrimination in already available opportunities, the League also looked to expand opportunities for women into more spheres of influence.

By utilizing the political structure left behind by IESA, the LWV of Iowa was able to successfully fight for many initiatives and provide support for the NLWV's initiatives. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the LWV of Iowa worked tirelessly to change the law concerning women by proposing or resisting specific bills to correct specific discriminations. While the ERA seemed an easy fix to the issue, the LWV of Iowa followed the NLWV's lead in resisting an easy way out, believing the ERA would threaten work already done by women. While their work focused primarily on woman-specific reform, the LWV of Iowa also supported other issues, such as child labor reform, welfare, movie censorship, healthcare, welfare, and education.<sup>98</sup> The list goes on and on; however, these activities lie outside the scope of this paper.

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<sup>98</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, "History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944), Box 9, Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957 (includes history 1919-1944), League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 2.

## **Educational Initiatives to Define Citizenship**

The LWV of Iowa was not alone in deciding on their agendas for the year. Each state's program of work was curated from a list voted on by the NLWV during their national conventions each year. Each state League prioritized the issues most important to them. A typical NLWV Program of Work included several broad topics, such as citizen education initiatives, child welfare, social hygiene, the legal status of women, and women in industry.<sup>99</sup> Based on records available on the LWV of Iowa's activities between 1920 and 1940, the LWV of Iowa fully embraced citizen education. Compared to other state-level leagues, the LWV of Iowa placed a high priority on citizenship education initiatives.

To realize their goal of educating eligible voters, the LWV of Iowa began hosting citizenship schools across Iowa with help from local leagues and other women's clubs in preparation for the 1920 election. Citizenship schools operated as the LWV of Iowa's largest initiative between 1920 and 1940, supported by both the state and local leagues. Planning for citizenship schools began during the winter of 1919-1920, according to Flora Dunlap, the LWV of Iowa's first president.<sup>100</sup> Pamphlets distributed by the NLWV show the types of lessons taught at citizenship schools across the country. A pamphlet written by Marie B. Ames includes twelve lessons:

- “Lesson No. 1: Nominating and Electing our President
- Lesson No. 2: Powers and Duties of Our President
- Lesson No. 3: Our President and His Cabinet
- Lesson No. 4: The Judicial Department
- Lesson No. 5: Congress at Work

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<sup>99</sup> “Plan of Work and Program for the National League of Women Voters, 1923-1924,” National League of Women Voters, April 1923, Box III:59, Folder: Program of Work, Hist. File 1, League of Women Voters (U.S.) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 3.

<sup>100</sup> Flora Dunlap, “The Iowa League of Women Voters” in “History: Iowa League of Women Voters Book 1, 1919-1940,” Iowa Women's Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

Lesson No 6: How Laws are Made  
Lesson No. 7: The Governor and other Executive Offices  
Lesson No. 8: State Boards and Commissions  
Lesson No 9: Relation of State Courts to Federal Courts  
Lesson No. 10: County and Township Forms of Government  
Lesson No. 11: History of Political Parties  
Lesson No. 12: Party Organization and Methods”<sup>101</sup>

These lessons reflect the desire of the NLWV, and the state leagues, for an educated population who effectively used their citizenship. According to the LWV of Iowa, effective citizenship included in-depth knowledge of the organization and function of all levels of government, including the political parties. Dunlap records that the first citizenship classes were held in Iowa City in February 1920 with help from the University of Iowa Outreach Division and instruction by University of Iowa professors; the inaugural citizenship class boasted an attendance of two hundred and fifteen women from forty-four counties across Iowa.<sup>102</sup>

Mrs. Earnest A. Hunt described the citizenship schools as “factual but absolutely unpartisan” in nature and intended for “men and women who needed correct information on which to base their own partisan decisions.”<sup>103</sup> As chairman of the LWV of Iowa’s citizenship schools, Julia B. Mayer traveled the state delivering lectures and overseeing courses on citizenship statewide. According to a bulletin published by the LWV of Iowa in April of 1922, citizenship schools under the direction of Mayer attracted large audiences of both men and women.<sup>104</sup> The fact that Mayer was able to teach and oversee citizenship schools to both men

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<sup>101</sup> National League of Women Voters, “Lessons for the Study of Citizenship by Marie B. Ames,” Box III:46, Folder: Citizenship Schools, League of Women Voters (U.S.) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>102</sup> Flora Dunlap, “The Iowa League of Women Voters” in “History: Iowa League of Women Voters Book 1, 1919-1940,” Iowa Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 3.

<sup>104</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 4, April 15, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

and women marks a shift since the beginning of the women's movement in the early- to mid-1800s. When women during that period gave lectures, the public viewed a mixed-gender audience to be scandalous. By 1922, the gender norm dictating that women should not conduct public speeches to mixed-gender audiences seem to have dissolved, marking a dramatic change in women's status in the public sphere. Citizenship schools remained popular throughout Iowa through the 1920s and 1930s, dwindling during the Great Depression and coming to an end at the beginning of World War II as money and volunteers diminished.<sup>105</sup>

A closer look at the intentions behind the citizenship school initiative taken on by Leagues across the nation reveals deeper concerns within the NLWV. Even though these women had fought so hard to achieve the vote for nearly one hundred years, they still concerned themselves with not only who could vote but also who they felt should not. Despite claims that early League members attempted to read the "times with minds free from prejudice and preconceived conceptions," the league makes clear their support for Americanization efforts.<sup>106</sup> The Handbook of the National American Woman Suffrage Association for the year 1919 describes the following citizenship initiatives for a proposed League of Women Voters:

1. "Compulsory education for all children between six and sixteen (...)
2. Education of adults by extension of public schools
3. English made the national language by making it compulsory in all public schools (...)
4. Higher qualifications for citizenship and more sympathetic and impressive ceremonials for naturalization
5. Direct citizenship for women, not citizenship through marriage, as a qualification for the vote
6. Naturalization for married women to be made possible

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<sup>105</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

<sup>106</sup> "Handbook of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and Proceedings of the Jubilee Convention (1869-1919)," ed. Justina Leavitt Wilson, National American Woman Suffrage Association, March 1919, BoxIII:58, Folder: n.a., League of Women Voters (U.S.) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 199.

7. Compulsory publication in foreign language newspapers of lessons on citizenship
8. Schools of citizenship in conjunction with the public schools, a certificate from such should be a qualification for naturalization and for the vote
9. An oath of allegiance to the United States to be one qualification for every citizen native and foreign born
10. An educational qualification for the vote in all states after a definite date to be determined.”<sup>107</sup>

All these proposed requirements for citizenship by NLWV leaders reflect a deep concern over who benefits from the rights of citizenship.

These initiatives set by the founders of the NLWV illustrate several points. First, they show that the NLWV, and the subsequent state leagues, believed that most people could be educated to become a good voter, regardless of language, national origin, or religion. This belief, however, could also be interpreted as a belief that immigrant voters needed an American education to vote intelligently, while Americans were pre-qualified by birth. Beliefs in the importance of educated voters reach further back than the Nineteenth Amendment; in fact, the founders of the women’s movement believed that only educated citizens should be allowed to vote. Despite the belief that anyone could be a citizen, League actions show support for Americanization.<sup>108</sup> During this time period, the League at both national and state levels emphasized support for both naturalization and educational training in order to vote.<sup>109</sup>

Looking specifically at points 2, 3, 7, and 8 above, this list suggests many strict educational requirements proposed by the NLWV. While the requirements may sound strict, they also suggest a sort of optimism: an assumption that any person could be trained for citizenship. These educational requirements, though similar to the use of literacy tests and poll taxes to bar racial minorities from voting on the surface, suggest a more inclusive belief. Even if these

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>108</sup> Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, 124.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 125.

women believed white, middle-class groups to be most qualified for voting, they also seem to have believed that other people were worth educating to gain the proper qualifications set by the NLWV in their citizenship schools. Rather than simply requiring a certain academic qualification for voting rights, the NLWV suggests a system that provides a way for people to obtain those qualifications, even for non-English speaking and immigrant populations, through the public school system. Point Three could also be interpreted in a nativist tone; however, when considering that elections are administered in English, this idea begins to make more sense in terms of voter registration. Initiative number one on the above list also presents the idea that citizenship and civic duty should be indoctrinated into all future voters.

On the flip side, the requirement that citizenship schools be advertised in foreign-language newspapers, number seven on the list, suggests targeting of specific populations. Following World War I, tensions came to a boiling point between German Americans and native-born Americans across the nation. German Americans were far from the only group facing discrimination in the 1920s and 1930s; however, World War I had vilified the German nationality in the eyes of many Americans. Because so many German people had settled in Iowa since the mid-nineteenth century, the shift was noticeable in Iowa. As noted previously, German Americans tended to settle in separate townships, away from the American-born, Protestant Iowans. Tensions among German American and woman activists in Iowa was one of the many continuities between the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association and the LWV of Iowa.

According to Hansen, “Once the United States entered World War I, German Americans would be labeled ‘the enemy within.’”<sup>110</sup> There were many efforts throughout the war, and after, to suppress German traditions and identity, and Iowa newspapers took on an Anti-German tone.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Slowly, the German language began to disappear from the Iowa landscape; an Iowa law passed in April of 1918 required the “exclusive use of English in Schools.”<sup>111</sup> German disappeared from school curriculums, replaced with the patriotism studies instead. Anti-German hysteria grew to the point where students in Davenport, Iowa broke into schools and burned over five hundred German textbooks, and school administrators only watched the destruction; some even cheered on the students.<sup>112</sup> That same year, Iowa Governor William Harding issued the Babel Proclamation, banning the use of all foreign languages in schools, places of worship, public spaces, and over the telephone.<sup>113</sup> The proclamation disproportionately affected German communities, especially those who lived most of their lives in German-speaking townships. Even after the war, anti-German hysteria continued, fueled further by victory.<sup>114</sup> Even after Governor Harding repealed the Babel Proclamation, German Americans still believed speaking in German to be too risky.

While there is no available archival evidence that proves the LWV of Iowa’s direct involvement in anti-German efforts, it likely that many citizenship school advertisements found their way into German newspapers because of the proposed NLWV education initiative number seven: “Compulsory publication in foreign language newspapers of lessons on citizenship.”<sup>115</sup> Initiative number three, requesting that English be made the official language of the US through the use of English exclusively in public schools, also follows along this line. Hansen describes

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Governor William L. Harding, “Babel Proclamation,” December 4, 1918, Educator Resources, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, <https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/immigration-regulation-response-and/babel-proclamation#>.

<sup>114</sup> Hansen, “God is Listening Only to the English Tongue,” 116.

<sup>115</sup> “Handbook of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and Proceedings of the Jubilee Convention (1869-1919),” ed. Justina Leavitt Wilson, National American Woman Suffrage Association, March 1919, BoxIII:58, Folder: n.a., League of Women Voters (U.S.) Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 199.

German Americans in the interwar period as “an ethnic group succumbing to the pressures of Americanization,” suggesting that efforts by groups like the LWV of Iowa to Americanize the German population in Iowa were succeeding.<sup>116</sup> German language disappeared from common use during World War I; this trend continued into the interwar period.<sup>117</sup> Remaining LWV of Iowa records do not indicate the nationality of their citizenship school attendees, but it remains likely that due to possible advertising in German newspapers that German Americans populated citizenship school classrooms.

In addition to citizenship school efforts to teach German populations about American democracy, German Americans also saw much of their culture stripped by Prohibition. The victory of the Temperance movement had been aided in large part by anti-German sentiment, which connected German-ness with alcohol consumption. According to Hansen, the National German American Alliance spoke vehemently against prohibition in Congressional hearings for the Eighteenth Amendment.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, German breweries were deemed acutely unpatriotic for their obstruction of the prohibition movement.<sup>119</sup> Prohibition went into effect in 1920, effectively closing down many remaining German businesses across Iowa. Not only was the German language considered espionage by the Babel Proclamation, German Americans faced the virtual erasure of their culture. The LWV of Iowa most likely believed much of the anti-German hype surrounding them at the time; their intentions, while misguided in retrospect, were likely in the interest of protecting their country by making German Americans into loyal American citizens.

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<sup>116</sup> Hansen, “God is Listening Only to the English Tongue,” 117.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Beyond Americanization efforts through citizenship schools, the LWV of Iowa and the NWLV's efforts to educate the population reflects a concern shared by one of the women's movements founders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. After the Civil War, conflict arose around a fundamental question: should women get the right to vote at the same time as freedmen? The resulting amendment, the Fifteenth Amendment, officially removed the ability of states to discriminate based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude" for the right to vote.<sup>120</sup> The language of the Fifteenth Amendment did not guarantee the right to vote; it simply removed the ability of states to use race as a discriminating factor in voting law.<sup>121</sup> The amendment left open several other avenues for discrimination. Stanton was a savvy politician in her prime, keenly aware of the power of words.<sup>122</sup> Closely mirroring the Fifteenth Amendment, Stanton wrote the Woman Suffrage Amendment to allow the same loopholes.<sup>123</sup> Most notably, Stanton supported educational requirements to qualify for the right to vote, a concept known as educated suffrage.

Stanton had been outraged when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified into the US Constitution, granting black men the right to vote before white, educated women. According to historian Lori D. Ginzberg, Stanton's radical beliefs that "women, as individuals capable of moral choice and intellectual distinction, deserved the rights granted to citizens of the United States," had always been colored by "the entitlement she felt as an educated white native-born American."<sup>124</sup> She often aligned herself with demands for educated suffrage.<sup>125</sup> Stanton often

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<sup>120</sup> U.S. Constitution, amend. XV, § 1.

<sup>121</sup> Tetrault, "When Women Won the Right to Vote."

<sup>122</sup> Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, 8.

<sup>123</sup> Tetrault, "When Women Won the Right to Vote."

<sup>124</sup> Lori D. Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 161.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

wrote in opposition to enfranchising more men, both immigrant and native-born, before educated white women were franchised.

While the LWV of Iowa and NLWV did not expressly state a belief that women should be enfranchised before anyone else, these organizations did argue that achievement of a defined academic standard should preclude receiving the right to vote. Many of the education initiatives listed by NLWV founders, particularly initiative number ten, align closely with Stanton's views on educated suffrage. According to Stanton, through education, a person may develop the intelligence to vote, whether it be learning to read or learning the English language.<sup>126</sup> In theory, an educational requirement for the vote would not discriminate against a specific race or gender, but in practice, this was never the reality. Poor communities, where immigrant populations and people of color were overrepresented, often lacked access to a quality education, while middle- and upper-class communities had more funding and resources available for their schools, which is still the case today. If an educational requirement were enacted, poor communities and people of color would be disproportionately excluded from the right to vote. The NLWV and LWV of Iowa did, however, offer alternatives to public education in citizenship – League-directed citizenship schools.

The LWV of Iowa and NLWV believed that educated voters would produce a better, more efficient government. The LWV of Iowa connected the idea of an educated voting pool with one that fulfilled their civic duties. A League bulletin published on July 20, 1922, declares, “efficiency in government will be assured when the majority of voters are intelligently and actively interested in public affairs because good government is plainly to the advantage of the

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<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Educated Suffrage Justified,” 3 November 1894 in *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Their Place Inside the Body-Politic, 1887-1895*, ed. Ann D. Gordon (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 656.

vast majority of men and women.”<sup>127</sup> Boiled down, the LWV of Iowa and the NLWV believed that educating the pool of eligible voters would increase government efficiency, efficacy, and bring better politicians into the government. According to LWV Author Kathryn H. Stone, the fate of the government is closely tied to its voting citizens.<sup>128</sup> Stone also argued that educated citizens can serve as a watchdog on the government, ensuring that the government properly carries out its duties.<sup>129</sup> While the NLWV and LWV of Iowa believed that democracy was the superior form of government, their actions seem to suggest a belief that the government must be protected from corruption by educated citizens.

Overall, support for educated suffrage colored the views of many NLWV and LWV of Iowa members, but their actions seem to have been rooted in good intentions. The citizenship schools could be considered as further attempts by white, largely Protestant, women to Americanize the US population; however, their ideas were also rooted in ambitions to improve American democracy. It is difficult to arrive at any conclusions based on available sources whether or not the LWV of Iowa consciously worked to Americanize immigrants and ethnic others. Regardless, their work in citizenship schools was firmly grounded in efforts to reform and define citizenship within the United States as someone who was English speaking, educated, and largely assimilated into American society.

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<sup>127</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 7, July 20, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Kathryn H. Stone, “A History of the League Program, 1949, Box 44, Folder: National League History: Platform and Program (Folder 2) 1940-1964, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, 5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

## Reflecting on the First 20 Years of the LWV of Iowa

The question remains whether or not the League of Women Voters achieved, or made progress towards, the ambitious goals they set at their formation in 1919. Like the NLWV, the LWV of Iowa had several aims which included many sub-goals. Of those sub-goals, only a few could receive significant attention due to limited time, resources, and funding. Despite restrictions, the LWV of Iowa lists several tangible accomplishments in *A History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*:

- “1920: Ratification of the Suffrage Amendment by Iowa
- 1925: Removal of the word ‘male’ from the Iowa Constitution as a necessary qualification for candidacy to the legislature
- 1933: Defeat of a bill discriminating against married women in public employment
- 1935: Defeat of bill discriminating against women in tax-paid positions
- 1935: Passage of a measure requiring use of the Merit System in selection of public employees
- 1937: Passage of the Municipal Service Measure
- 1937: Defeat of Bill discriminating against women’s employment on the basis of kinship and marriage status
- 1939: Passage of the Eugenic Health Measure
- 1939: Passage of the Pre-natal Health Measure”<sup>130</sup>

With a watchful eye on their legislature and careful lobbying, the LWV of Iowa worked to protect the rights of Iowa women against unjust discrimination. These accomplishments are specific to Iowa at the state level and do not reflect any work the LWV of Iowa did on behalf of the NLWV's national, more far-reaching goals. Additionally, this list only lists the successes, leaving out many unsuccessful but hard-fought campaigns. Failures are equally important to remember, as they inform future actions. Regardless, this list of tangible accomplishments of the LWV of Iowa gives some insight into just how busy the League was during its first two decades.

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<sup>130</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 4.

Among their accomplishments, the League also notes the “broader education and practical participation” of citizens within their communities and in their civic duties.<sup>131</sup> In 1922, the LWV of Iowa already estimated that approximately thirteen-thousand people had attended citizenship schools led by Julia B. Mayer.<sup>132</sup> While sources are not available that record the attendance of citizenship schools, it is reasonable to believe that the LWV of Iowa reached tens of thousands of people through their educational initiatives between 1920 and 1940. It is difficult to measure the outcomes of these citizenship schools. However, the League’s writing indicates a belief that many people benefited and became more informed citizens after attending a class. Despite the similarities between the League’s initiatives and educated suffrage strategies, it is important to acknowledge the success the League enjoyed in reaching out to Iowa citizens across the state.

As the world moved into the 1940s, it became clearer that the United States would be at war in Europe once again. Florence Kerr spoke to an LWV of Iowa audience on April 17, 1940:

“I suppose all of us have been thinking about the tragic storm of war that is raging so mercilessly in Europe. The news from each new battlefield arouses our emotions of indignation and pity. War holds us from day to day in a spell of anxiety. And sometimes, between the newspaper headlines and the radio, we find it hard to think of anything else.”<sup>133</sup>

Despite the League’s commitment to international peace, wartime brought new changes to the organization. As Kerr pointed out to the League in 1940, before the US had officially entered the war, “there are (...) other things to think about – other things right here at home we must think

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> League of Women Voters of Iowa, Bulletin No. 4, April 15, 1922, Box 93, Folder: Bulletin of the Iowa LWV; 1922-1944, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

<sup>133</sup> Florence Kerr, “Gearing Our Economic System to the Country’s Needs,” April 17, 1940, Box 10, Folder: Convention Minutes 1927-1945 (Folder 2), Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Archives, Iowa City, IA, 1.

about.”<sup>134</sup> The LWV of Iowa devoted itself to the war effort on the home front, emphasizing how Iowa could help.<sup>135</sup> Through World War II and into the Cold War years, the LWV of Iowa remained committed to providing citizenship education for Iowans, including pre-election candidate meet-and-greets, radio programs, publications, new voter registration, citizenship schools, and sponsorships of other community programs.<sup>136</sup> Their influence waned, however, as volunteers and time became scarce, as Iowa men were drafted and women took on more work both inside and outside the home to make do during wartime. Citizenship schools eventually stopped, put on hold until years after the war. Additionally, the League budget was at an all-time low by 1937, since so many LWV of Iowa presidents had avoided dealing with the dwindling bank account.<sup>137</sup>

One hundred years after the formation of the NLWV and the LWV of Iowa, some groups' access to the vote remains restricted. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965, arguably one of the most influential pieces of voting rights legislation, more people, have been able to exercise the right to vote, but not all.<sup>138</sup> Political scientist Tova Andrea Wang argues that the American political system has become skewed, referring to voting as a privilege rather than a right.<sup>139</sup> Wang argues, “Voting is a right that should be as accessible as possible to all American citizens

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Bernadine Smith, “Iowa League of Women Voters 1941-1943” in “Iowa League of Women Voters Book I, 1919-1940,” Scrapbook, Iowa Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 180.

<sup>136</sup> Ina Payne, “Iowa League of Women Voters in Close Relationship with the National League of Women Voters to Meet Demands in Growth and Finance,” in “Iowa League of Women Voters Book I, 1919-1940,” Scrapbook, Iowa Women's Suffrage Digital Collection, Iowa Women's Archives, Iowa City, IA, 185.

<sup>137</sup> Mrs. Ernest A. Hunt, *History in Brief: Iowa League of Women Voters (1919-1944)*, Box 9: Folder: LWV-IA Reports: State Board, 1938-1957, League of Women Voters of Iowa Records, Iowa Women’s Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA, 2.

<sup>138</sup> Tetrault, “When Women Won the Right to Vote.”

<sup>139</sup> Tova Andrea Wang, *The Politics of Voter Suppression: Defending and Expanding American’s Right to Vote*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 3.

and should not be purposefully made more difficult.”<sup>140</sup> Restricting the right to vote reduces the representative nature of our government; if not all citizens can vote, their voices are not heard. Even today, in 2019, many millions of Americans continue to be disenfranchised by “voter identification laws, registration requirements, felon disenfranchisement, voter purges, and overcrowded polling places.”<sup>141</sup> This is significant because there are measurable ideological differences between those who vote and those who do not, or cannot, vote.<sup>142</sup> Wang notes that “Democratic constituencies are more likely to be nonvoters: 20 percent of people who identify as Democrats say they are not registered to vote, compared with 14 percent of Republicans.”<sup>143</sup> It seems a logical conclusion that if all nonvoters cast their ballots, the outcomes of elections could be different.

Because of loopholes in existing voter laws, political campaigns and elected officials can employ strategies as a means of suppressing the votes of people who might vote for opponents, which both parties have done in the past.<sup>144</sup> Over time, elected officials have adopted “low profile strategies to limit the scope of voting rights enforcement,” according to political scientist Jesse H. Rhodes.<sup>145</sup> Populations most vulnerable to these voter suppression strategies include the elderly, poor, and people of color, who are most likely to rely on government welfare programs and vote Democrat.<sup>146</sup> If these people cannot vote, their voices will not be heard. According to Rhodes, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund has counted “dozens of subtle alterations in election rules” between June 2013 and September 2016 which make it increasingly difficult for

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Jesse H. Rhodes, *Ballot Blocked: The Political Erosion of the Voting Rights Act*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>146</sup> Wang, *The Politics of Voter Suppression*, 6.

“historically disadvantaged communities to vote and yield political influence.”<sup>147</sup> American democracy is not perfect. Political scientist Allan J. Lichtman argues that America’s faults can be traced back to the founder’s failure to enshrine the right to vote in the most pivotal document to our democracy: the US Constitution.<sup>148</sup> According to Lichtman, “among the enumerated rights that the government cannot abridge, the right to vote remained conspicuously absent and remains so to this day.”<sup>149</sup>

Women are closer than ever before to reaching the final rung on Elmer Bushnell Andrew’s illustration, *The Sky is Now Her Limit* (Figure 1 on page six). In 2016, Hilary Clinton made history when she won the Democratic nomination for president, the first woman to do so for either major party. Her historic bid for the presidency has taken women one step closer to breaking the most persistent glass ceiling: The Oval Office. As the 2020 election nears, a diverse group of women have thrown their hats into the ring for the Democratic nomination, including Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Kamala Harris, Representative Tulsi Gabbard, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Senator Amy Klobuchar, and author Marianne Williamson. No Republican women have chosen to challenge incumbent President Donald Trump for the nomination.<sup>150</sup> With the glass ceiling for a major party nomination broken, there is one less “first” to be accomplished.

The successes of the LWV of Iowa undoubtedly helped Iowa women climb towards greater gender equality. Because of the League’s hard work, many bills that aimed to restrict

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<sup>147</sup> Rhodes includes the following on his analysis of changes in electoral rules: “changes in methods of election, mid-decade redistricting, purges in voter rolls, relocation of polling places, reductions in the number of polling places, and so forth.” Rhodes, *Ballot Blocked*, 182.

<sup>148</sup> Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, 2.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Alexander Burns, Matt Flegenheimer, Jasmine C. Lee, Lisa Lerer, and Johnathon Martin, “Who’s Running for President in 2020?” *New York Times*, Updated October 24, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/us/politics/2020-presidential-candidates.html>.

women's autonomy never became law and Iowa women became eligible to run for the state legislature for the first time in Iowa history. While many women's groups, including the LWV of Iowa, did not agree on how women's rights should be expanded, they all knew something needed to be done. The woman's movement did not end with the right to vote; it included much more. Looking back as far as the Declaration of Sentiments, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1848, we can see that women activists have been working towards a multitude of goals for the last two centuries.

Despite the laudable accomplishments of the women's rights movement, there is still work to be done. Today, the fight for gender equality continues on many levels. The gender pay gap clearly illustrates the continued dissonance between the sexes. According to a survey conducted by the American Association of University Women, in 2018, white women made only seventy-nine cents for every dollar a man makes. The gap is even wider for minorities, with Hispanic women making fifty-four cents to the dollar.<sup>151</sup> Women and minorities continue to be underrepresented in high-paying careers. Women find themselves restricted for many reasons, including motherhood responsibilities, occupational sorting, sexual harassment, racism, and disability discrimination. A record 130 women are currently serving in the 116<sup>th</sup> congress, including 105 in the House and 25 in the Senate.<sup>152</sup> Even still, women make up only 23.7% of members of congress.

The Nineteenth Amendment should not be remembered as an endpoint in women's history; it is a point when women activists celebrated their victory then continued their fight. The

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<sup>151</sup> Kevin Miller and Deborah J. Vagins, "The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap: Fall 2018 Edition," (Washington, D.C: American Association of University Women), 6.

<sup>152</sup> CRS Report Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress "Women in Congress: Statistics and Brief Overview," Congressional Research Service, Updated November 13, 2019, 1. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43244.pdf>.

LWV of Iowa is just one example of many organizations across the United States who persisted in the struggle for gender equality after 1920. Organizations across the United States, both large and small, continue to fight for women's rights. As we commemorate the 100 years since the founding of the LWV of Iowa, we can both celebrate their achievements and note the limits on their original vision. Today, the LWV has committed itself to inclusion and diversity for the current and future success of the organization.<sup>153</sup> By understanding past limitations, the League strives to move forward to create a more inclusive democracy.

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<sup>153</sup> League of Women Voters, "About Us," LWV.org, <https://www.lwv.org/about-us>.

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