

Michigan Journal of Gender & Law

Volume 29 | Issue 1

2022

Black Women & Women's Suffrage: Understanding the Perception of the Nineteenth Amendment Through the Pages of the Chicago Defender

Tamar Anna Alexanian
Children's Law Center of California

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjgl>



Part of the [Election Law Commons](#), [Law and Gender Commons](#), [Law and Race Commons](#), and the [Legal History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tamar A. Alexanian, *Black Women & Women's Suffrage: Understanding the Perception of the Nineteenth Amendment Through the Pages of the Chicago Defender*, 29 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 63 (2022).
Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjgl/vol29/iss1/3>

<https://doi.org/10.36641/mjgl.29.1.black>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Journal of Gender & Law by an authorized editor of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact mlaw.repository@umich.edu.

BLACK WOMEN & WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE:
UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEPTION OF THE
NINETEENTH AMENDMENT THROUGH THE
PAGES OF THE *CHICAGO DEFENDER*

*Tamar Anna Alexanian**

INTRODUCTION

Susan B. Anthony once famously stated, “I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work for or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman.”¹ The racism of many early suffragettes has been well documented and discussed;² Black suffragettes and other suffragettes of color³ were, at best, relegated to the margins of the movement⁴ and, at

* Skadden Fellow, Children’s Law Center of California. For their support and suggestions, I am grateful to Professors Ellen Katz and Emily Prifogle, Julia Adams, Anna Belkin, Hannah Bredar, Clara Butler, Brendan Flynn, Becca Garfinkel, Jonathan Kagan-Kans, and Meredith Kahn. Thank you also to the editors of the Michigan Journal of Gender & Law for the energy and guidance that they brought to this Article. And, above all, thank you to the work of suffragists and community organizers who came before us.

1. ELEANOR FLEXNER, CENTURY OF STRUGGLE: THE WOMEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE U.S. 144 (photo. rept. 1972) (1959).
2. See, e.g., FAYE E. DUDDEN, FIGHTING CHANCE: THE STRUGGLE OVER WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND BLACK SUFFRAGE IN RECONSTRUCTION AMERICA 3 (2011); LOUISE MICHELE NEWMAN, WHITE WOMEN’S RIGHTS: THE RACIAL ORIGINS OF FEMINISM IN THE UNITED STATES 60-72 (1999); ANGELA Y. DAVIS, WOMEN, RACE & CLASS 61-73 (1981); see generally Jen McDanel, *White Suffragist Dis/Entitlement: The Revolution and the Rhetoric of Racism*, 30 LEGACY 243 (2013) (discussing racism in Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s newspaper, *Revolution*).
3. See generally CATHLEEN D. CAHILL, RECASTING THE VOTE: HOW WOMEN OF COLOR TRANSFORMED THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT (2020) (discussing the often-overlooked stories and importance of Chinese, African American, Native, and Hispanic women in the suffrage movement).
4. See MARTHA S. JONES, VANGUARD: HOW BLACK WOMEN BROKE BARRIERS, WON THE VOTE, AND INSISTED ON EQUALITY FOR ALL 16 (2020) (“These efforts correct a record made more than a century ago by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted Harper, who dubbed themselves *the* historians of the early women’s movement. Between 1881 and 1922, they published the six-volume, fifty-seven-hundred-page *History of Woman Suffrage*. But they told only one part of the story and in that relegated Black women to the margins. Later historians relied upon these same volumes, producing new studies that, regretfully, repeated old omissions.”) [hereinafter JONES, VANGUARD].

worst, scorned and turned away by white suffragettes.⁵ Moreover, part of white suffragettes' strategy for passage of the Nineteenth Amendment was based on racist appeals to white men; white suffragettes claimed that passage of the Nineteenth Amendment would help keep white voters in the majority and, ultimately, would help uphold white supremacy.⁶ Against this backdrop, Black women⁷—and much of the Black community more generally—still supported and fought for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.⁸

Recent legal and historical scholars have been dedicated to studying the often-overlooked and instrumental role that Black women played in the Suffrage Movement and Black enfranchisement.⁹ This Article seeks to look at the coverage by Black—largely male—journalists at the *Chicago Defender* in the ten years preceding and proceeding the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.¹⁰ In doing so, this Article hopes to better understand the ways that some Black community members understood and viewed the Nineteenth Amendment and how that perception changed. Although in hindsight we understand that the Nineteenth Amendment was not the liberating feat for Black women that it was for white women, what does Black journalistic coverage in the period immediately before and after its passage tell us about the perception of the Nineteenth Amendment and Black women's enfranchisement at the time?

The methodology of this research differs from those used in other historical research regarding Black women's suffrage. Many historians have focused on understanding Black women's suffrage through studying

5. ROSALYN TERBORG-PENN, *AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE VOTE, 1850-1920*, 10 (1998); *see id.*

6. *See* Sarah Gordon, *White Supremacy and the Suffrage Movement*, WOMEN AT THE CENTER (Aug. 7, 2020), [<https://perma.cc/RVU8-QEMJ>].

7. *See* Martha S. Jones, *What the 19th Amendment Meant for Black Women*, POLITICO (Aug. 26, 2020, 4:30 AM), [<https://perma.cc/ER7C-C36D>] [hereinafter Jones, *What the 19th Amendment Meant*].

8. *See generally* ROSALYN TERBORG-PENN, *AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE VOTE, 1850-1920* (1998).

9. *See generally* JONES, *VANGUARD*, *supra* note 4; CAHILL, *supra* note 3.

10. According to journalist Ethan Michaeli, "No newspaper played a greater role in shaping American politics and demographics during the 20th century." Monica Davey & John Eligon, The Chicago Defender, *Legendary Black Newspaper, Prints Last Copy*, N.Y. TIMES (July 9, 2019), [<https://perma.cc/J8V8-HUXT>]. For in-depth information about the influence of the *Defender* across the nation, *see generally* ETHAN MICHAELI, *THE DEFENDER: HOW THE LEGENDARY BLACK NEWSPAPER CHANGED AMERICA FROM THE AGE OF THE PULLMAN PORTERS TO THE AGE OF OBAMA* (2016).

individual women's stories:¹¹ In her groundbreaking and well-received book *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All*, legal historian Martha Jones says that “by recounting the lives of some of the many Black women who engaged in political fights, the picture of a whole comes into view.”¹² These histories rely on a large variety of historical documents left behind by, and about, individual suffragists and events to gain an understanding of “the picture of a whole.”¹³ This Article takes a different approach: it looks deeply at only one set of primary documents—articles printed in the *Chicago Defender*—to better understand the changes and patterns in community perception revealed through journalistic coverage. This is not counter to the important work of these other historians, who have helped recover the overlooked stories of suffragists of color. Instead, this Article seeks to further our understanding of these stories through a different medium.

In Part I, this Article considers the historical legal framework surrounding Black women's suffrage, especially looking at the intersection of the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments and the subsequent case law. This history sets forth the legal landscape in which Black women's suffrage efforts took place and, of particular interest to this Article, in which the *Chicago Defender* was being published.

In Part II, this article discusses the *Chicago Defender's* coverage, readers, and influence. Appreciating the *Defender's* carefully curated sense of self is important to understanding both its writers and its readers. Eventually boasting itself to be “The Mouthpiece of 14 Million People,”¹⁴ the *Defender* cultivated a reputation for publishing hard-hitting

11. See CAHILL, *supra* note 3, at 4 (focusing on the stories of six women of color); JONES, VANGUARD *supra* note 4, at 14 (“*Vanguard* gathers up Black women's stories in the spirit of Alice Walker's 1983 essay collection, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. There, Walker uncovered, waded through, and immersed herself in the lives of the women who came before her.”).

12. JONES, VANGUARD, *supra* note 4, at 16.

13. Historians have used documents from newspapers, court manuscripts, tracts, books, memoirs, images, scrapbooks, and letters to construct a holistic and rounded historical understanding of the movement. See JONES, *supra* note 4, at 14; CAHILL, *supra* note 3, at 283-327.

14. *Newspapers: The Chicago Defender*, *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords*, PBS, [https://perma.cc/CK6D-YYB5] (last visited Feb. 6, 2022) [hereinafter *Newspapers: The Chicago Defender*]. The Black American population was likely around 14 million by 1940. *1.2 Million Blacks Not Counted in 1940 Census, Records Reveal*, DENVER POST (May 20, 2012), https://www.denverpost.com/2012/05/20/1-2-million-blacks-not-counted-in-1940-census-records-reveal/.

articles and having a “racially high-minded purpose.”¹⁵ The Black community, like any other community, is not a monolith, and the patterns and understandings that this Article extrapolates from the pages of the *Chicago Defender* cannot speak for all Black people, even when the newspaper itself claims to be the mouthpiece for all Black Americans.¹⁶ Still, the *Chicago Defender* was the most-read Black newspaper across the country, and its historical significance is undebated.¹⁷ Therefore, the articles published by the *Defender* necessarily expose well-received ideas circulating amongst Black communities during the time; at the very least, published articles indicate that people were thinking or talking about particular topics in particular ways while lack of publication implies, if not outright indicates, the opposite. The *Defender*’s massive readership and longevity could only exist if the newspaper was believed to be reputable and if the messages on its pages were valued by its readers.¹⁸ Thus, this historical contextualization reveals the scope and magnitude of the assertions that come from the articles discussed in Part III.

In Part III, this Article analyzes articles published by the *Chicago Defender* between 1910 and 1930. In particular, this Article tracks the newspaper’s shifting use of mockery, coverage of Black women’s organizing efforts, and discussion of women’s suffrage during this time. While the pages of the *Defender* between 1910 and 1914 often used mockery or humor to discuss women’s suffrage and suffragettes, this derisive tone largely vanished from the *Defender*’s pages by 1914, replaced by praise for women’s suffrage and suffragettes and, eventually, by criticism for those who did not believe in women’s suffrage. The articles reveal a similar trend regarding women’s organizing efforts. Although the articles published beginning in 1910 announce debates regarding the issue of women’s suffrage, by the mid-1910s, women’s suffrage was rarely “debated,” replaced instead by articles and notices about lectures and citizenship classes to prepare the female citizenry for the vote. By 1919, coverage

15. ROI OTTLEY, *THE LONELY WARRIOR: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ROBERT S. ABBOTT* 98 (1955).

16. See *Newspapers: The Chicago Defender*, *supra* note 14.

17. Alan D. DeSantis, *A Forgotten Leader: Robert S. Abbott and the Chicago Defender from 1910-1920*, 23 *JOURNALISM HIST.* 63, 65 (1997); see, e.g., MICHAELI, *supra* note 10.

18. Just four years after its founding, the *Defender* was boasting a readership larger than Chicago’s other black papers combined. *Id.* at 27. Further, even though the newspaper went completely digital in 2019, it continues to reach a large audience and has never stopped publishing since it began in 1905. See Brigit Katz, *The Chicago Defender, an Iconic Black Newspaper, to Release Its Last Print Issue*, *SMITHSONIAN MAG.* (July 9, 2019), [<https://perma.cc/P4Q4-LMKV>].

of these meetings sharply declined, replaced almost completely with concern over and political activism against Jim Crow laws. Taken together, these shifts reveal the changing atmosphere and sentiments of Black men, who made up a large part of the journalists and readers of the *Defender*. While much of the current research regarding Black women's suffrage concerns Black women's perceptions and oft-forgotten work, this Article discusses Black men's changing perception of women's suffrage. It reveals Black men's early sexism, then support, and finally silence as the fight against Jim Crow absorbed the Black male citizenry and consciousness.

Further, the Article's use of this 20-year period—between 1910 and 1930—is important. The *Defender* went through a significant shift in 1910, when the newspaper became a “clearly focused organ for racial advancement.”¹⁹ And between 1910 and 1920, the *Defender* defined and ushered in a new era of Black journalism.²⁰ In attempting to extrapolate shared perceptions through articles in the *Defender*, those articles published after the newspaper gained its reputation for racial advancement are most relevant to this research. They also allow for more accurate period comparisons, since the newspaper maintained this reputation throughout the studied period. In doing this sort of analysis, this Article hopes to add to the current research so we better understand how the Black community thought about the Nineteenth Amendment and Black women's suffrage at that time.

I. HISTORICAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUFFRAGE

In its original form, the U.S. Constitution²¹ did not guarantee the right to vote.²² An individual's right to vote in a federal election was, therefore, dependent on their state granting them the right to do so.²³

19. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 65.

20. *Id.* at 63.

21. The only mentions of voting in the Constitution appear in Article I, Section 2, Clause 1 (“The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States, and the Electors in each State shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature”) and Article I, Section 4 (“Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of choosing Senators”).

22. The U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed this in *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 U.S. 542, 555 (1875) (“The Constitution of the United States has not conferred the right of suffrage upon any one . . .”).

23. See Joshua A. Douglas, *The Right to Vote Under State Constitutions*, 67 VAND. L. REV. 89, 93-94 (2014); *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162, 172 (1874) (“When the Federal Constitution was adopted, all the States, with the exception of Rhode Island and Connecticut, had constitutions of their own. These two continued to act under

Historically, every state has limited the right to vote to a subset of their population.²⁴ Although voter disenfranchisement remains a nationwide issue,²⁵ the U.S. has been expanding the franchise since the Civil War.²⁶ This Article will focus primarily on Black enfranchisement and women's enfranchisement through the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments, and the ways that this country historically continued to disenfranchise Black and women voters after the passage of these amendments.

A. *Black Enfranchisement*

Passed in 1868 and 1870 respectively, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments extended rights previously denied to Black men.²⁷ The Fifteenth Amendment explicitly addressed the voting rights of Black Americans, stating, "The right . . . to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."²⁸ During Reconstruction and a handful of years

their charters from the Crown. Upon an examination of those constitutions we find that in no State were all citizens permitted to vote. Each State determined for itself who should have that power.").

24. The most common limitations involved property ownership, length of residency, age, race, and sex. See JUSTIN MOELLER & RONALD F. KING, *REMOVAL OF THE PROPERTY QUALIFICATION FOR VOTING IN THE UNITED STATES: STRATEGY AND SUFFRAGE 1* (2019) (regarding the history of property qualifications for voting); Eugene D. Mazo, *Residency and Democracy: Durational Residency Requirements from the Framers to the Present*, 43 FLA. ST. U. L. REV. 611, 614-31 (2016) (regarding the history of residency requirements in America); WENDELL W. CULTICE, *YOUTH'S BATTLE FOR THE BALLOT: A HISTORY OF VOTING AGE IN AMERICA 2-18* (Contributions in Pol. Sci. Ser. No. 291, 1992) (regarding the history of voting restrictions by age); CORRINE M. MCCONNAUGHY, *THE POLITICS OF SUFFRAGE EXTENSION IN THE AMERICAN STATES: PARTY, RACE, AND THE PURSUIT OF WOMEN'S VOTING RIGHTS 3-4* (2004) (regarding the history of racial restrictions by states); Sandra Day O'Connor, *The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, 49 VAND. L. REV. 657, 662-65 (1996) (regarding the history of women's suffrage on the state level). Some limitations, such as felony disenfranchisement, continue to exist today. See KATHERINE IRENE PETTUS, *FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT IN AMERICA: HISTORICAL ORIGINS, INSTITUTIONAL RACISM, AND MODERN CONSEQUENCES 1-4* (LFB Scholarly Publishing 2005) (2004).
25. See Carrie Levine, Pratheek Rebal, & Matt Vasilogambros, *New Data Tracks Polling Place Locations for 37 States*, Article in *Barriers to the Ballot Box*, THE CTR. FOR PUB. INTEGRITY (DEC. 13, 2021), [<https://perma.cc/7ARJ-8H5S>].
26. SAMUEL ISSACHAROFF, PAMELA S. KARLAN, RICHARD H. PILDES, & NATHAN PERSILY, *THE LAW OF DEMOCRACY: LEGAL STRUCTURE OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS 16* (Foundation Press 5th ed. 2016) [hereinafter ISSACHAROFF et al.].
27. U.S. CONST. amend. XIV; U.S. CONST. amend. XV.
28. U.S. CONST. amend. XV, § 1.

thereafter, Black male voter turnout was high across the country.²⁹ For example, in nearly every Southern state, a majority of adult Black males voted in the 1880 presidential election.³⁰ However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly all Black voters had been stripped from the voting rolls in the South.³¹ Many Southern states used a variety of tactics to accomplish this, including through force³² and the use of restrictive voting qualifications.³³

Congress's unwillingness to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments played an important role in the decline of Black enfranchisement during this time. For example, Congress refused to investigate allegations of Black exclusion from Alabama's 1894 Senate election.³⁴ Congress also refused to enforce Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which provided for a reduction in the size of a state's House delegation if the state discriminated in voting.³⁵ And while Congress was failing to protect Black voters, some Southern congressmen made efforts to outright repeal the Fifteenth Amendment.³⁶

The government's failure to protect the rights of Black voters went beyond the failures of Congress: the Supreme Court also played a pivotal role in undercutting Black enfranchisement.

29. ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26 at 43; see Daniel B. Jones, Werner Troesken, & Randall Walsh, *Political Participation in a Violent Society: The Impact of Lynching on Voter Turnout in the Post-Reconstruction South*, 129 J. DEV. ECON. 29, 34-35 (2017) [hereinafter Daniel B. Jones]; see also HANES WALTON JR., SHERMAN C. PUCKETT, & DONALD R. DESKINS JR., *THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ELECTORATE: A STATISTICAL HISTORY* (2012).

30. J. Morgan Kousser, *THE SHAPING OF SOUTHERN POLITICS: SUFFRAGE RESTRICTIONS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ONE-PARTY SOUTH, 1880-1910*, 15 (1974).

31. See Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., *Principles and Prejudice: The Supreme Court and Race in the Progressive Era Part 3: Black Disenfranchisement from the KKK to the Grandfather Clause*, 82 COLUM. L. REV. 835, 847 (1982).

32. See *id.* ("Racial lynching, mob violence, terrorism by white vigilante groups, cheered on by the press and Southern demagogues vying with each other in their rhetoric of race chauvinism, created a savage state of racial intimidation by the turn of the century.").

33. See *id.* at 842; see generally PAUL LEWINSON, *RACE, CLASS, AND PARTY* (1932) (detailing the history of Black voter disenfranchisement from the late 19th through the early 20th centuries).

34. S. REP. NO. 447 (1896); S. REP. NO. 447, Part 2 (1896).

35. ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26, at 43.

36. See Kimberly A. Hamlin, *How Racism Almost Killed Women's Right to Vote*, WASH. POST (June 4, 2019), [<http://perma.cc/M7ZG-53E5>]; JONES, *VANGUARD*, *supra* note 4, at 150; *Senator Vardaman's Amendment Loses*, Chi. Def., Mar. 21, 1914, at 2.

Fueled by the 1872 election for Louisiana's governor, antagonism between Southern Democrats and the federal government—led by Republicans—erupted, most notably in the Colfax Massacre of 1873.³⁷ When President Grant sent federal troops to support the Republican candidate, white Southerners formed the “White League,” a heavily-armed insurgency similar to the Ku Klux Klan.³⁸ Fearful that the White League would seize control of the regional government, a Black militia took control of the local courthouse.³⁹ Shortly thereafter, a mob of white men surrounded the courthouse.⁴⁰ Even after the Black militia surrendered, the white rebels murdered many of the Black men, ultimately killing between 60 and 150 Black individuals.⁴¹ While the Louisiana courts charged nine white men with violating the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871,⁴² the Supreme Court dismissed all indictments.⁴³ The Court sent a clear message: they would only protect Black voters against state sponsored disenfranchisement efforts.⁴⁴

Then, in 1875, the Supreme Court struck down sections of the 1870 Enforcement Act, claiming that they were beyond congressional power.⁴⁵ Simultaneously, the Court upheld a variety of state efforts to deny other aspects of citizenship to Black men.⁴⁶

Finally, in 1903, the Supreme Court was asked to decide whether blatant state disenfranchisement of Black Americans was constitutional under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. In *Giles v. Harris*, the Court refused to provide relief to Jackson W. Giles, a Black man whose

37. Danny Lewis, *The 1873 Colfax Massacre Crippled the Reconstruction Era*, SMITHSONIAN MAG. (Apr. 13, 2016), [<http://perma.cc/V2EG-2H2Z>]. For more information about the Colfax Massacre, see generally CHARLES LANE, *THE DAY FREEDOM DIED: THE COLFAX MASSACRE, THE SUPREME COURT, AND THE BETRAYAL OF RECONSTRUCTION* (2008); LEEANNA KEITH, *THE COLFAX MASSACRE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF BLACK POWER, WHITE TERROR, AND THE DEATH OF RECONSTRUCTION* (2008).

38. Lewis, *supra* note 37.

39. Bill Decker, *Colfax Riot or Massacre*, THE ADVOC. (Mar. 7, 2013, 9:32 AM), [<https://perma.cc/F7BQ-82QN>].

40. *Id.*

41. Lewis, *supra* note 37. Only three white men were killed. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 U.S. 542 (1875).

44. See *United States v. Harris*, 106 U.S. 629 (1883) (holding that the Fourteenth Amendment applies only to state action, not individual action that deprives one of equal protection and due process under the law).

45. *United States v. Reese*, 92 U.S. 214 (1875).

46. See, e.g., *Williams v. Mississippi*, 170 U.S. 213 (1898) (upholding state efforts to deny Black men the right to participate on juries).

voting registration was denied in his home state of Alabama.⁴⁷ Ultimately, this case showed Americans that the Supreme Court would not intervene in the disenfranchisement of Black Americans.

Southern states began utilizing a wide variety of techniques to disenfranchise Black voters, including poll taxes,⁴⁸ grandfather clauses,⁴⁹ literacy tests,⁵⁰ and white primaries.⁵¹ In fact, by 1904, every ex-Confederate state had adopted some version of a poll tax.⁵² Every state in the Deep South⁵³ adopted a new state constitution between 1890 and 1908 and every newly-adopted constitution included at least one of these disenfranchising methods.⁵⁴ White Southerners also did not shy away from using force and violence to scare Black voters from the polls.⁵⁵ These various disenfranchisement efforts were widely successful, and this ad hoc pattern continued into the 1940s and beyond.⁵⁶

B. *Women's Suffrage*

Both feminist and legal scholars often cite the 1848 Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York as the beginning of the women's rights movement.⁵⁷ At first, the women's movement was hopeful that the

47. *Giles v. Harris*, 189 U.S. 475 (1903).

48. Schmidt, *supra* note 31, at 845.

49. *Id.* at 836; ALEXANDER KEYSSAR, *THE RIGHT TO VOTE: THE CONTESTED HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES* 112 (rev. ed. 2009).

50. KEYSSAR, *supra* note 49, at 111-12; Schmidt, *supra* note 31, at 842.

51. White primaries were primary elections (largely in the Southern states) where only white voters were permitted to participate. See Keyssar, *supra* note 49, at 247; Armand Derfner, *Racial Discrimination and the Right to Vote*, 26 VAND. L. REV. 523, 524 (1973); R. VOLNEY RISER, *DEFYING DISFRANCHISEMENT: BLACK VOTING RIGHTS ACTIVISM IN THE JIM CROW SOUTH, 1890-1908* (2010).

52. ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26, at 74.

53. These states included Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. See MICHAEL PERMAN, *STRUGGLE FOR MASTERY: DISFRANCHISEMENT IN THE SOUTH, 1888-1908* (2001).

54. ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26, at 55.

55. See Daniel B. Jones, *supra* note 29, at 37.

56. Derfner, *supra* note 51, at 524.

57. See Carolyn S. Bratt, *Introduction to the Sesquicentennial of the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: American Women's Unfinished Quest for Legal, Economic, Political, and Social Equality*, 84 KY. L.J. 715, 715 (1995). The 1848 Convention in Seneca Falls is considered the beginning of First Wave Feminism, which is the movement discussed throughout this Article. For information regarding the Waves, see RORY COOKE DICKER, *A HISTORY OF U.S. FEMINISMS* (2008). For a critical analysis of how the 1848 Women's Rights Convention became mythologized in history, see LISA TETRAULT, *THE MYTH OF SENECA FALLS: MEMORY AND THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT, 1848-1898* (2014).

Fourteenth Amendment would enfranchise them.⁵⁸ However, the writers of the Fourteenth Amendment made sure to include the word “male” in Section 2 of the Amendment, a devastating blow to the suffragists.⁵⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a prominent white suffragist, even stated, “If that word ‘male’ be inserted, it will take us a century at least to get it out.”⁶⁰ And, generally speaking, Stanton’s sentiment was correct: the addition of the word “male” made it difficult for women to secure the right to vote.⁶¹

Western territories were the first to extend the franchise to women.⁶² After the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868 (with the word “male” included in Section 2), suffragists hoped that Congress would use its Section 5 powers to eliminate gender from state voting laws.⁶³ Congress denied direct responsibility: they told suffragists to take the matter to the courts.⁶⁴

In 1874, the Supreme Court ruled the Fourteenth Amendment did not extend the right to vote to women.⁶⁵ Virginia Minor, a U.S. citizen

58. Nina Morais, Note, *Sex Discrimination and the Fourteenth Amendment: Lost History*, 97 YALE L.J. 1153, 1159 (1988).

59. *See id.*

60. SUSAN WARE, WHY THEY MARCHED: UNTOLD STORIES OF THE WOMEN WHO FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE 20 (2019).

61. *See* *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162, 178 (1874). Not only was Virginia Minor’s claim rejected unanimously by the Supreme Court, but popular opinion also considered Minor’s request for relief frivolous. An editorial excerpt from *The Nation* wrote, “The opinion, delivered by the Chief-Justice, is of course conclusive, and what will probably strike most lawyers about it, is wonder that the point should ever have been raised. Every one in the country knows that the Fourteenth Amendment was not adopted for the purpose of giving women the right to vote, and the argument made to support the claim is only a shade less puerile than that which is made by some women’s-rights agitators from the Fifteenth Amendment abolishing ‘slavery and involuntary servitude.’ Considering the crowded condition of the Supreme Court docket, and the vast number of really important cases which are delayed by such suits as this, it seems as if a more peremptory way of dealing with them would be better, and as if giving up precious time to the consideration of such arguments as we have just referred to might possibly lay the Court open to the charge of a ‘delay of justice’ provided against by a much older bill of rights than the Fourteenth of Fifteenth Amendment.” *Image 71 of Blackwell Family Papers: Lucy Stone Papers, 1759-1960; Miscellany; Notebooks; 1 of 2*, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, [https://perma.cc/PNY5-GKZ8].

62. Wyoming extended the franchise to women in 1869 followed by Utah in 1870, Washington in 1883, and Colorado in 1893. *See* O’Connor, *supra* note 24, at 662-63; *see generally* REBECCA MEAD, HOW THE VOTE WAS WON: WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES, 1868-1914 (2004).

63. Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment broadly authorizes Congress to advance the protections of due process, equal protection, and the privileges and immunities of citizenship. *See* ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26, at 23.

64. *See id.*

65. *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162, 178 (1874).

from the state of Missouri and a follower of Susan B. Anthony, brought a case against Reese Happersett, the registrar who rejected her application to register to vote.⁶⁶ At that time, Missouri did not allow women to vote.⁶⁷ It was widely believed that women lacked the capacity to vote.⁶⁸ Still, Virginia Minor argued that voting was a privilege and immunity of citizenship and, as a citizen of the United States and Missouri, she was wrongly denied her right to vote.⁶⁹

Unfortunately, the Court did not agree.⁷⁰ Although it agreed that women were clearly citizens, the Court noted that women had been citizens long before the Fourteenth Amendment was passed.⁷¹ Since women were not eligible to vote when the Constitution was enacted, the Privileges and Immunities Clause, it held, was not meant to include the right to vote. The Court also noted that Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment clearly contemplated that states would deny suffrage to some people⁷²; rather than prohibiting disenfranchisement, the Amendment merely enacted a penalty when states did so.⁷³ Unanimously, the Supreme Court upheld Missouri's voting legislation.⁷⁴

Although women won voting rights in some states, there was no national movement on the issue until 1918, when Congress approved the Nineteenth Amendment and sent it to the states for ratification.⁷⁵ The Amendment was rejected by some Southern states but received approval in the West, Northeast, and Midwest.⁷⁶ It also received approval in Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.⁷⁷ The Nineteenth Amendment was enacted on August 18, 1920 and overturned *Minor v.*

66. *Minor*, 88 U.S. at 178.

67. In order to file her lawsuit, Virginia Minor was required by Missouri law to get her husband's signature. See ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26, at 23.

68. Some other widely-held beliefs included: women were childlike and were therefore incapable of voting; allowing women to vote was a threat to family cohesion and marriage; women should only be involved in domestic affairs; and women's suffrage was a threat to masculinity. See Marina Koren, *Why Men Thought Women Weren't Made to Vote*, ATLANTIC (July 11, 2019), [<https://perma.cc/XMQ7-DSG9>]; *Says Modes Hurt Suffrage*, N.Y. TIMES (July 28, 1913), at 1.

69. *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162, 165 (1874).

70. *Minor*, 88 U.S. at 171.

71. *Minor*, 88 U.S. at 170.

72. *Minor*, 88 U.S. at 174.

73. This penalty only punished denying voting rights to men; there was no penalty for denying voting rights to women. *Minor*, 88 U.S. at 174-75.

74. *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162, 178 (1874).

75. U.S. CONST. amend. XIX.

76. ISSACHAROFF et al., *supra* note 26, at 27.

77. *Id.*

Happersett.⁷⁸ Since its passage, there has been “virtually no litigation” generated by the Nineteenth Amendment.⁷⁹

C. *Where Did That Leave Black Women?*

Feminist scholars often cite the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment as the end of the First Wave of the Women’s Rights Movement, and the Second Wave did not begin until the 1960s.⁸⁰ So, where did that leave Black women?

Not a single Black woman was in attendance at the Seneca Falls Convention.⁸¹ Unfortunately, this foreshadowed the deep-seated racial fissures that would plague the movement.⁸² When Black men became enfranchised, white suffragettes were enraged. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Standard*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote:

The representative women of the nation have done their uttermost for the last thirty years to secure freedom for the negro, and as long as he was lowest in the scale of being, we were willing to press *his* claims; but now, as the celestial gate to civil rights is slowly moving on its hinges, it becomes a serious question whether we had better stand aside and see ‘Sambo’ walk into the kingdom first . . . In fact, it is better to be the slave of an educated white man, than of a degraded, ignorant black one.⁸³

Susan B. Anthony apparently felt similarly, stating, “I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work for or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman.”⁸⁴ These women, the leaders of the movement,⁸⁵ turned towards racism, classism, and elitism in the hopes of securing the vote for women, either forgetting or ignoring all the women

78. *Id.* at 26.

79. *Id.* at 28.

80. See, e.g., DICKER, *supra* note 57, at 6.

81. DAVIS, *supra* note 2, at 57 (“[T]here was not a single Black woman in attendance. Nor did the convention’s documents make even a passing reference to Black women.”).

82. Willie J. Epps, Jr. & Jonathan M. Warren, *Sheroes: The Struggle of Black Suffragists*, 59 *Judges’ J.* 10, 10 (Summer 2020).

83. 2 *HISTORY OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE* 94-95 (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, & Matilda Joslyn Gage eds., 1887).

84. FLEXNER, *supra* note 1, at 144.

85. See JONES, *VANGUARD*, *supra* note 4, at 16 (“ . . . Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton . . . who dubbed themselves *the* historians of the early women’s movement.”).

they were leaving behind. These suffragettes claimed that women's suffrage was justified on the grounds that white, native-born women could help secure the political dominance of "Americans" against those vying for their rights.⁸⁶ When the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, Black women's fight was not over.⁸⁷

II. THE FAR-REACHING INFLUENCE OF THE *CHICAGO DEFENDER*

"The Defender recorded our expansion of democracy—the degree to which African Americans were locked out of the process. The Defender recorded the injustice and then became part of the process of opening up opportunity and making people more aware of the civil rights issues that were at stake . . . The Defender represents the best of American journalism, which has always had a function not just of reporting, but also of advocacy and having a point of view." —Senator Barack Obama, PBS Interview 2005⁸⁸

A. *What Was the Chicago Defender Covering?*

The first issue of the *Chicago Defender* came out on May 5, 1905.⁸⁹ Although it would become known for stories about racial injustice, segregation, and white-on-black crime, it started out by focusing primarily on local gossip and special interest stories.⁹⁰ Early on, the paper reported on every church group, fraternal organization, and business, often referencing individuals by name to stick with the maxim "Names Make News."⁹¹ At this time, the *Defender* was very much a local newspaper.

86. White suffragists did not limit themselves to putting down Black men and women. They also targeted Chinese immigrants, uneducated individuals, and criminals. Much of the rhetoric used then reflects white supremacist language and fear.

87. Jones, *What the 19th Amendment Meant*, *supra* note 7; Olivia B. Waxman, 'It's a Struggle They Will Wage Alone.' *How Black Women Won the Right to Vote*, TIME, [https://perma.cc/GT8Y-JH6T].

88. MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at xviii.

89. For the first issue, Abbott only printed 300 copies. Each copy was handbill size and only four pages long. See DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 64.

90. *Id.*

91. *Id.*

Things began to change when the *Defender* published an exposé on muckraking crusades in 1909.⁹² The newspaper's founder, Robert S. Abbott, quickly realized that the key to the *Defender's* success was reporting on stories that underscored a "racially high-minded purpose."⁹³ By doing so, he hoped to uplift his readership and, in turn, his race.⁹⁴ In 1910, due in part to changes with the newspaper staff, the *Defender* became a "clearly focused organ for racial advancement."⁹⁵ Between 1910 and 1920, the *Defender* defined and ushered in a new era of Black journalism.⁹⁶

The *Defender* also set itself apart by publishing material and using language that no other Black newspaper dared to publish or use. This language "represented unapologetic [B]lack pride, dignity, and assertiveness."⁹⁷ The *Defender* used the word "Race" to denote Black people; for example, "The Race Needs a Real Leader" and "Emmett Jay Scott is found to be a great asset to the Race."⁹⁸ While other dailies often placed "colored" in parentheses after the names of Black Americans, the *Defender* used parentheses only to indicate when someone was white.⁹⁹ Together, this messaging told Black Americans that the *Chicago Defender* was a publication by and for them, a place where they could find news about their communities that was often ignored or overlooked by white-owned daily newspapers.

92. OTTLEY, *supra* note 15, at 98; see *Mothers Taking Innocent Daughters to Houses of Ill Fame: To Play Piano*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 26, 1910, at 1.

93. OTTLEY, *supra* note 15, at 1-16.

94. *Id.* at 9.

95. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 65.

96. *Id.* at 63.

97. JAMES R. GROSSMAN, *LAND OF HOPE: CHICAGO, BLACK SOUTHERNERS, AND THE GREAT MIGRATION* 75 (1989).

98. *The Race Needs a Real Leader*, CHI. DEF., Jan. 9, 1915, at 8; Ralph W. Tyler, *The Present Crisis Produced Real Man: Emmett Jay Scott Is Found to Be a Great Asset to the Race*, CHI. DEF., Jan. 19, 1918, at 10; see also *Appeal to Chicago Professional Men That Are Prostituting the Race*, CHI. DEF., Jul. 29, 1911, at 7; *Enterprise of the Race Press*, CHI. DEF., Dec. 9, 1911, at 3; *Praise for the Gallant Soldiers: Surgeon-General Says Members of the Race in the Army Are Seldom Sick*, CHI. DEF., Nov. 9, 1912, at 1. The Chicago Defender archives indicate that this phrase—"the Race"—was used in over 33,000 articles.

99. See *Personals*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 28, 1911, at 3 ("Dr. and Mrs. Stone (white)"); *Convict White Soldier on Cowardice Charge*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 30, 1919, at 1 ("Samuel H Stone (white)"); *Asks Washington to Vote Down Suffrage*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 27, 1920, at 20 ("Mary G. Kilbreth (white)").

B. *The Readers & Influence of the Chicago Defender*

The *Defender* struggled to build a readership in its early years.¹⁰⁰ Abbott solicited subscriptions at churches, city pool halls, barbershops, bars, cabarets, and restaurants; much to the amusement and mockery of the three other Black newspapers in Chicago,¹⁰¹ he even solicited door to door in his neighborhood.¹⁰² Unlike many of the other newspapers at the time, Abbott did not have his own resources to subsidize the *Defender* and, instead, depended entirely on the support of the community.¹⁰³ Subscribers made up the newspaper's largest income stream, which left the *Defender* "beholden to the whole community, rather than one family, business concern, political party, or interest group . . ."¹⁰⁴ This also meant that the pages of the *Defender* necessarily had to be filled with topics of interest and widely-supported opinions in order to maintain and gain readership.

The *Defender* did not have its first regular newsstand sales until 1912.¹⁰⁵ But even before the newspaper hit the regular newsstand, the *Defender* boasted a readership of twenty-five thousand, reaching approximately one out of ten Black Chicagoans.¹⁰⁶ Shortly thereafter, the *Defender* became a nation-wide must-read,¹⁰⁷ and Pullman Porters played an integral role.¹⁰⁸ Since the majority of Black folks continued living in the South,¹⁰⁹ the *Defender's* continued success and self-sufficiency depended, in part, on tapping into readers there. The porters were in regular contact with the Black communities in the South; their knowledge of

100. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 64.

101. *Id.*; Robert S. Abbott, *Defender Had No Easy Time in Its Youth*, CHI. DEF., June 7, 1930, at 22.

102. MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 24.

103. *Id.* at 21.

104. *Id.*

105. *See* DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 64.

106. Abbott calculated this figure by multiplying the actual number of papers sold (between four thousand and six thousand) by the number of times he expected the paper was passed from one person to another (a common way to share news at the time). These numbers indicate that the *Defender* had a larger readership than all of the city's other Black newspapers, combined. *See* MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 27.

107. Copies of the *Defender* were even being sold in London, Monrovia, Liberia, and the Philippines. *Id.* at 50.

108. *See Railroad Men Great Help to Chicago Defender*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 13, 1915, at 2.

109. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Long-Lasting Legacy of the Great Migration*, SMITHSONIAN MAG., [<https://perma.cc/X2D8-F7M4>].

these communities—both in the big cities and in small rural towns¹¹⁰—allowed the *Defender* to reach these readers.¹¹¹ Still, authorities in the South viewed the *Defender* as a “radical” and “dangerous” publication and sometimes tried to seize the newspaper.¹¹² It was not uncommon for the newspaper to be banned from the newsstands completely.¹¹³ Those brave enough to publicly read or distribute the *Defender* in the 1920s were often harassed or threatened with death.¹¹⁴ Black newspapers in the South did not dare publish the radical things that were written in the *Chicago Defender*,¹¹⁵ if they did, they likely would have been killed or run out of town.¹¹⁶ But the *Defender* dared to say such things, and Black communities in the South began to view the *Chicago Defender* as a newspaper they could depend on and trust.¹¹⁷ By the 1920s, two-thirds of the *Defender’s* readers were in the Deep South.¹¹⁸ The combination of diligent workers, loyal patrons, politically-active railroad porters, and dedicated traveling entertainers allowed the *Defender* to deeply penetrate the South and, ultimately, communities across the country.¹¹⁹

By the 1920s, the *Defender* boasted a circulation of over 250,000,¹²⁰ making it the most-read Black newspaper in the country.¹²¹ The Pullman Porters did much more than expand the *Defender’s* readership: they also

110. In 1919, the *Defender* was sent to over 1,542 towns across the region. The following towns were purchasing over 100 weekly copies: Fry’s Mill, AR; Bibsland, LA; Tunica, MS; Yoakum, TX; and Palatka, FL. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 65.

111. MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 32.

112. *Id.*; Brian Thornton, *The “Dangerous” Chicago Defender: A Study of the Newspaper’s Editorials and Letters to the Editor in 1968*, 40 *Journalism Hist.* 40, 40 (2014).

113. Thornton, *supra* note 112, at 40.

114. *Id.*; MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 77.

115. For example, see *Father and Three Sons Assassinated for Raising the First Cotton, News Never Reached World From Texas*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 30, 1915, at 1 (“Women, get your guns ready: the men lack backbone. Sharpen anything that will leave its mark and prepare. Prepare to strike the blow.” and “[C]all the white fiends to the door and shoot them down.”).

116. Thornton, *supra* note 112, at 40.

117. *Id.*

118. *Id.*

119. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 65.

120. These numbers do not accurately capture the readership of the *Defender*, since many people used informal modes of paper circulation, including borrowing and communal reading. Borrowing was common amongst friends, families, and church groups and allowed communities to save money. Communal reading was primarily done in Southern communities at churches, barbershops, and saloons. One individual would publicly orate the newspaper, primarily to a group of illiterate community members. These informal circulation methods likely increased readership to nearly one million in the years before 1920. *Id.* at 65-66.

121. *Id.* at 70.

expanded the newspaper's news network. Soon, the *Defender* was reporting on news from all over the country and, occasionally, around the world.¹²² It was the newspaper that Black Americans could—and did—call their own.

Although the *Chicago Defender* was undoubtedly a Chicago newspaper, its far-reaching influence and readership demonstrated that the scope of the newspaper was much larger. The magnitude of this reach may best be encapsulated by the newspaper's role in the Great Migration.¹²³ Between 1916 and 1917, the Black population in the Midwest increased drastically as Black Americans from Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana made their way North.¹²⁴ Even though other Black newspapers included stories about migration, the *Defender* became "the undisputed champion of the migration cause," unabashedly printing stories to encourage the exodus¹²⁵ through a "migration campaign."¹²⁶ Poet Carl Sandburg once wrote that, "The *Defender* more than any other one agency was the big cause of the 'Northern fever' and the big exodus from the South."¹²⁷ Similarly, the U.S. Department of Labor admitted that in certain parts of the country, the *Defender* was likely more effective in commandeering labor than all other agents were put together.¹²⁸

This exodus not only expanded both the *Defender's* circulation and impact, it also illustrates the far-reaching influence and readership that the newspaper had already achieved.¹²⁹ The Wilson administration appointed a special advisor to produce an extensive report on the causes and

122. MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 50; *see, e.g., Coast of Liberia is Shelled by a German Submarine*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 20, 1918 at 1; *Philippines Are Rich in Relics Scientist Says*, CHI. DEF., Dec. 22, 1923 at 11; *Cuba to Have First Hanging in 19 Years*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 8, 1925 at A1.

123. The National Archives describes the Great Migration in the following way: "The Great Migration was one of the largest movements of people in United States history. Approximately six million Black people moved from the American South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western states roughly from the 1910s until the 1970s. The driving force behind the mass movement was to escape racial violence, pursue economic and educational opportunities, and obtain freedom from the oppression of Jim Crow." *The Great Migration (1910-1970)*, NAT'L ARCHIVES, [<https://perma.cc/GWT4-A6R3>].

124. Rockford, Illinois saw an increase from 500 to 1,500; in 1910, Detroit's Black population was just under 6,000 and increased to over 35,000 by 1919. It is estimated that over 400,000 Black Americans left the South during this time. MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 76.

125. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 70; *see Predicts Exodus of Race*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 19, 1916, at 1; *Race Labor Leaving*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 5, 1916, at 1; *The Exodus*, CHI. DEF., Sept. 2, 1916, at 1; *Savannah Alarmed Over Labor Exodus*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 14, 1916, at 3.

126. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 66.

127. FLORETTE HENRI, BLACK MIGRATION: MOVEMENT NORTH 1900-1920 63 (1975).

128. DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 66; *see id.*

129. *See* DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 69.

effects of the Great Migration.¹³⁰ For his report, the advisor tracked the *Defender's* “booming circulation” and discovered that in some Southern states, “the paper sold out on the day it arrived. Copies were passed around until they disintegrated. In one town . . . they reported that reading *The Defender* conferred the impression of being ‘intelligent’; in another place, even old men who were illiterate made a point of carrying a copy under their arms.”¹³¹

In total, the *Chicago Defender* was a newspaper that prided itself on being an organ for racial advancement, publishing articles that were widely popular and hugely influential amongst the largest Black readership in the country. Though the *Defender's* readers were diverse,¹³² they were proud to call the newspaper their own. Considering the newspaper's meager beginnings, the success it achieved could only be possible with the support of a large readership. Though the newspaper could not literally serve as “the mouthpiece of 14,000,000 people,”¹³³ the articles it published had to be of interest to a large portion of its readership; it could not boast such a large readership and such a mighty reputation otherwise. And this suggests that the *Defender's* staff, believing their audience to be Black Americans across the entire country, were writing about popular and prominent issues that were of interest to the masses. Thus, studying articles published in the *Defender* between 1910 and 1930—during the heyday of the newspaper's influence—can reveal the wishes, aspirations, and thoughts of both its journalists and its devoted Black American readers.

130. MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 74.

131. *Id.* at 74-75.

132. The specifics regarding the *Chicago Defender's* readership are uncertain, since the majority of the readership supposedly never formally subscribed to the newspaper. Still, the newspaper was popular in both the North and the South, among both the literate and illiterate populations. Although some could afford a regular subscription, those who were less well-off cannot be discounted as possible readers, since the newspapers were often passed around within a community. See DeSantis, *supra* note 17, at 65-66.

133. CHI. DEF., Mar. 11, 1922, at 1 (“THE MOUTHPIECE OF 14,000,000 PEOPLE”); see also CHI. DEF., Feb. 21, 1948, at 7 (“For 41 Years Your Defender Has Been The Mouthpiece of Negro Citizens”); CHI. DEF., Apr. 19, 1919, at 10 (“In those homes where good news has its most devoted readers you will invariably find the CHICAGO DEFENDER. Why? Because we have developed that quality of giving you that class of news that is appreciable. Logically and inevitably such a desire demands and selects the mouthpiece of 12,000,000 people.”); CHI. DEF., Feb. 25, 1922, at 1 (“It is the One Live Newspaper That Is Recognized as the Mouthpiece of Our People”); CHI. DEF., Jul. 25, 1925, at A7 (“The demand for The Chicago Defender continues to grow. It is the mouthpiece of 12,000,000 people.”).

III. STUDYING BLACK WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE THROUGH THE *CHICAGO DEFENDER*

The Black community was quick to take up the cause of women's suffrage. While the *Defender* published a number of articles mocking women's suffrage between 1910 and 1914, these jokes quickly vanished from its pages. They were replaced by calls to Black women—some earnest, some militant—to prepare to vote, using many of the tactics it used to appeal to Black men. When the Nineteenth Amendment was finally passed, the Black community had long since been in support of women's suffrage. However, by 1920, the Black community was already familiar with the many tactics that states were utilizing to keep Black voters from the polls; the pages of the *Chicago Defender* reflected a communal knowledge that newly enfranchised Black women voters would now face these same tactics. Ultimately, the Black community understood that the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment would mean little to them in the era when Jim Crow ruled.

A. *Understanding the Perception of Black Men's Suffrage*

Voting was a very serious matter in the Black community. Black enfranchisement was a hard-earned right and, therefore, not taken for granted. In one article, the *Defender* stated that the Fifteenth Amendment was “divinely ordained”¹³⁴ while, in another, it wrote that suffrage “is our greatest possession.”¹³⁵ While a number of efforts were unsuccessfully made to repeal the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, the Black community did not waver in their commitment to the ballot.¹³⁶

Amongst the Black community, Black men were encouraged—and even expected—to vote.¹³⁷ Moreover, Black men were expected to vote

134. *Fifteenth Amendment*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 4, 1916, at 8.

135. *Final Notice to U.S. Congress: Would Repeal Fifteenth Amendment to Pass Federal Suffrage Act*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 21, 1914, at 1.

136. *See Senator Vardaman's Amendment Loses*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 21, 1914, at 2.

137. *See Mildred Miller*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 9, 1912, at 7 (“In the first place many real good citizens in the second ward . . . do not interest themselves enough in politics to register and do their duty either at the primary or the regular election.”); *Don't Fail to Register*, CHI. DEF., Sept. 21, 1912, at 1 (“Some time between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. on Oct. 5 you should find time to comply with this duty of citizenship.”); *Editorial Article 2—No Title*, CHI. DEF., Nov. 29, 1924, at A12 (“The slacker who does not vote is responsible for the growth of class hatreds and minority rule in American public life.”).

for candidates that would be “of greatest benefit to the Race[.]”¹³⁸ Although the Republican party was often favored within the Black community, the *Defender* refused to endorse candidates based on party alone.¹³⁹ Instead, the newspaper often encouraged readers to study candidates and make informed decisions. For example, on the front page on November 4, 1922, the *Defender* wrote, “[T]he point we wish to impress upon our readers is to carefully investigate the record of each individual candidate with a view of voting for and against individuals rather than for or against parties or factions.”¹⁴⁰ In this way, the newspaper encouraged the community to remain engaged and hold candidates accountable.

The *Defender* also used radical rhetoric when discussing Black voters who were not fulfilling their civic responsibilities. A 1912 article stated, “In Belgium the man who refuses to vote is thrown in jail, but there are not prisons enough to accommodate even a fraction of the nonvoters in this patriotic land.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, on the front page of the November 5, 1910 newspaper, the *Defender* proclaimed, “The Negro who will vote against himself . . . should be disenfranchised.”¹⁴² The article also declared, “[I]f a Negro sells his vote he should be punished as other men . . . A man that is so little as that should be cast out of the city and put in the State’s prison, where he belongs”¹⁴³ These messages demonstrate the high value the Black community assigned to voting and the expectations associated with having the franchise; voting was such a serious matter that those who were not fulfilling their duties were described as criminals deserving of punishment. Against this backdrop, women across the country were gaining the right to vote.

B. *Understanding the Perception of Women’s Suffrage through the Use of Humor and Mockery in the Defender*

Between 1910 and 1914, the *Defender* printed a number of humorous or contemptuous articles about women’s suffrage and women generally. Many of these articles hinged on gendered societal expectations surrounding femininity or womanhood. For example, one article, a mock-

138. *How We Will Vote—And Why*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 7, 1928, at A2; see also *Shall He Be Our Alderman?*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 10, 1912, at 1 (“A vote for Edw. H. Wright for alderman is a duty and should be a pleasure for every race loving man in Chicago.”).

139. See MICHAELI, *supra* note 10, at 24.

140. Alfred Anderson, *The Man—Not the Party*, CHI. DEF., Nov. 4, 1922, at 1.

141. *Article 12—No Title*, CHI. DEF., Jul. 13, 1912, at 7.

142. Mr. Arnold, *Lexington, Mo., Notes: And a Word From Nearby Towns*, CHI. DEF., Nov. 5, 1910, at 1.

143. *Id.*

dialogue printed in 1911, ridiculed women's lack of decisiveness, stating, "He—Why do you say women would never buy votes? She—Because they couldn't exchange them."¹⁴⁴ Although buying votes was often and repeatedly scorned throughout the pages of the *Defender*,¹⁴⁵ this dialogue does not commend women for "never buy[ing] votes."¹⁴⁶ Similarly, another article noted that "careless female voters" often accidentally enclosed shopping lists or other personal items in their woman's club ballots, sometimes forgetting to include their ballots altogether.¹⁴⁷ Although this article does not directly mention women's suffrage, the emphasis on women's inability to correctly use their ballots for women's clubs does not speak highly of their impending suffrage abilities; instead, the article mocks women as forgetful at best and inept at worst. Another article in 1912 mocked women's inability to set aside personal pettiness, projecting that a female delegate in 1916 would refuse to vote as required by her delegation because the candidate had "gone and had her hat trimmed just like mine" and, therefore, the delegate "wouldn't vote for [her] even if there were no other women in the world to vote for."¹⁴⁸ These tropes were not unique to Black women; some of these jokes were even from non-Black sources and were simply reprinted in the pages of the *Defender*, illustrating how sexist tropes transcended racial lines.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, some of these mocking articles targeted suffragettes specifically. In the early 1910s, the stereotypes regarding suffragettes were no more creative than current stereotypes regarding feminists. For example, suffragettes were often synonymous with spinsters: In a 1912 article, after being assured by an athletic young man, a suffragette stated, "You know, I'm a spinster and a suffragette, but there certainly are times when a man is a mighty good thing to have around"¹⁵⁰; another article, a mock-dialogue printed in 1911, reads, "She—Have you reflected in your advocacy of woman suffrage of the danger to your party? He—What's that? She—That out of mere force of habit, all the old cats would scratch the

144. *The Reason*, CHI. DEF., May 6, 1911, at 7.

145. See Mr. Arnold, *supra* note 142.

146. *Id.*

147. *Curious Ballots of Women: Shopping Lists Among Other Things Put in Envelopes by Careless Female Voters*, CHI. DEF., June 17, 1911, at 4.

148. *In 1916*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 10, 1912, at 4.

149. See *The Suffragette*, CHI. DEF., Sept. 3, 1910, at 4A (reprinted from *Lippincott's Magazine*); *The Reason*, *supra* note 144 (reprinted from the *Princeton Tiger*); *A Happy Married Life*, CHI. DEF., Jul. 13, 1912, at 8 (reprinted from *Harper's Weekly*); *Man Gets a Bouquet*, CHI. DEF., Jan. 27, 1912, at 2 (reprinted from *New York Press*).

150. *Man Gets a Bouquet*, *supra* note 149.

ticket?”¹⁵¹ Suffragettes also had a reputation for cooking poorly¹⁵² and spending an extensive time away from home.¹⁵³ Once again, these stereotypes were common in Black and white communities alike.

However, by 1913 many of the punchlines in the *Defender* had shifted. Articles mocking suffragettes declined and then disappeared completely. The articles that persisted often mocked individuals who did not believe that women should have the right to vote. For example, a humorous 1912 article titled, “The ‘Superior’ Sex” included the following exchange between Miss Belinda and the man she employed to help with her garden:

“The polls ain’t decent for women. I’ve said it before, and I say it again, women folks ain’t got no business in such a dirty place.”

“Where is the voting place in this town?” asked Miss Belinda.

“Well, since the old town hall burned down we’ve been votin’ in the Oakland district school.”

“Oh, that’s where your daughter teaches. Dear me, you must hate to have Amanda in such a dirty place so much of the time.”¹⁵⁴

Here, the man said that the polls were no place for women, stating that the polls were “such a dirty place.”¹⁵⁵ Tongue-in-cheek, Miss Belinda slyly pointed out that the dirty polling place in question is, in fact, the school where his daughter teaches, which the man apparently did not consider to be “too dirty” as long as his daughter was engaging in stereotypically feminine work.¹⁵⁶ To further illustrate the article’s tone, the writer placed the word “Superior” from the article’s title in quotation marks¹⁵⁷; although men have long been considered the “superior sex,” the

151. *A Cat-astrophe*, CHI. DEF., May 27, 1911, at 2.

152. *See Article 6—No Title*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 12, 1913, at 6 (“I’m married now and I’m going to get some good home cooking. How do you know, she may be suffragette?”).

153. *See Seemed to Fill the Bill: Young Suffragette Appeared to the Youth’s Mother to Be Suitable as His Wife*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 21, 1911, at 7 (a conversation between a mother-in-law and bride-to-be: “What time do you expect to come in at night? ‘O, anywhere from 12 to 3 in the morning.’”).

154. Ernest Wollett, *The “Superior” Sex*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 5, 1912, at 6.

155. *Id.*

156. *Id.*

157. *Id.*

quotation marks here suggest that the writer did not consider men to be superior and, in fact, that the man in the dialogue was the butt of the joke.

A 1913 article with a similar sentiment said, “It’s all very well for educated women to vote,” said an ardent anti to Mrs. Belmont, “but think how terrible it would be if your cook had a vote.” “He has,” replied Mrs. Belmont with a smile.¹⁵⁸ Here, the ardent anti obviously did not consider that Mrs. Belmont’s cook was a man, who already was enfranchised. Ultimately, the ardent anti’s argument fell apart since—as Mrs. Belmont’s smile suggested—the ardent anti would not suggest that male cooks should not have the right to vote. In these articles, Miss Belinda and Mrs. Belmont deflated common arguments used against women’s suffrage. And, in both, the “antis” appeared foolish when the suffragettes used their arguments against them. This shift by the *Defender* corresponded with women’s enfranchisement in Illinois; in June of 1913, the Illinois Suffrage Act was signed into law and allowed all women to vote for president and local officers.¹⁵⁹ As such, the articles that the *Defender* published reflected changing sentiments in the Black community about women’s suffrage more generally.

The language used in the *Defender* also highlights this change: while the word “suffragette” appeared in eleven articles in 1912 and thirteen articles in 1913, it only appears in two or three articles per year between 1914 and 1920.¹⁶⁰ After 1920, the word “suffragette” appears in one article in 1924 and then disappears from *Defender’s* pages altogether for nearly two decades.¹⁶¹ This shift in language, however, does not correspond with a lack of interest in suffrage. In 1912 and 1913, the majority of the articles that used the word “suffragette” did so in a mocking or joking manner.¹⁶² However, as the sentiments surrounding women’s suffrage shifted, so did the language used to discuss suffrage supporters. For

158. *He Had a Vote*, CHI. DEF., May 31, 1913, at 7.

159. Grace Wilbur Trout, *Side Lights on Illinois Suffrage History*, 13 J. ILL. STATE HIST. SOC’Y 145, 167 (1920).

160. However, 1919 is an exception; the word “suffragette” does not appear in any articles during that year.

161. The 1941 article discusses how Ethiopian Empress Mennen “has been studying the suffragette movement.” *Empress Plans Reforms for her Ethiopia*, CHI. DEF., May 17, 1941, at 2.

162. See, e.g., *A Happy Married Life*, CHI. DEF., July 13, 1912, at 8 (a man remarks on his marriage to a suffragette); *Article 6 – No Title*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 12, 1913, at 6 (joking about the cooking skills of suffragettes); *Editorial Article 1–No Title*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 19, 1913, at 4 (characterizing a woman’s reaction to voting); *In Their Flats*, CHI. DEF., Dec. 14, 1912, at 2 (describing having a suffragette in the home); *Where He Might*

example, Ida B. Wells, a prominent Black woman involved in the suffrage movement, was rarely called a suffragette; instead, one 1913 article referred to Wells as “our prominent race and club leader”¹⁶³ while another article called her “The Modern Joan Arc.”¹⁶⁴ The *Defender* spoke similarly of the Black community’s support for women’s suffrage: in one 1913 article, the *Defender* said, “It is not too much to say the women will need protection many times at the polls and they will find no better champions of their rights than the man of color,”¹⁶⁵ while a 1916 article stated, “the wise thing for our people . . . to do is to support solidly the first amendment for woman’s suffrage that comes along.”¹⁶⁶ One 1915 blurb made the shift clear: when discussing the women’s suffrage movement, the article stated, “Let the good work go on, we are with the women right or wrong.”¹⁶⁷ Although Black leaders of the women’s movement—including Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell—could have been called suffragettes, the movement away from this word indicated a community-wide shift. It was no longer noteworthy when someone believed in women’s suffrage because the Black community already believed in and was fighting for votes for women. Although the Black community was initially susceptible to the negative stereotypes associated with suffragettes and the women’s movement more generally, it soon came to understand the value of women’s suffrage to their communities, and the coverage in the pages of the *Defender* reflected this change.

C. Understanding Women’s Suffrage through Black Women’s Organizing Efforts

The earliest record of social clubs¹⁶⁸ discussing women’s suffrage within the pages of the *Defender* is from an article published on February

Have Been, CHI. DEF., June 14, 1913, at 7 (describing a man’s encounter with a suffragette); *Why A Man Likes A Dog: Of Course There Are Other Reasons, But These Are the Ideas of the Suffragette Lady*, CHI. DEF., Jan. 6, 1912, at 6 (describing the obedient characteristics men like about dogs).

163. *Article 9—No Title*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 22, 1913, at 8.

164. *Marches in Parade Despite Protests*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 8, 1913, at 1.

165. *Women at the Polls*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 2, 1913, at 7.

166. *Ohio’s Heirloom*, CHI. DEF., Dec. 23, 1916, at 6.

167. *Editorial Article 3—No Title*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 2, 1915, at 8.

168. Social clubs were formed primarily in the 1920s and played a key role in the history of Black America. These clubs typically began informally and, later, became more prominent. Janita Poe & Tribune Staff Writer, *Role of Social Clubs Changes with Times*, CHI. TRIB., Feb. 9, 1994, [<https://perma.cc/5DL2-JNUC>].

12, 1910.¹⁶⁹ The article, found on page 3, stated that “[c]olored men and women alike were invited” to a “colored woman’s suffrage mass meeting” in New York.¹⁷⁰ More articles announcing meetings and debates appeared in 1911 and 1912. For example, on April 8, 1911, the *Defender* announced an address at the Chicago Standard Literary Society of Olivet Baptist Church entitled, “Social Unrest in Relation to the Women’s Suffrage Movement.”¹⁷¹ That same month, another social club heard a speech titled, “Shall Women Vote?” by a “renowned critic” of women’s suffrage.¹⁷² Although the content of these meetings was not reported in the *Defender*, the titles and speakers indicate that many of these early discussions were not in favor—or, at least, were skeptical—of women’s suffrage.

In 1912 and 1913, messaging surrounding these conversations and speeches shifted slightly; while some continued to argue for both sides, many articles indicated an increasingly positive reaction to women’s suffrage. For example, in an article published on March 30, 1912, the *Defender* reported that Honorable Julius F. Taylor, president of the Colored Press Bureau “put the question of votes for women before the bureau and . . . it was unanimously decided to favor and advocate the proposition.”¹⁷³ The following year in Baltimore, the *Defender* reported that Bishop L.J. Coppin declared his support for women’s suffrage.¹⁷⁴

Formal debates regarding women’s suffrage show a similar trend. For example, in Indiana in 1911, a social club held a debate called, “Resolved, That Women Should Have the Right to Vote.”¹⁷⁵ The debate included two men arguing for women’s suffrage and two men arguing against women’s suffrage. Although the result was “seven to three in favor of the affirmative side,” the *Defender* also noted that “[B]y the way, there were three ladies and one mere man on the judges’ bench. Is there not a question that arises in your mind as to the outcome of the decision?”¹⁷⁶ The reporter’s use of the word “mere” to describe the one man on the judge’s bench signals the reporter’s belief in the unfairness of the judgment: the ruling must have been unfair because most of the judges were women. In

169. It is likely that earlier articles existed. However, available archival information does not currently go back farther than 1910.

170. *Here and There*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 12, 1910, at 3.

171. *See Mr. Jerome Barlow to Speak at Olivet*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 8, 1911, at 1.

172. C.R. Williams, *South Side Notes*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 15, 1911, at 2.

173. *The Colored Press Bureau*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 30, 1912, at 6.

174. *Bishop Coppin Favors Woman Suffrage*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 1, 1913, at 1.

175. Irene Hickman, *Direct from the Bend: Society News and Doings From the Benders*, CHI. DEF., Dec. 23, 1911, at 3.

176. *Id.* at 3.

comparison, at a 1913 debate in Wisconsin, two women deliberated the same topic against two men; although “[t]he judges gave their decision as a tie . . . the unanimous consent of the audience was that the [women] won.”¹⁷⁷ Although this article was published only two years later and the outcome—a tie—seems less favorable to women’s suffrage, the reporter does not comment on—or dismiss—the judges’ votes based on their sex. Moreover, the “unanimous consent of the audience” was in favor of women’s suffrage.

Soon thereafter, the debates and conversations dropped off and were largely replaced with women’s suffrage clubs and general educational meetings. For example, Ida B. Wells founded the Chicago Alpha Suffrage Club in 1913.¹⁷⁸ After its founding, news about and announcements from the Alpha Suffrage Club frequently appeared on the pages of the *Defender*. The club met every Wednesday,¹⁷⁹ and meetings included studying politics,¹⁸⁰ meeting with politicians,¹⁸¹ preparing to “get out the vote,”¹⁸² and demonstrating the use of voting machines.¹⁸³ Other Black women’s suffrage organizations appeared across the country.¹⁸⁴

In the years leading up to the Nineteenth Amendment, Black women’s organizing efforts and club discussions, as reported in the *Defender*, also shifted. By 1917, women’s suffrage was rarely, if ever, “debated.” Instead, knowledgeable women involved in the suffrage movement gave lectures on the topic.¹⁸⁵ Many of these lectures also began focusing on how women’s suffrage would particularly impact Black women and the Black community.¹⁸⁶ Social clubs ran citizenship classes and lectures to prepare women for their newly acquired or impending

177. Luna M. Scott, *Front Page 5—No Title*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 22, 1913, at 1.

178. WARE, *supra* note 60, at 101.

179. Meetings sometimes shifted to bimonthly during the summer. See *Alpha Suffrage Club*, CHI. DEF., Sept. 12, 1914, at 5.

180. K.J. Bills, *Clubs and Societies: The Alpha Suffrage Club*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 23, 1913, at 2.

181. *Alpha Suffrage Club*, CHI. DEF., Sept. 12, 1914, at 5; *Alpha Suffrage Club*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 6, 1915, at 3.

182. *Alpha Suffrage Club*, CHI. DEF., Apr. 3, 1915, at 3.

183. *Alpha Suffrage Club Banquet*, CHI. DEF., Nov. 22, 1913, at 4.

184. See JONES, VANGUARD, *supra* note 4, at 283.

185. See *Doings Down Along the Jersey Shore*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 31, 1917, at 8.

186. See *id.* at 8 (“Mrs. Nelson’s lecture was concise and practical, bringing out such features of this great question of ‘Votes for Women,’ which are peculiar to the Race.”); Katherine Kent Lambert, *Birmingham, Alabama*, CHI. DEF., Nov. 6, 1920, at 13 (“After business, the discussion of suffrage as it affects the Negro Woman...”).

civic responsibility.¹⁸⁷ Some held meetings to instruct women on how to register.¹⁸⁸ These meetings also served as a time for women to register together or, in some instances in the South, to attempt to register.¹⁸⁹

Just before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, these meetings occurred much less frequently. This is unsurprising, since the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment indicated nationwide support for women's suffrage. However, this decline also corresponded with a change in suffrage efforts and conversations within the Black community. As the Nineteenth Amendment became inevitable, the Black community shifted efforts towards combating Jim Crow laws that kept Black men and women alike from the polls. In fact, the Alpha Suffrage Club did not report a single meeting in the *Defender* in 1919, the year before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. The sharp decline in women's suffrage meetings, lectures, and discussions corresponded both with this community-wide change and understanding of Black suffrage.

D. *The Shift from Women's Suffrage to Jim Crow*

It was unsurprising to the Black community when racial tensions arose in the women's suffrage movement. The *Defender* reported on several clashes between Black and white suffragettes. For example, after the 1913 Women's Suffrage Parade, the *Defender* reported that "Mrs. Ida B. Wells-Barnett . . . refused to be 'Jim Crowed' in the suffrage parade in Washington D.C." and, instead, took her place with the other (white) Illinois delegates.¹⁹⁰ A year later, another article started by saying, "As was

187. See *Yonkers Notes*, CHI. DEF., May 25, 1918, at 2 ("Since the women of New York state have obtained the right to vote citizenship classes have been formed . . ."); Lambert, *supra* note 186, at 13 ("Part of the afternoon was devoted to the discussion of . . . Woman Suffrage, also . . . on Citizenship.") (quotation marks omitted).

188. *Republican County Chairman Jacob A. Livingston Addresses the League*, CHI. DEF., May 25, 1918, at 3.

189. One such instance was reported by the *Defender* on November 6, 1920 in Alabama. Lambert, *supra* note 186, at 13 ("The members decided to go down in a body to register Thursday morning. They did, but were turned away, not being allowed to register. Think of leading women of the race over 300 strong.")

190. *Article 9—No Title*, *supra* note 163, at 8; see also *Marches in Parade Despite Protest*, *supra* note 164, at 1 ("Mrs. Barnett marched with the Illinois delegation . . ."); R.W. Thompson, *News Notes of the Nation's Capital*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 29, 1913, at 5 ("Mrs. Ida Wells Barnett . . . marched with the Illinois delegation . . ."); *Suffragette Movement*, CHI. DEF., Mar. 8, 1913, at 8 (reporting that Ida B. Wells was ordered to ". . . march in the colored section or not at all . . .").

to be expected our women are meeting with some objections in the Suffragettes' ranks"¹⁹¹ The language in this latter article is particularly telling: the article's opening phrase, "As was to be expected," highlights the Black community's beliefs surrounding activist work during that time. However, generally speaking, the *Defender* did not spend much time discussing the fissures in the suffrage movement or the wrongs committed against Black women, though they were many. Instead, the paper began to focus increasingly on the ways that women's suffrage and Jim Crow were connected, especially in Southern states.

The connection between Black suffrage and women's suffrage became inherently and politically entangled in the years before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. One 1915 article stated,

[O]ur Southern friends see in the suffragettes' proposed amendment . . . a bitter pill that they will be expected to swallow if the measure goes through, and that pill is that if women are given the ballot the 'brunettes,' who in many States are in the vast majority, will have the same privilege¹⁹²

This concern was increasingly echoed throughout the country. One article, printed the following year, indicated that President Wilson similarly understood the connection between women's suffrage and Black suffrage: "[P]ersons close to the President say they believe his private opinion is that woman suffrage in the south would be bad for that section of the country on account of the increase it would cause in the Negro vote."¹⁹³ Other politicians from the South explicitly expressed similar sentiments: In 1918, Senator Williams from Mississippi said, "There will come a time in our international relations when the people out West will regret that they did not draw the white line. . . . Do you want to let . . . nig[g]er women vote?"¹⁹⁴

By 1918, the majority of discussions regarding women's suffrage on the pages of the *Defender* focused on the South's use of Jim Crow to disenfranchise Black voters—both male and female. In one article, the *Defender* wrote:

[The Southern states] plan all day and lie awake nights scheming how to carry out their point. This from an editor of one of the largest Texas dailies is representative: "There is nothing in

191. *Rubbing Elbows*, CHI. DEF., Feb. 21, 1914, at 4.

192. *That Suffrage Amendment*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 16, 1915, at 8.

193. *Detroit Free Press Flays Pres. Wilson*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 19, 1916, at 6.

194. *Miss. Senator Cries Aloud Against Woman Suffrage*, CHI. DEF., July 6, 1918, at 10.

the past political history of the South to justify the fear that Negro women would prove a political menace were the federal amendment adopted.’ We agree with this learned scribe; the fears of the rabble are unfounded. The southern states have found a way to retain the supremacy of the white man at the polls and it is safe to believe they will do likewise where our women are concerned.¹⁹⁵

The article goes on to cite measures such as grandfather clauses, white primaries, and literacy tests as measures used to keep Black citizens from the polls.¹⁹⁶

As the inevitability of the Nineteenth Amendment became increasingly clear, the Black community turned its attention to Black suffrage efforts more generally. Therefore, even before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the Black community saw Black women as voters—or, potential voters in Southern states—just the same as their Black male counterparts. As such, the *Defender* encouraged all subscribers, men and women alike, to get out and vote.

The Black community’s shift in focus is evident in the *Defender’s* reporting on the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. In fact, the *Chicago Defender* did not report on the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment during the week of August 18, 1920.¹⁹⁷ The front-page stories for that week included, “Trap Woman in Blackmail Plot,”¹⁹⁸ “South Revolts on Jim Crow System,”¹⁹⁹ and “Resorts Close as Policemen Raid.”²⁰⁰ By 1920, women’s suffrage was not frequently reported on by the *Defender*. Suffrage was, as always, important to the Black community; one 1924 article, reporting on the National Race Congress, said, “Women were called upon to exercise their rights under the 19th amendment . . .”²⁰¹ However, attention shifted away from women’s suffrage and towards Black suffrage more generally as it became clear that Black women would only be able to vote in places where Black men were able to vote. Jim Crow laws were impacting both Black men and Black women at the polls.

One 1929 article in the *Defender* illustrated the issues that Black men and women faced when attempting to vote. The article stated, “The

195. *Women’s Suffrage*, CHI. DEF., Oct. 12, 1918, at 12.

196. *Id.*

197. See CHI. DEF., Aug. 21, 1920.

198. *Trap Woman in Blackmail Plot*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 21, 1920, at 1.

199. *South Revolts on Jim Crow System*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 21, 1920, at 1.

200. *Resorts Close as Policemen Raid*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 21, 1920, at 1.

201. Wayland Rudd, *National Race Congress Ends Its Annual Session*, CHI. DEF., May 17, 1924, at A11.

recent decision . . . in invalidating the Virginia Democratic primary law has served to emphasize the fact that our citizens in Virginia are denied the right to vote in general elections in flagrant violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the 14th and 15th amendments . . .”²⁰² The article provides numbers to support this claim, saying that there were “315,000 of our citizens of both sexes” in Virginia but only 8,000 Black men and women were allowed to vote in the 1929 presidential election.²⁰³ Other articles focused on systemic issues and called on politicians to protect Black voters in the South. Discussing the Republican National Convention of 1924, one article published three major demands: “1. Effort be made that Race Republicans in disfranchised states be given the opportunity to vote”; “2. Appropriate legislation be enacted to stop lynching of Race American citizens”; and “3. “That something must be done with lily-witeism . . . “ an anti-Black movement within the Republican party.”²⁰⁴ The Black community was well aware that Black men and women alike were struggling to cast their votes in the Jim Crow South; the *Defender’s* pivot to discussing Black suffrage generally illustrates a community-wide understanding of the ways that the Nineteenth Amendment would—or, more accurately, would not—impact Black women voters.

CONCLUSION

Recent scholarship has started recognizing the important role that Black women played in the women’s rights movement, often relying on a variety of primary sources to gain a better understanding of Black suffragettes and organizing during that time. Considering the stories published by the *Chicago Defender* between 1910 and 1930 offers additional, and thus far largely unexamined, insight and perspective into the thoughts and beliefs of the greater Black community generally—and Black men in particular—during this time. While *Defender* reporters in the early 1910s relied on sexist tropes to mock women’s suffrage and suffragettes, the tone of these articles turned towards acceptance and then outright promotion long before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. A similar trend appeared on the newspaper’s pages regarding women’s organizing efforts across the country. And by 1919, coverage and discussion of women’s suffrage was scarcely found in the *Defender*,

202. *Deny Virginia Citizens Right to Use Ballot*, CHI. DEF., Aug. 3, 1929, at A1.

203. *Id.*

204. William White, *Demand G.O.P Curb South: Must Give Race the Right to Vote*, CHI. DEF, June 14, 1924, at 5.

replaced almost completely with concern for and political activism surrounding Jim Crow laws. Tellingly, when the Nineteenth Amendment passed in 1920, the *Defender* did not even report on it. Though these findings cannot speak for all Black Americans during this period, the paper's reputation and influence indicate that the ideas found on its pages were highly valued by Black Americans. While much of the current research regarding Black women's suffrage concerns Black women's activist efforts, this Article discusses Black men's changing perception of women's suffrage through journalistic coverage. Words and stories have power; listening to the words and stories on the pages of the *Chicago Defender*—and thinking about all of the Black communities, large and small, that understood the newspaper to be *theirs*—sheds light on the way that these readers thought about and understood the Nineteenth Amendment. ❀

