The Rhetoric of Laura Clay: A Southern Argument for Woman Suffrage

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A SOUTHERN ARGUMENT FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE

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Margaret E. Wesolowski
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THE RHETORIC OF LAURA CLAY:
A SOUTHERN ARGUMENT FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE

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PREFACE

My interest in Laura Clay began at the suggestion of Dr. Randall Capps who indicated that the words of Kentucky's pioneer suffragist orator merited study. As my accumulation of research on Miss Clay mounted, I found that her spoken and written words on behalf of women were indeed deserving of analysis. During the span of her ninety-two year lifetime, she witnessed first-hand the restrictive role assigned to women. She participated in the tedious persuasive campaign to open their lives to greater, more just opportunities. And, she received the gratitude of many women who lived better lives because of her commitment to the achievement of feminine rights.

As I delved into historical accounts of the suffragist movement, I realized the benefits "those who came after" gained from "those who came before." The rights of women were not won easily nor quickly, and the dedication of the leaders of the woman's movement deserve to be remembered.

In preparing this account of Laura Clay's persuasive efforts for the rights of women, I depended on the assistance of several people. I would like to thank Phyllis Rzeszowski who typed my thesis with skill and good spirits. I acknowledge with gratitude my great debt to Dr. Carl Kell, who directed this study, and to Dr. Randall Capps and Dr. Larry...
Winn, who served as members of my graduate committee. By their guidance and example, they encouraged me to pursue the goal of high standards of scholarship in the research and preparation of this study. Whatever progress towards that goal is evidenced in this thesis attests to their leadership. Throughout my graduate career, their personal friendship has been a cherished joy.

I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to my family, for they helped to keep a happy home for us as my graduate career grew to a close. This thesis is dedicated to my two little girls, Christina and Holly, two future women who made the long fight for woman's rights worthwhile.
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THE RHETORIC OF LAURA CLAY:
A SOUTHERN ARGUMENT FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Margaret E. Wesolowski  August 1974  106 pages  Directed by: Carl Kell, Randall Capps, and Larry Wi-n
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This study focused on the persuasive efforts of Laura Clay (1848-1941) as they represented a particularly southern argument for woman suffrage as opposed to the northern, or National American Woman Suffrage Association, suffrage argument. As a Kentuckian, she believed she understood southern attitudes on the three major issues she encountered during her thirty-two years as a suffragist.

The three issues were those of woman's traditional role, the race question, and state versus federal legislation. The arguments of Miss Clay concerning these issues were premised on justice and expediency, which formed the rationale of suffragist rhetoric.

Her arguments, tailored to southerners, supported the national rhetorical position by advocating a new role for women equal to the status of men based on the Christian and natural rights doctrines and the changed society caused by industrialization. She argued the race issue by stipulating an educational prerequisite, rather than a color qualification, for female enfranchisement. With her rhetorical skills, she sought to bring her southern audience to embrace the national
position on these first two issues.

However, she could not accept the national association's decision to push solely for a federal amendment, to the neglect of states rights. Laura Clay's adherence to states rights ultimately set her at odds with the course of the national suffrage association, which she had served as first auditor for sixteen years.
CHAPTER I

LAURA CLAY: SUFFRAGIST RHETORICIAN
OF THE "COMMONWEALTH"

American suffragists engaged in a persuasive campaign which lasted seventy-two years. Suffragists began their rhetorical campaign in 1848 when fledgling feminists gathered in convention at Seneca Falls, New York, and votes for women became a goal incorporated in the "Declaration of Sentiments" which they wrote. As the movement grew and attracted members throughout the United States, it captured the crusading spirit of Kentuckian Laura Clay who came to devote her energies to seeking woman suffrage.

In 1920, women were granted the right to vote by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, guaranteeing female enfranchisement. Miss Clay was among the movement's leaders who, with intelligence, persuasiveness, and perseverance, succeeded in securing the law that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied . . . on

1By agitating for their rights, women challenged the proponents of the status quo to develop arguments refuting the demands enumerated in the "Declaration of Sentiments." The dialectical tension which ensued between the women agitators and the defenders of tradition comprised the rhetoric of the woman's rights movement. Elizabeth Myette Coughlin and Charles Edward Coughlin, "Convention in Petticoats: the Seneca Falls Declaration of Woman's Rights," Today's Speech 21 (Fall 1973):17.
The suffragist movement developed during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period of booming American optimism. Like a prairie fire, movements were springing up in support of abolition of slavery, improvement of public schooling, promotion of temperance, reform in the prisons and mental institutions, belief in permanent peace and utopian societies, and equality for women. The American people were taking stock of their vast, bountiful, unwieldy country and their great, beautiful, unwieldy democratic system. Various groups were working to bring to fruition the promises inherent in the abundant land and in its democracy.

The far-reaching reform crusade of the later nineteenth century was followed by the Progressive movement, which spanned the years 1898 to 1914. In addition to other reformists, Progressives were new allies to the woman suffrage cause. They believed that female voters would "elevate the political tone." With the aid of this reform spirit, suffrage leaders throughout America gathered strength for their cause. These women envisioned a new, more dignified, and, to them, inevitable concept of womanhood.

1U. S. Const. amend. XIX, sec. 1.


3Ibid., pp. 706-7.
To Kentucky's suffrage leader, Laura Clay, woman's suffrage was not a revolution but an evolution. She helped win supporters for evolving female rights as a national, state, and regional speaker and leader. She considered votes for women the natural fulfillment of principles embodied in the Bible as well as the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. It was also the natural outcome of a society revolutionized by industrialization which created work demands for women outside the traditional home sphere. The opportunities of women had to change also. The righteousness and necessity of female enfranchisement were clearly evident to Miss Clay. She argued for the establishment of feminine voting power upon two premises, one of justice, inherent in the Christian and natural rights doctrines, and the other of expediency, brought about by altered economic and social conditions.

A review of Miss Clay's woman's rights career reveals her prominence among the nation's suffrage leaders. She served at the national level for sixteen years (1895-1911) as first auditor of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Miss Clay participated in the policy decisions of the board and served the national association by campaigning for suffrage in Michigan, Oregon, South Carolina, Nebraska and elsewhere. In her own state, she figured prominently as president of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association (KERA) from its inception in 1888 until her resignation from that office in 1912. Under her
leadership, the KERA promoted reforms such as the right of a wife instead of a husband to directly collect her wages (1890), the right of a married woman to make a will and control her own real estate (1893), and the equalization of curtesy and dower in the Husband and Wife Law (1894). The ballot was utmost in her regard, however, and she continuously urged access to the ballot box as the most crucial of all reforms due to women.

Although an ardent crusader for woman's enfranchise-ment, Miss Clay was opposed to gaining it through a federal suffrage amendment. She felt such action would be an usurpation of power strictly delegated to the states. Miss Clay argued for suffrage through individual state legisla-tion, a states rights approach confined mainly to southerners. In the face of northern objections to states rights, Miss Clay had the strength of character to hold firm to her prin-ciples.

Her speeches, letters, and public activities indicate that she possessed a strong character, principles, and intel-ligence. Fortified by these traits, Miss Clay was able to formulate strategies advancing the ideas of the woman's movement and to persevere in the tedious efforts at accomplishing the desired goal of suffragists. The motives and

1The practice of curtesy and dower is further explained on page 13. Kentucky Equal Rights Association, "What the Kentucky Equal Rights Association Has Done and What It Proposes to Do." 1896, Laura Clay Papers, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. Hereafter cited as LCP.
abilities which prepared her to leave the parlor and climb the platform to argue for female equality developed from influences early in her life as she grew into womanhood.

Laura Clay received a prominent family name at her birth in 1849, at White Hall near Richmond, Kentucky. The name of Clay bespoke wealth and prominence, and it would later give her the ethical attributes of dignity and refinement before her speaking audiences. Her descendancy from the same stock as statesman Henry Clay, a distant relative, and her father, Cassius Marcellus Clay, appointed as Ambassador to Russia for eight years by President Abraham Lincoln, was often noted in newspaper accounts of her speaking engagements.

Along with the Clay family name, Laura seems to have inherited a strong, expressive character. Members of the family were known as persons "vigorous of intellect and physique" who were "outspoken as to their political views."1 In addition to Laura, two other Clay daughters, Mary and Sallie, and their mother, Mary Warfield Clay, all became active advocates of woman's rights.

Motivation for their feminist advocacy can be traced to events stemming from the parents' marital discord. Cassius Clay, a poor manager, placed the family's finances in precarious straits.2 The family's lack of financial


2 Paul E. Fuller, "Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1971, pp. 4-6.)
security was added to Mrs. Clay's burdens which included running the household of White Hall and raising the six of their ten children who lived to maturity. While Clay was in Russia, the management of the estate was added directly to his wife's already full list of responsibilities. The unhappy marriage finally broke apart when Clay's illegitimate son, offspring of an affair with a Russian woman during his years as Ambassador, appeared at White Hall.¹

After the ensuing divorce, the Clay ladies became increasingly more involved in seeking equal treatment for women. The divorce illuminated for them the injustice in the legal and property rights of wives. Mrs. Clay received little as property settlement after twenty-four years of marriage.² Her comfortable living after the divorce derived from a trust fund left to her by her parents. Clay did not, however, inflict the added injustice of depriving the mother of keeping the last remaining minor child.³ By law, he was the only guardian, but he did not enforce his claim.

Mrs. Clay's marital experience made Laura well aware of the unjust legal restrictions placed upon women and of the potential unhappiness found in any marriage. It may have been because Laura Clay was closest to her mother throughout the divorce that she "was more vulnerable to

¹Because Clay never denied the paternity of the boy, it is assumed he was his son. Ibid., p. 33.

²Ibid., p. 34.

³Ibid., p. 28.
the effects of the family crisis than were her sisters and brothers." The divorce and its aftermath must have been a critical factor in her life as she searched for a guiding philosophy.

The traditional role of sweetheart and wife was de glamorized for Miss Clay. No doubt, it was in part due to her parents' unhappiness that she never married and sought another kind of involvement in life. She was developing a sense of Christian duty. The events surrounding her parent's divorce directed her towards a Christian commitment to achieving justice for women.

Miss Clay's emerging desire to improve the conditions of others is evident in her diary entries. Accounts she read in Historic Incidents and Life in India prompted her to write in her diary at age fifteen:

The people are degraded beyond anything I ever imagined. It makes me sad to feel that human beings are so low. I would like to be a missionary, and help to raise them from their degraded state. In that same year she became a member of the Episcopal Church and began to develop a strong traditionally religious belief in Christian service to others. Soon after, she began her personal commitment to the woman's rights cause.

Laura Clay began to conceive the idea that her service

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1 Ibid., pp. 34-5.
2 Diary, 13 April 1864, LCP.
3 Fuller, p. 19.
to God would take the form of service in the fight for female equality. A diary entry she wrote as a young woman reveals her esteem for the gentle sex. Exclaiming, "It is yet but the dawn of the day of Woman's Rights!" she noted the "unspotted chastity, the temperance, the selflessness, the daily ruling of life by duty of women" as compared to the "sensual and selfish lives of men." She marvelled that such virtues of women should be overlooked and all great moral revolutions "should be imputed to men." Although she was aware of the "unjust relations between men and women" due to the family's "own unhappy domestic relations," she wrote that her feeling was "not a jealousy of men." It was instead "a desire to see women awake to the higher life which God, through the advance of Christian civilization, has opened to them." ¹

Miss Clay was aware of her strong identification with the woman's cause. She wrote in her diary:

To do what I can to help on the great cause of Woman's Rights seems to me to be that sphere of activity in His service to which God has called me both through my feelings which call me that way, and the education of life which has fixed the bent of my thoughts and opinions. ²

Twenty-two years later, in an 1896 newspaper interview, she observed that the work of the KERA was vital because she was "firmly convinced that no other cause in our country, except maintaining the gospel of Christ, is so sacred and

¹Diary, 13 April 1864, LCP.
²Ibid., 26 July 1874.
necessary to the advancement of civilization as the cause of equal rights for men and women.\textsuperscript{1}

As Laura Clay matured and encountered setbacks in her work, she continued to view her suffrage activities as service to God. For example, in 1906, after the loss of the Oregon state suffrage campaign, she advised a friend and co-worker "that this work is God's cause, and He is the leader of all our campaigns." She added that, "When He pleases He will give us the victory; in the meanwhile for us to doubt would be disloyalty, to falter would be sin."\textsuperscript{2} Her Christian belief in the equal roles of men and women was a strong personal motivating factor in her suffrage career. It was also, as will be discussed later, a public arguing point to win woman's rights adherents.

In addition to this personal commitment to suffrage, Miss Clay had abilities needed for leadership in the movement. She profitted from having not only a keen mind, but also an educational background that was quite extensive for a woman of her day. She had been told from her childhood that she possessed more than ordinary mental abilities.\textsuperscript{3} At one time Laura Clay was considering entering law, and a family friend wrote her, "When God has given a woman a talent, I am persuaded you know she ought to use it; and as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Louisville Courier-Journal, 1 March 1896, LCP.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Laura Clay to Mrs. Upton, 26 June 1906, LCP.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Diary, 13 July 1878, LCP.
\end{itemize}
regards the talent, we are all sure you have it."¹ Years later, her able mind would be repeatedly praised in newspaper reviews of her speeches.

Her education began at the Foxtown Academy, near Richmond. There she received some early training in speech-making from the teacher who required that the students "write compositions or speak."² She studied at Sayre Institute, Lexington, from 1863 to 1865. At Sayre, the female students received a more academic curriculum than the traditional girls' schools offerings. Other southern schools tended to prepare the girls to be socially, not necessarily intellectually, wise. At Sayre, training was offered in "French, Latin, German language and literature, vocal and instrumental music, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, geology, chemistry, astronomy, history, English literature, and philosophy" as opposed to the music and charm courses of other schools for young women.³ She therefore developed "an awareness of her own intellectual worth" which "seems to have bent her in directions which young ladies were not supposed to follow." Her greater confidence in her mental rather than social abilities was probably another factor

¹Ron S. B. /___/ to Laura Clay, 18 January 1886, Clay Family Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky, quoted in Fuller, p. 48.

²Cassius M. Clay, Jr. to Slew (Tarleton), 14 March 1857, LCP, Fuller, p. 7.

causing her never to develop a courtship leading to marriage.¹

Laura and her mother were both desirous of further education for her. Accordingly, she attended Sarah Hoffman's Finishing School, New York, for the academic year 1865-66. After an interval of several years, she attended the University of Michigan, 1879-80, and in 1886, attended one semester at what is now known as the University of Kentucky.

Laura became able to support herself in 1873 when her father portioned out a part of his estate among the six children.² She managed her farm very successfully, taking "possession of the land without stock or utensils," and by "observation and experience, prudence and industry . . . greatly improved the lands and stock," annually realizing a good income.³ This income enabled her to provide for her living and later for some of the expense of her suffrage work.

The influences of her parents' divorce and her Christian commitment to the suffragist movement were unique influences in Laura Clay's life and led her into suffrage leadership. Her sense of injustice, her awareness of the need for equal rights for women, and her intelligence

¹Fuller, p. 18.
²Ibid., p. 38.
and education were factors giving her the diligence and insight for promoting woman's rights. Her successful management of her farm provided her with a steady income and leisure time. Because she never married, she was free from family responsibilities and could afford more time and energy for suffrage work. The time was ripe for her to become a suffragist; the woman's movement was one of the major reform groups of the era. Several decades earlier, young girls would dream of becoming missionaries in China, but by the time Miss Clay was an adult, she and hundreds of other women would be drawn to reform the abuses of their own society.

Rectifying the abused condition of women in Kentucky was the aim of the KERA organized by Laura Clay in 1888.\(^1\) The purpose of the organization was to obtain "for women equality with men in educational, industrial, legal, and political rights."\(^2\) As president of the group for twenty-four years, Miss Clay promoted changes in legislation favorable to women, worked to increase suffrage membership and sentiment throughout the state, and sought the establishment of co-education in colleges and universities.

\(^1\)In 1888, Laura Clay attended the annual meeting of the American Woman Suffrage Association meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, and used the occasion to organize Kentucky suffragists into a state suffrage association under which county auxiliaries were also formed. Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, eds., History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 4 (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1902; reprint ed., New York: Source Book Press, 1970), p. 665.

\(^2\)"What the Kentucky Equal Rights Association Has Done."
In their legislative work, the suffrage workers found many state laws which maintained the inequality of women with men. The association published a pamphlet in 1896, "What the Kentucky Equal Rights Association Has Done and What It Proposes to Do," which listed laws on the statutes in 1888, laws the KERA wanted to change. For example, a husband could legally collect his wife's wages. Upon marriage, a woman lost all personal property to her husband. The common law of curtesy and dower provided that a widower inherited all his wife's "personality not hitherto reduced to possession," and when there were children, inherited all interest in his wife's real estate until his death. In contrast, the wife, "when there were children, inherited one third of his real estate possessed during marriage." Also, Kentucky was the only state in which a married woman could not make a will.¹

Laws similar to these were being changed in many states due to the persistent efforts of women. Their efforts included the use of public speeches to educate the citizens and win new supporters, male as well as female, to the woman's rights movement. When speeches alone would not have sufficient persuasive impact and would not reach the desired audience, the women used other tools to convince the law-makers and public of the need for their reforms. Petitions bearing thousands of signatures were

¹"What the Kentucky Equal Rights Association Has Done."
presented to the state Constitutional Convention of 1890-91 and the regular sessions of the Kentucky General Assembly. Members of the KERA called upon representatives who favored suffragism to present feminist resolutions to the legislature. Leaflets and newspaper articles and columns were written to reach the citizenry. However, in 1896, the KERA had still failed in its attempts to secure other just laws for women.

Women still lacked the power to protect their children and the power to vote. The "age of consent" was not raised from twelve to eighteen years as the association desired. Married mothers had yet to be declared legal guardians of their children. Women physicians were still not appointed to lunatic asylums. In addition, a General School Suffrage law which was desired by the KERA still was not passed.

Female suffrage had existed in limited form in Kentucky as early as 1838. By law, widows with school age children were allowed to vote for school trustees in the county districts in which they resided.¹ Further advances in suffrage for women were made, but full enfranchisement was not gained until the 1920 federal amendment. The KERA worked continuously to achieve woman suffrage gains, believing that the other achieved reforms "would have been obtained with vastly less labor, had women possessed the

¹Anthony and Harper, p. 674.
Laura Clay often appeared before the Kentucky legislature to request that they consider woman suffrage. She appeared, for example, before the state legislators at the Constitutional Convention of 1890-91. Upon the suffragists' appeal, W. H. Mackoy of Covington presented before the Assembly a resolution stating that "The General Assembly may hereafter extend full or partial suffrage to female citizens of the United States of the age of 21 years, who have resided in this state one year, etc." When the discussion of the article on elections was near ending, he moved for a hearing of the ladies, who had been lobbying for many days during the session. Laura acted as spokeswoman for the little group of four ladies who were present as representatives of the KERA.

Apparently her appeal for female enfranchisement was a dramatic confrontation, a woman "pleading for the women of the future." A reporter observed that, although Miss Clay's course might be "misguided" and "her theories not well founded," the scene was a striking one as Laura spoke before "one hundred furrow-faced and white-headed delegates seated silently--perfectly silent--for the first time in many weeks." That same reporter noted that her speech

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1 "What the Kentucky Equal Rights Association Has Done."
3 "Louisville Times", 13 December 1890, LCP.
"was the best the convention has listened to for weeks."¹

Laura gave "a brief, well-worded, and sensible address, which was heartily applauded."² She began by complimenting the Convention delegates for their ideas of right and justice which had been a "veritable soul-uplifting to her," and she stated that she did not come expecting them to grant female suffrage then. Rather, her request was that they provide in the new Constitution for "the time when women would be as capable as men of self-government, and to empower the Legislatures of the future to grant them a trial to this right when the time was ripe for it."³ Well-received as her speech was, the Convention did not incorporate the resolution into the revised Constitution.

As her remarks indicated, Laura realized that hope for full female suffrage was still in vain because public sentiment in Kentucky was still mainly opposed to female suffrage. For example, one man, while believing in woman's vote in the management of schools, was opposed to further female suffrage. He also publicly complimented Laura on a speech he heard her make, yet another comment he made afterwards reflected a popular antisuffrage view of the time. His statement represented "the general opinion of this subject" of votes for women when he expressed the sentiment, "I love them too much to allow them to vote. If they were granted

¹Ibid.
²Louisville Courier-Journal, 13 December 1890, LCP.
³Louisville Times, 13 December 1890, LCP.
that right the marriage tie would disappear inside of fifty years."¹

Kentucky women as well as men voiced antisuffrage opinions. In 1890-91, while state suffragists were lobbying in Frankfort for new rights for women, the wife of Governor Buckner was entrenched in a traditional viewpoint. Asked what she thought about granting women additional rights, she reportedly answered, "I have more rights now than I know what to do with."²

Spurring public sentiment for suffrage was another task, in addition to pressing for reform legislation, which called forth Laura Clay's persuasive abilities. Speeches by woman's rights advocates had been a popular method of feminist persuasion. Ladies who engaged in public speaking had gradually become accepted.³ Several prominent suffragists, among them Susan B. Anthony and Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, spoke in Kentucky.

To facilitate the use of suffrage speakers, the Fayette ERA, Miss Clay's local association, formed a Speaker's Bureau in 1889. The bureau, in "recognizing the importance

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Only a few bold women broke from tradition in the 1820's and 1830's and dared give public speeches. They set the example for women to follow, so that by Laura Clay's time, many women orated for female rights. Doris Yoakum, "Woman's Introduction to the American Platform," in History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. William N. Brigance (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), pp. 153-93.
of public addresses for the advancement of their cause," developed "a plan for providing lectures at a very low price for localities which desire to hear Equal Rights principles discussed." A list was compiled of members of the association who would give free lectures. A town could hear one of these lecturers by providing the minimal expense of "hall, advertising and entertainment for the speaker" and by taking up a "collection at the lecture for the benefit of the KERA."¹

These speakers traveled to many small towns, reaching Kentuckians unfamiliar with woman's rights arguments. Letters to ERA members regarding tour arrangements for suffragist speakers reveal that woman's suffrage still had few supporters and was regarded as something of a novelty. For example, an Ashland woman wrote that "While I may not be in favor of 'Woman's Suffrage,' yet I am not afraid of it or its advocates," and that a hall would be available to suffrage speakers.² In Carrollton an audience would be secured due to "the novelty of the subject" even though woman's suffrage had few advocates there.³ A Lebanon woman wrote expressing her desire to in "any way advance the Equal Rights question" in her town. She noted: "There are only

¹Lexington Gazette, 30 November 1889, LCP.
²J. B. Powell to Mrs. Chennault, 11 May 1888, LCP.
³Lucy E. Winslow to Mrs. Chennault, 5 April 1888, LCP.
two other ladies that I know of who endorse this movement . . . being Southerners it is hard for us to advance out of the old routine."\(^1\)

Changing "the old routine" of women from conservative acquiescence to suffrage enthusiasm was vital to the KERA. Public sentiment still followed traditional beliefs, even more so in the southern states than in other sections of the country. A letter from a lady in Harrodsburg points out this burden of tradition which the suffragists had to try to overcome. The writer indicated that she knew of a "good many ladies" that were "interested in this movement among the ladies, but are hindered by the prejudice of friends from coming out and doing any work." She explained that women "are not interested many times because they have never given the subject any thought and have not informed themselves about the matter." Men were also uninformed, she wrote, and "have gone on thinking as the /sic/ fathers did," instead of "looking at the other side of the question."\(^2\)

Securing suffrage supporters was important as a persuasive deterrent to the argument that "women don't want suffrage." Miss Clay pursued this goal by working to increase membership and by encouraging local equal rights groups to

\(^1\)Fannie L. Harrison to Laura Clay, 1 September 1888, LCP.

\(^2\)The woman added: "how they /men/ also quote Scripture, it is amusing." The use of the Bible to defend the status quo is discussed in chapter II. Mrs. L. S. Marimon to Laura Clay, 12 April 1889, LCP.
be formed throughout the state. Often, Miss Clay wrote articles about the woman's movement to attract new supporters.

Laura Clay regularly wrote a "Woman's Column" for the Lexington Gazette. Press work was an important rhetorical strategy employed by suffragists. Not only did they write articles expressing the tenents of their movement and detailing the activities of their members, but suffragist writers tried to turn any occasion to their advantage.\(^1\)

One example of Miss Clay's ability to utilize other events for purposes of woman's rights propaganda is her 1892 Christmas Eve article in the "Woman's Column." She took her theme from the gift-giving which marks Christmas.

Here's justice! Here's magnanimity! All the year a man eats the comfortable meals his wife has cooked; wears the clothes she has washed and mended; lives in the well-ordered house she has swept and dusted; romps with the pretty children her watchful care night and day goes to keep fat and rosy and clean and sweet; and when Christmas comes, he gives her a present out of his money, and amiably accepts one which she, poor thing, can only pretend to give, since it also is paid for out of his money. His money! Where then is his wife's money? Where are the fruits of her labor? . . . and when New Year's day comes, it will be a good time, . . . for every wife to resolve that she will have too much self respect to look upon herself as a 'supported' member of the

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\(^1\)Suffragists were instructed at the NAWSA conventions to weave their propaganda into any and all news items. National American Woman Suffrage Association, Proceedings of the Thirty-second Annual Convention (Washington, D.C.: Press of Alfred J. Ferris, 1900), p. 23. Another time, suffragists were told, "Scarcely a week passes without something in the papers that could be taken as a nucleus for a suffrage argument, just something as an excuse for the letter to the editor." National American Woman Suffrage Association, Proceedings of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention (Warren, Ohio: Press of Frank Perry, 1902), p. 37.
household . . . and for every husband to resolve that he will be too fair-minded to deny his wife's claim to her equal share of the earnings.¹

In the "Woman's Column" and in published letters to the editors of the Lexington papers, Laura Clay also sought to win support for greater female educational opportunities. She pledged in an 1891 "Woman's Column" that the KERA would begin a "vigorous effort to have the universities and colleges in the State open to young women as well as to young men."² By 1901, the indefatigable campaign of the association resulted in eligibility for women to attend Kentucky University at Lexington, Central University at Richmond, and Kentucky Wesleyan College at Winchester.³ The suffragists also secured female dormitory facilities for the new students and were trying to obtain legislation enabling women to serve as members of the Board of Trustees of the colleges and universities.⁴

Miss Clay pursued the goal of woman suffrage through speeches, newspaper articles, petitions, and legislative activity. Her personal identification with the justice of the movement and her intelligence were an asset throughout her rhetorical campaign to advance the woman's cause in the South. Work for the national movement occupied much of her

¹Lexington Gazette, 24 December 1892, LCP.
²Ibid., 25 April 1891.
³Boston Woman's Journal, 7 September 1901, LCP.
⁴Lexington Herald, n.d., 1901, LCP.
time, but the South was her homeland and her particular cause. She was able to approach her southern audiences with an insight lacked by suffrage leaders who were not from Dixie.

The focus of this study is on Laura Clay's rhetoric as it represents a uniquely southern argument for woman's rights. Her rhetoric was comprised of her efforts to co-ordinate the purposes desired by the suffragist movement with the attitudes held by members of her southern audience. Her speeches, articles, and letters reveal her application of suffrage purposes to southern audiences, however, as they were refined under the catalysis of Laura Clay's own ideas and perceptions.

In addition to spoken words, other forms of rhetorical communication were used by the leaders of the woman's movement and by other reform groups of their time. These reform movements formed organizations, they utilized lecturers, they issued periodicals, they sought the support of ministers, educators, legislators, and other prominent public figures.¹ With these tools of persuasion, reformers tried to communicate with, educate, and convince their audiences of their particular view of social injustice. The NAWSA as well as the KERA used all these methods and developed others, some already mentioned. Awakening the people of Kentucky and the South to the ideas of the woman's move-

ment called forth Laura Clay's adept use of many persuasive tools applied to her southern audiences.

The woman's rights movement had to encompass many differing views. Among these different views were those of the North versus the South, liberals versus conservatives, the working women versus the privileged women, and women versus men. Externally the movement had to reach and convert members of the large heterogeneous American public. Internally, it had to maintain cooperation among the members, who were also representative of various beliefs.

It is important to understand the function of rhetoric as a binding agent in the woman's movement, both externally and internally. The following questions arise, and they will be answered in chapters II and III. What negotiable appeals did the suffragists use to merge the heterogeneous audiences into an activated unit supporting female enfranchisment? What appeals did Miss Clay use as a southern states rights suffragist who differed from the federal emphasis of the national group?

Laura Clay's specific rhetorical methods and appeals for woman suffrage in Kentucky and the South will be examined in the next chapter. In chapter II, Miss Clay's characteristic presentation of the southern position on suffrage will be compared to the general rhetorical arguments and methods of the NAWSA. This southern position regarding suffrage made necessary the alteration of several specific national arguments on the issues of woman's traditional role,
of unlimited suffrage, and of states rights. She could support the northern position and attempt to persuade her audiences in Dixie to alter the traditional concept of woman's role and to allow negroes who could read and write to vote. But she was a staunch believer in states rights and could not support the federal woman suffrage amendment proposed by the national association.

Her rhetorical efforts to push for woman suffrage achieved through state, rather than federal, legislation will be examined in chapter III. Her belief in states rights ultimately set her at odds with the NAWSA, and in 1911 she was removed from the board of the national group, an action taken by an eastern faction which was not inclined towards states rights. She continued to fight the proposed Susan B. Anthony Amendment as an unwarranted extension of federal power until the document became law.

The final view of Miss Clay as a suffragist rhetorician will be presented in chapter IV through the comments of the people who heard her speak. Newspaper accounts of her public speeches reveal her competence on the platform. Her speaking manner was clear, dignified, and sometimes interjected with humor. Her arguments were logical and well supported by evidence. Miss Clay was a woman who enjoyed speaking, and she was accomplished at the task.

The material in the Laura Clay Papers of the Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, was the major source for this study. It has provided ample material to analyze
Miss Clay's appeals to her audiences nationally, regionally, and locally. Her southern suffrage arguments drawn from her speeches; her letters to newspapers, friends, other state leaders; and her legislative activity have afforded insight into understanding the rhetoric of Laura Clay, admirable Kentucky lady and pioneer suffragist.
CHAPTER II

THE RHETORIC OF THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT:
LAURA CLAY AND THE SOUTHERN POSITION

Laura Clay carried her suffrage arguments beyond Kentucky borders throughout the whole South, a section set apart from the rest of the nation in woman suffrage progress. Northern suffragists regarded Dixie as an impenetrable bulwark of traditional attitudes concerning woman's role, the race question, and states rights. Suffrage pioneer Lucy Stone had visited Georgia in 1887 and found that southern women were afraid to demand the vote: "They said it was here, as it was at / sic / the North forty years ago, that they could not do anything."¹ Nevertheless, ten years later Carrie Chapman Catt held hopes for developing the South, believing that, "While the South is not yet favorable to woman suffrage, it gives a very cordial hearing to it. . . . A year or two of work there will change the sentiment and quite revolutionize it."² The representative sent by Mrs. Catt to advance woman's suffrage, however,


reported that these expectations were wrong. Stimulating feminist sentiment in the South would prove to be a herculean labor for the NAWSA and for Miss Clay.

Laura Clay was aware of the slow suffrage progress in the southern states and of the notice of it taken by northern feminists. In an 1893 newspaper article she wrote that,

> during the past few years it has become evident to students of the suffrage movement that the principle obstacle to woman's suffrage becoming a leading political issue is the imagined indifference to it of the Southern States."

While other suffragists termed the South indifferent or even antagonistic to suffrage, she explained that the southern attitude was not indicative "of conviction, but only the conservatism of a people who have been too deeply engaged upon other pressing social problems to devote much thought to woman suffrage." She felt that effective organization in the South would evidence a force of strength for woman's rights.2 Stressing that southerners could not be omitted from suffrage work, Laura Clay told the 1893 NAWSA convention that, "You have worked for forty years and you will work for forty years more and do nothing unless you bring in the South."3 To meet the need for cultivating suffragism in the South, the NAWSA created a Committee on Southern Work in 1892 with Laura Clay as chairman.

1Little Rock Woman's Chronicle, 25 February 1893, LCP.

2N.p., Woman's Journal, n.d., 1892, LCP.

3Sinclair, p. 249
The task of putting suffragist ideas in southern heads was great, even for a respected lady of the South. Although some type of suffrage organization was begun in every southern state by 1900, not much agitation arose in this section until the turn of the century.¹ In contrast, the North and West were much busier in advancing the woman's movement.

There are several reasons why the South differed enough from other sections of the country to be a potential destructive force to the suffragist movement unless converted as an ally. First, southern men had long supported the myth that their women did not need the vote, and indeed, did not even want it. A southern woman was considered too much a ladylike belle to desire the masculine role of annually visiting a voting booth. The traditional view of the quiet, acquiescent woman was furthered by Biblical teachings, such as St. Paul's edict for women to remain silent in church and to obey their husbands. When men of the South looked North and observed the militant feminist parades, took note of the remarks of anti-Bible advocates, and considered the career orientation of many northern suffragists, they became more entrenched in their traditional stance.

Secondly, the woman's movement was tainted with abolitionism from its past and threatened contagion in the future of increased numbers of negro women at southern polls. The

horrors of the reconstruction era left southern men with a great predilection against the extension of suffrage and no desire to allow more negroes to vote. Suffrage grande dame Susan B. Anthony was the embodiment of radical abolitionism to many southerners. While Miss Anthony presumed that the South regarded her well, Carrie Chapman Catt quipped that Susan Anthony had "little idea how those old 'Confeds' hate her."\(^1\) She had never been forgiven for her abolitionist leadership or for her espousal of a federal amendment which would destroy states rights control over elections.

Fear of the expansion of federal power by a constitutional amendment was a third factor making the South resistant to woman's suffrage arguments. A federal amendment was more than an attack on the states rights principle nurtured in the South. The proposed Susan B. Anthony Amendment (eventually the Nineteenth Amendment) gave the power of voting regulation to the national government. Thereby, the new law could do away with all the discriminatory voting practices used to negate the negro vote. As the Southern Woman's Rejection League viewed it, "The present amendment . . . means the revival of force bills, race wars, and Federal control of elections in the South."\(^2\)

Several national arguments concerning these three issues of woman's traditional role, the race problem, and

\(^1\)Sinclair, p. 297.

states rights had to be altered to become acceptable to southern audiences. The question of whether or not it was right and beneficial to society that female citizens be allowed to vote became obscured under the barrage of southern objections. The following table summarizes the division between the southern and northern rhetorical positions on these issues:

**TABLE 1**

**SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN RHETORICAL POSITIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Southern Rhetorical Position</th>
<th>Northern Rhetorical Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman's traditional role</td>
<td>The southern male sense of chivalry and Biblical views supported the traditional view of women.</td>
<td>Women needed the vote for their protection because they were working outside the home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlimited suffrage</td>
<td>Female suffrage would enlarge the negro vote and endanger white supremacy.</td>
<td>White women voters would far outnumber negro women as well as immigrants at the polls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States rights</td>
<td>The South feared the loss of state power to the federal government.</td>
<td>After trying an individual states approach, the NAWSA advocated a federal amendment as the only feasible method of guaranteeing the vote to all American women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Laura Clay accepted the northern position on woman's
traditional role and on unlimited suffrage and she tried to gain similar acceptance of these ideas from her southern audience. Because she understood the sensibilities of the South, she could adapt her arguments to her particular audience. In pressing southern gentlemen to support a new, more realistic role for women, she took care to point out that male chivalry did not protect the widow, spinster, or female workers. By advocating an educational prerequisite for suffrage, she hoped to minimize southern trepidation regarding negro women voters. However, on the final issue of states rights, she remained firm in her support of the southern rhetorical position. In shaping her arguments on each of these three issues, Laura Clay proceeded from the two major premises of justice and expediency.

The rationale of suffragist rhetoric lay within the paradigm of the two premises of "justice" and "expediency." Early suffragists in the mid-eighteenth century has based most of their claim to enfranchisement on the natural rights doctrine. At a time when the heated debate on rights, both natural and governmental, exploded onto the bloody battlefield of Civil War, it was an obvious and logical premise. Women who articulated abolitionist causes gradually gained the right to speak publicly but only the negro man benefitted enough from the upsurge of interest in democratic principles to attain the franchise. After the Fourteenth

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Amendment, the negro man voted, and the newly added word male in the Constitution distanced the female further from the voting booth than before. Women continued to argue the justice of their cause, and the logic of it did promote some gains. The improvements in legal and property rights and the increase in colleges and co-educational facilities for women were evidence of this.

Along with arguments based on justice, the early suffragists used arguments based on the self-protection theory of expediency.¹ Women who worked, who were heads of families or who were merely tax-paying and represented citizens, realized that the ballot was necessary to safeguard their interests.

The appeal of the justice of universal suffrage, however, by degrees lost some of its persuasiveness. The South's problem which had derived from full manhood suffrage was the negro voter. Around the turn of the century, the North found a parallel in the influx of immigrants to this country; foreign-born males voting at the polls represented a problem to the North. Non-white, non-native people were being regarded as non-suitable voters. Universal suffrage was no longer such a sound claim upon which feminists could base their arguments, and a new argument to catapult women into voting power was needed. The strongest argument suffragists could make as the twentieth century began was premised on expediency—the benefits a class of native-born,

¹Ibid., p. 55.
white, middle-class women could bring to a society wishing to maintain its system. Thus, justice and expediency comprised the rationale of suffragist persuasion. The interlacing of these premises in Laura Clay's arguments on the three major issues she confronted will now be examined.

In refuting the prevalent southern attitude upholding woman's traditional role, Miss Clay developed an argument based on the intrinsic equality of the sexes found in the Bible. By stressing the justice in the Scriptures, she tried to prove that certainly God did not intend that women should not vote even though people who believed in Scriptural teachings found much to disavow the rights suffragists claimed. The theological basis for woman's-place-is-in-the-home was drawn from the assertion that God had created men and women different for different roles. For proof, religious believers who opposed suffrage turned to passages in Genesis seemingly allocating a division both of labor and authority between the sexes and to St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, in which the apostle instructed women to be silent in the church and to obey their husbands.1 If this interpretation of evidence were true, then Bible-believing southerners who valued the Holy Word would not heed the suffragist claim of co-ordinate roles between men and women.

The religious question had long perplexed suffragists. In 1852, two divisions of thought were highlighted in a

1Ibid., p. 17.
debate which almost split the young movement. While some suffragists felt that woman's rights were upheld in Scriptures, others argued that "if the authority of the Bible were admitted, the Book would have to be rewritten, in order to defend the cause of women."¹ Laura Clay became one suffrage leader who used the Bible to support the woman's cause.

Three reasons are apparent for Miss Clay's interpretation of the Bible as a positive persuasive influence for suffrage. First, the woman's cause and God's Will were linked in her mind. She had developed in her early life a personal trust in the Divine ordinance of equality between the sexes. A second reason for her Biblical argument stemmed from the nature of her audience. Religion had played an important part in the southern woman's life. Through her church relationship, a woman had received the spiritual strength to accept her subservient and unrewarding role, and she also had enjoyed the social pleasures of church groups. In addition, southern men adhered to the Bible, at least in quoting the proper Biblical passages against woman's rights. To deny the sanction of Divine Will on suffrage would be striking a blow beneath the Bible belt. A third reason for her use of Scriptural support was the need to enlist the influential assistance of ministers. Church leaders had to be convinced that no conflict between the Bible and woman's rights existed. Although southern

¹Sinclair, p. 198.
women had been encouraged in work outside of the home by Baptist and Methodist preachers who were happy to have them pursue missionary and philanthropic fund raising, the churches discouraged the new desire for additional rights, such as suffrage.¹

Much of Laura Clay's rhetorical efforts for suffrage had to center on showing Biblical support for woman's equal status with men. Newspaper accounts of her speeches in different states reveal the theme of her argument from Christian doctrine. By correcting the misinterpreted Biblical evidence, she hoped that her audiences, whom she felt believed in following God's Word, would accept her claim for justice and the female ballot.

Kentuckians heard her Scriptural argument for suffrage on many occasions. For example, she told her audience at the KERA Convention, 1891, that the subjection of women was a misinterpretation of Genesis; it was "subversive of the social order of equality which prevailed when God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."² In Owensboro, she addressed an audience saying that the first appeal for woman's equality must be to the Bible to reveal the common misunderstandings about women. The Scripture in which God says that man should rule over woman "was not a command, but simply a prophecy of a reign of force rather

¹Scott, p. 138.
²Painesville (Oh.) Telegraph, 14 January 1891, LCP.
than of justice as the result of sin."¹

In South Carolina, she expounded her Scriptural arguments for suffrage. As in other speeches throughout the South, she referred her hearers to Genesis, and "after skillfully and carefully presenting such passages as 'man shall rule over thee,' with fairly good logic" she declared men and women were created co-ordinate. The woman "who preferred privileges to rights" came under her attack because such servile obedience was "a subversion of God's intended plans."² She described the Divine plan instituting the co-ordinate roles of men and women, roles which had changed by man's tradition in that woman's sphere was limited by her opportunities, man's by his capabilities." Since mankind's eviction from the Garden of Eden, "the subjection of women has always been in exact proportion to the dominion of sin." Fortunately, the rights of women advanced "with the advance of Christianity and would continue to do so."³

A speech made by Laura Clay to her church vestry reveals in further detail her argument deduced from God's plan for humanity. The "great charter of human rights, Genesis 1:26-28," affirms, she declared, that "God made both man and woman in His own image" and gave to them the same task of subduing the earth and the same authority over the works of their hands. No indication was ever made of any unequal

¹Owensboro (Ky.) no name, 8 March 1895, LCP.
²Laurens (S.C.) no name, n.d., LCP.
³Greensville (S.C.) Daily News, 30 April 1895, LCP.
status between the rights of man and woman. God's original plan of equality has been altered through tradition only because of the words of man.\(^1\)

She pointed out that woman was created as a "helpmeet" for man and that both the Jewish and Christian religions teach the existence of equal souls for both sexes. Therefore, "the duty of woman is not to conform herself to the wishes and wants of man," but to seek "her own individuality by conforming herself to God's holy law, as He makes it clear to her through the medium of her own spirit and conscience." Her only superior is God, for man has a "will no better nor higher than her own."\(^2\)

God told the woman after the fall, "Thy desire shall be unto thy husband and he shall rule over thee." But, asked Miss Clay, is this not a prophecy, rather than a command, as the "gifts and the calling of God are without repentance"? The original Divine plan indicates, therefore, the social order to follow.\(^3\)

In her speech, "Argument from Bible Teachings," Miss Clay challenged the prevailing idea that St. Paul ordered the subjection of women. She emphasized the Apostle's "doctrine of the Christian law of liberty" which he explained in saying, "With freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."

\(^1\)Speech to the church vestry, n.p., n.d., LCP.
\(^2\)Ibid.
\(^3\)Ibid.
If this was St. Paul's view, it is clear, she observed, that practical, not doctrinal, reasons led to his instructions given to early church brethren, which restricted the activity of women.¹

The Apostle taught that Christians "possess undeniable rights." However, in exercising these rights it is sometimes expedient to hold them "in abeyance for the higher good of others." She noted that the Apostle himself on occasion temporarily sacrificed some rights for expedient reasons, as he had asked early Christian women to do also. Yet, it must be remembered that the initial teaching from St. Paul was "the Christian's calling is to freedom," including the freedom of full civil liberties.²

Laura Clay's expectation that her audiences would value divine teachings was sound. The woman's movement and the American public were becoming more Christian minded, and certainly the South adhered to the Bible. In the early days of the suffrage movement, "anti-clericalism was a lusty element in its growth." But, at that time, only one American in seven was a church member, a ratio which changed by 1900 to three church members out of every seven Americans. The suffrage movement was attracting a growing membership of church-going women and men and enlisting the support of ministers. It now seemed wise to show that while "God had once kept

¹"Argument from Bible Teachings," Washington (D.C.) Woman's Tribune, 18 February 1894, LCP.
²Ibid.
woman down; now He seemed to be doing all He could do to help her up."¹ To some members of the NAWSA it was good propaganda to claim that the word of God was on their side, but for Laura Clay, the good propaganda emanated from deep, personal religious beliefs.

Laura Clay was involved in two events in the NAWSA which show the confrontation between the old anti-clericalism and the new utilization of Christian doctrine. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, president of NAWSA from 1890 to 1892, doubted the truths of the Bible and issued a commentary on the parts of it which referred to women, which she entitled the "Woman's Bible."² Laura Clay was one of those who voted against and defeated the national association's support of the publication. Miss Clay and Mrs. Stanton had had disagreements over religious beliefs before.

A report of their previous disagreement by a Kentucky newspaper points out not only the wide difference between the two women, but also the public acceptance Laura Clay had gained due to her Christian convictions. The newspaper account chastises Mrs. Stanton for her statements attacking the Bible, and, in addition, because she had "assailed many better women than herself only because they were more conservative and more wise," better women such as Miss Clay.³

The confrontation developed when Laura Clay, "one of

¹Sinclair, p. 203.
²Anthony and Harper, p. 263.
³Lexington Observer, n.d., 1895, LCP.
the earliest, most conservative and wisest leaders in the
cause of woman's rights" had objected to Mrs. Stanton's
resolution to have the World's Fair open on Sunday. Accord-
ing to Mrs. Stanton's account, when the resolution passed,
Laura Clay, "a narrow, bigoted woman, had a fit of hysterics
and in deference to her and to prevent any worse physical
results to her, I withdrew my resolution."¹

No doubt, what appeared to Mrs. Stanton as narrow-
mindedness appeared to conservative southern audiences as
Christian discipleship. The newspaper account gives testimony
to this effect, continuing that there "can be no question
that the utterances of such women as Mrs. Stanton will dis-
credit and retard the movement for equal rights." Such
women have only a little wisdom, and

when they have drunk deeper of the Pierian Spring, they
will have a better opinion of both the Scriptures and
the good women who are co-operating with them in the great
cause of universal emancipation.²

Because Laura Clay understood her southern audience,
she understood the need for a strong Biblical argument. In
a speech to her church vestry she explained that as a Chris-
tian woman speaking to other Christian women, "no other argu-
ment, however plausible, will give us full freedom to use
whatever just means our hands may find as long as one lurk-
ing doubt" lingers "that any portion of God's holy word
condemns this enlarged liberty of ours."¹ Similarly, she

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.
advised an audience present at the 1894 NAWSA Convention that "a systematic study and proclaiming of the Scriptural position of women will most completely and quickly convert people to the justice of our cause." She then referred her listeners to Christ's statement, "if ye abide in my word, then ye are truly my disciples, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." 2 In advancing the truth of the Christian word, Laura Clay sallied forth to change the popular conception of woman's role.

In addition to Christian doctrine, Laura Clay focused on the theory of natural rights to uphold a new lifestyle for women. The cornerstone documents of American democracy gave women the right to break from their traditional role into new political equality. Principles stated in the Declaration of Independence, she declared, "are so broad that they had to be uttered in generic terms; and no sound reasoning can limit them to one half of the race." 3 If evidence showed that the tenents of democracy applied to both sexes, then the claim to female enfranchisement would be warranted on the belief that equal people should be treated alike. Laura Clay developed her argument as follows:

Suffragists of America have never advanced any new theory of government in defense of their claims.

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1Speech to church vestry.

2"Argument from Bible Teachings."

3"Counterparts," Speech to NAWSA Convention, 1 June 1901, LCP.
They have only declared that they stand loyally and firmly on the fundamental principles of government accepted by our people for more than a century and a quarter of glorious national life. They are the principles for which our forefathers fought and bled. They are embodied in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution of the United States. 'Taxation without representation is tyranny.' Women are taxed. 'Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.' Women are governed. The demand for suffrage for women is not a revolution, it is only an evolution in the application of these principles. Since nature has endowed men with the qualities which make them the leaders of the race men have come into liberty prior to women; but women must share it in due time if these principles are true, and not to separate the two halves of humanity. . . . The burden of proof lies upon those who deny their application to women. They must show cause, if they can, why women should not have political liberty. We believe there is no argument against the right of women to vote which might not be equally used against the right of men to vote. 1

Audiences heard her declare that "when a man argues against the application of these principles he argues against the very principles that made him free." 2

Laura Clay emphasized that this fight for woman's justice will be won on the moral battleground. Other subject classes have seized by force their advances in social or political freedom, but "in this struggle the moral forces are and must be the only ones that can be called into operation." 3 She explained that, "We can never succeed by using forcible methods, but to bring about the speedy enfranchisement of women we must appeal to the better element of men." 4

1 Speech, no name, n.d., LCP.
2 Knoxville, no name, 1 February 1913, LCP.
3 Painesville (Oh.) Telegraph, 14 January 1891, LCP.
4 Chattanooga, no name, n.d., 1913, LCP
The moral victory would be won when men realized that humanity suffers if one half of it is kept bound to a servile position.

The political liberty which women claimed for reasons of justice was not keeping pace with other advances they were making. Intellectually and industrially, women had made gains, but politically they had been impeded by written constitutions. Laura Clay claimed that women in Kentucky were a hundred years backward in their rights. The "equality of human rights," she observed, "necessarily follows identity in capabilities and responsibilities." That women were capable and responsible was being emphasized in suffragist arguments based on expediency of the woman's vote. The arguments based on expediency which Laura Clay used to refute woman's traditional role will now be examined.

Miss Clay endeavored to show her audiences that women needed the ballot for the preservation of their own interests. Audiences must be made aware that existing laws voted in by men were not, in fact, protecting women as antisuffragists asserted. Upon this realistic conception women could claim the necessity of the ballot warranted by the belief in the basic right of self-protection for everyone.

If women suffered under man-made laws at home, they suffered even more when they left their homes to work in

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1 N.p., *The Enquirer*, 18 October 1893, LCP.
2 Harper, p. 221.
factories and mills in the changing society of the middle and late 1800's. Women were working outside of the home in growing numbers, working under the worst of situations, and working without the power of the ballot to rectify their oppressive plight.

Women working outside the home began as a condition, not as a feminist theory of independence. During the Civil War, women had had to do the work of the men who were on battlefronts. Many, both in the South and North, did the new and strange activities well, becoming "planters, millers, merchants, manufacturers, managers."¹ After the war, when thousands of men did not return to lift the work burden from women's shoulders, the widows had themselves and children to support. There were many single women who also needed to work in order to live. Labor was a necessary part of their life, not yet the symbolic achievement of personal independence it would become. But, even as a condition, it strengthened the foundation for the spirit of independence which was a part of feminist philosophy.

Greater numbers of women were drawn into working due to the advent of industrialization, which greatly altered women's lives in several ways. For some women--and children--the new change in life meant laboring long hours to sustain America's enlarging industries. It was obvious, argued suffragists, that these women needed to vote in laws to regulate their working conditions. For other women, the alteration of

¹Scott, p. 117
life brought about by the Machine Age was the lessening of economic tasks which had kept women at home. Factors such as smaller families, better health, canned food, ready-made clothes, all combined to reduce the time required for traditional household functions, and to expand leisure time, especially of urban wives.¹

Emancipated negro women, in turn, freed a great number of middle-class white women from staying home to attend to the chores of homemaking and childcare. These women could work, and they could join one or more of a variety of woman's associations, and in thus emerging from the domestic sphere, could eventually be attracted to the woman's suffrage movement, "a great middle-of-the-road movement; evidence of a slow come mass conviction representative of that most coherent tightest-welded, farthest-reaching section of society--the middle." Women out of the home became increasingly aware of the conditions of laboring women, conditions which proved the lack of male protection. In order to gain economic well being, it appeared that the gentle sex would have to vote it in themselves.

Miss Clay felt that the lack of economic independence was a great threat to women. She pointed out to her listeners that

whatever might be the case in theory, in practice many women did not have men who could support them, and yet it was generally thought that girls did not need to be educated to earn a living.²

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¹Ibid., p. 135.
²Sinclair, p. 131.
³Scott, p. 131.
She deplored loveless marriages entered into by women seeking financial security; every woman needs to feel capable of self-support. She asseverated her belief in the self-protection value of the vote in correspondence to another suffrage worker: "If I felt that women did not need the ballot for their own protection, I should certainly not devote my life to getting it for them." In the decade before suffrage was granted, she reasoned with her audiences that self-protection through the ballot was vital to working women. A sample rhetorical effort demonstrates her persuasive posture:

The United States' census of 1880 showed something upwards of 2,000,000 of wage-earning women and girls over ten years of age. In ten years, by the census of 1890 the number had grown to more than three millions / sic /; and again in 1900 it had risen to more than 5,300,000. The figures of the census of 1910 are not yet available, but we have every reason to believe that they will show from seven million to nine million of women and girls working for wages outside of their homes. Seven millions of women! . . . Most of them young, many of them receiving very small wages, all of them withdrawn from the protection of home, which had been the safeguard for all preceding generations of women, and with no commensurate provision for the extension of the protection of law to replace that which has been lost to them. There is not, there cannot be, any greater moral, sociological or industrial problem before the American people than the due protection of these millions of industrial women, thrown into new relations with the outside world by the relentless requirements of modern industry. Who can believe that the position of these unenfranchised laborers is as safe and favorable as it would be if women enjoyed the share in government which the political principles of our country declare to be justly theirs? These women are the daughters of the nation;

1Laura Clay to Mrs. Upton, 17 September 1906, LCP.
what man would undertake the care of a family of daughters without the aid of their mother? So these daughters of the nation need the ballot in the hands of the mother sex, so that mother care may be exercised in making and executing the laws which must now in such large part replace that care and protection which mothers and home threw around them.¹

In her speeches, Miss Clay indicted those men and women who were indifferent to the hardships of women. She criticized the woman who would "say in her sweet womanly way, I prefer privileges to rights," observing that the indifference of privileged women to rights was "a serious barrier to the large class of women denied either privileges or rights in getting what is their due."² Men who opposed female suffrage for selfish reasons had their counterpart in women who allow their mental horizon to be narrowed down to personal objects, shutting out great principles; in women who are unwilling to make sacrifices of ease for maintenance of the most sacred rights."³

Laura Clay challenged men to fulfill their responsibilities to women. She objected that, "If women do not yet appreciate citizenship, it is the fault of the men." They should teach women to value the ballot. Rebuking men for not doing so, she said, if they have not taught women "it is for two reasons of which you can take your choice. Either men do not love women enough, or they do not value the chief right of citizenship as they should."⁴ Another time

¹Speech, no name, n.d., LCP.
²Greensville (S.C.) Daily News, 30 April 1895, LCP.
³Painesville (Ch.) Telegraph, 14 January 1891.
⁴Nashville Banner, 10 January 1913, LCP.
she told her listeners, "'When men need the help of women, they cry liberty, equality and fraternity; and when the women come to the front and respond," helping to win whatever the struggle may be, "the men ungrateful creatures that they are, say; "Women, wait yet awhile.'"¹ Men must now reciprocate by giving women the vote.

What men must be made to see is that many women did not feel represented by them, and needed and desired their own ballot. Laura Clay believed that men harbored great good will for women, but that good will was not enough.

No matter how much men may desire to be just to women, since nature does not give them ability to see with their own eyes and women's too, women will always need the ballot in their own hands to maintain equal rights for both sexes."²

Laura Clay had argued for a change in woman's role based on the doctrines of natural rights and Christianity. Feminist philosophy was founded upon the "inalienable rights" of women as well as of men and to this concept of equal status, Miss Clay had added arguments drawn from the Bible. Along with the bulk of arguments establishing the justice of woman suffrage, Miss Clay and other suffragists began to build a case for the expediency of woman suffrage.

The suffragist expediency argument advanced from what benefits individual women could receive from the vote to what benefits society would receive. A specific argument

¹Lexington Leader, 13 November 1908, LCP.
²Louisville Courier-Journal, 1 March 1896, LCP.
used by Laura Clay referred to the dual nature of humanity. She explained that every generation of men as well as women suffered from the educational and political limitations imposed upon the mothers who were raising them. It was apparent, she said, that "the rights of women mean in the very highest sense the rights of men, the rights of humanity." In an era resounding with discussions of Darwin's new theory and of eugenics, these arguments probably had extra appeal to her audiences. An excerpt from a speech, "Counterparts," delivered at the 1901 NAWSA convention, shows more fully her development of this argument:

Any social system founded on a theory designed for the elevation of one sex above the other is altogether false and delusive to the expectations built upon it. For the human race is dual and heredity keeps the stock common from which both men and women spring. Since the common stock is improved and invigorated by the acquired qualities of individuals without regard to sex; and as the acquired qualities are imparted even more widely and permanently by ideas than by parenthood, it is to the advantage of both that all possibilities of development shall be extended to both sexes. All that woman has lost by social systems which denied to her education and free expression of her genius in art, literature or statesmanship has been lost to man also because it has diminished the inheritable riches of the nature from which he draws his existence. He has been less, though unhampered by the shackles which bound her, because she has been less.

Laura Clay, however, more commonly used arguments which alluded to more practical reforms than did this philosophical view of humanity.

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1Painesville (Oh.) Telegraph, 14 January 1891, LCP.
2"Counterparts."
During a reformist period, "the future woman voter was portrayed as more reformist than male voters, and more likely to be an active, participating citizen."¹ The new social gospel which advocated government more as a social welfare agency than as a way to prevent men from interfering with one another's rights could use the well-desired votes of women. In this reform era, "suffrage ceased to be advocated primarily as a reform and became in addition a means to a reform."² Political movements outside the woman's movement believed in the regenerating influence of women and one by one were espousing woman's suffrage.

Reforms could be accomplished by women, not because they were the same as men as previously stressed, but because they were different. They had a duty to share their particular skills with their communities. Laura Clay phrased it this way:

What American suffragists want to introduce into politics is the feminine element. We do not want to imitate men. . . . We are going to be women in politics. We are going to do those very things which men, just because they are men, cannot do, or must do badly. When we enter politics, we do it in order to give the State the finest feminity of which we are capable. We do not mean to compare and measure ourselves by what men have achieved, but to bring our highest ideals to the Government, if it takes three generations. The present contest is not between men and women even if it is admitted that there is a contest. It is between the new ideas and the old.¹

Because home was the old woman's sphere, the new character

¹Morgan, p. 156.
²Kraditor, p. 66.
of "enlarged housekeeping assumed by government depended on
the insights of women. Women believed

that their training as cooks, seamstresses, housecleaners,
and mothers qualified them to help in legislation con-
cerned with food inspection, sweatshop sanitation, street-
cleaning, and public schools."\textsuperscript{2}

The social benefits gained by women voting for
children and the home were alluded to often in Laura Clay's
speeches. With the aid of a homely, domestic example, she
expounded this argument to her many audiences during 1913:

The fact is, any solicitude about woman's loss of
time from home duties on account of voting is entirely
out of place. Rightly considered and sensibly exer-
cized, the ballot is a wonderful labor saver for women
as housekeepers and mothers. For instance, we all
know that in the cities there are ordinances for
street cleaning and where there are great factories
sending out clouds of thick smoke, there are smoke
consuming ordinances. We all know, also, that fre-
quently these ordinances are very imperfectly enforc-
ed, and when they are not, clouds of dust come into
women's houses, and settle on their carpets and
furniture because those most interested in cleanliness
have no voice in enforcing them. Now how much easier
it would be for women on election day to put on their
street suit, go to the polls and drop a nice ballot
into a box, rather than get up early, put on their
working gown, and scrub and scrub to get the dirt and
smoke out of their clean houses. . . . And there are
laws regarding the care of the public health, and the
purity of food which concern women and their work
most intimately. No doubt, men desire these laws to
be enforced as well as women; but those things fall
in the line of women's work, and they will always be
more zealous in their enforcement than men. . . .
There are many things which most nearly concern the
life interests and work of women which have undergone
radical changes along with other industrial changes;
and which must be readjusted to meet the modern demands.
Women will always be the homemakers; but since the
modern forms of industry have taken out of the hands of

\textsuperscript{1}Goodman, p. xvi.

\textsuperscript{2}Kraditor, p. 66.
the individual homemaker her personal supervision of the manufacture of clothing and providing food supplies, and the care of the labor of her daughters, that supervision must, to be effective, be given by the combined care of the women of the community. Men have a right to expect that women shall give intelligent direction to those things which make for the health, the comfort and the general welfare of the family.¹

Laura Clay often used examples to illustrate the practical good accomplished by women. Her listeners were apprised of the fact that Congress allotted three million dollars to study the diseases of pigs but only thirty thousand dollars to study the sicknesses of children, and that the latter appropriation came as the result of the efforts of women.² The direct influence of women voting would alter this imbalance. Women had also influenced the enactment of pure food laws, she pointed out. Yet, they needed the ballot to do more.

Often objections were raised that women would have to mingle with all classes at the polls and that they would be leaving their children in order to vote. Miss Clay pointed out that if women can mingle with all classes in the business and industrial world for 364 days, they wouldn't be harmed by mingling at the polls one day a year.³ When people asked, "What will become of the baby when women vote?" she replied that a woman should get the same person to tend

¹Speech, no name, n.d., LCP.

²Pontiac (Mich.) Press Gazette, 9 March 1913, n.p., Times News, 30 March 1913; Nashville Banner, 10 January 1913; Chattanooga Daily Times, 29 January 1913, LCP.

³Knoxville, no name, 1 February 1913, LCP.
the child as she did when she went to pay her taxes. She also answered the criticism that if women voted, their husbands would have to spend election day babysitting. Her solution was that the parents take the "baby in its carriage and roll it to the polls and while one of them voted, the other could stand outside and care for the baby." She added that if it were necessary, "the candidates could be kept at the polls to take care of the children while his supporters cast their ballots." Her audience greeted this remark with much laughter.

More serious objections raised by southern men against the new woman's role concerned the militancy of some women. This militancy induced the apprehension that voting women "would bring the whole complex of extreme feminist demands from easy divorce to the right of mixed marriages." The association of radical women with abolition was still strong. Also, radical females were the antithesis of the southern ideal woman. Therefore, when militant English suffragettes made headlines, Laura Clay took pains to clarify the differences between American suffragists and their British sisters.

Although the goals of both groups were similar, English suffragettes believed that the temperament and repressiveness of their countrymen necessitated more extreme

1 Pontiac (Mich.) Press Gazette, 10 March 1913, LCP.

2 Knoxville, no name, 1 February 1913, LCP.

3 Sinclair, p. 296.
measures, she explained. Such drastic activities would not be necessary in the United States because American statesmen had begun to recognize and make adjustments to the changed conditions of women's lives. The policies in the two countries are different—only England being unresponsive to the great suffering of half of its population. While "Americans must deplore the excesses of the English suffragettes," she said, they must honor the spirit of those women who, believing that their enfranchisement is right, "are willing to be roughly handled by police, to be thrust into filthy prisons and condemned to hard labor, like convicted felons."¹ To nullify the conception of suffragists as radicals, Miss Clay took care never to support any immoderate demand, from dress reform to bicycling. This moderate course obviously helped assuage southern fears of unsexed females.

The claim of suffragists to voting power premised on expediency was effective. Male reformers of the day anticipated zealous support from female voters and believed the claim of expediency advanced by suffrage leaders. Flanked by the argument of justice on one side and expediency on the other, a new woman's role was being successfully shaped by Miss Clay. Another issue awaited her, and she confronted the question of unlimited suffrage with arguments also premised on the justice and expediency of the

¹Speech, no name, n.d., LCP.
woman's vote.

Although the emergence of the woman's movement came from abolitionism and the belief in natural rights, the suffrage movement had problems regarding universal enfranchisement. Sentiment was rising for the restriction of voting powers to only "suitable" members of the American population, a reaction to the fear of dominance by inferior breeds.

'How can I,' asked a woman from Florida, 'with the blood of heroes in my heart, and with the free and independent spirit they bequeathed me, quietly submit to representation by the alien and the negro?'

Suffrage leader Anna Shaw emoted:

'Never before in the history of the world have men made former slaves the political masters of their former mistresses! . . . There is not a colour from white to black, from red to yellow, there is not a nation from pole to pole, that does not send its contingent to govern American women.'

On the race issue, Miss Clay presented arguments that woman suffrage would diminish the negro vote, not increase it to thereby destroy the southern political system. Two strategies were open to southern suffragists: they could appeal overtly to racism and demand the color qualification of white for voters, or they could demand a less radical educational qualification for voters. Extremist suffrage leader Kate Gordon of New Orleans pursued the former course. An examination of her strategy and Miss Clay's attitude towards it reveal the difference between the extreme and conservative southern positions.

1Sinclair, p. 296
Kate Gordon wrote that she was "absolutely opposed to the Suffrage Association opening the question of suffrage upon anything else but a white basis." She noted the difficulty with which negro men had been excluded from voting in the states where they formed a sizeable group. Only by establishing the stipulation of color could an "honest white supremacy" be maintained to get rid of the fraudulent voting conditions surrounding the southern right to vote. She proposed to direct a campaign for white woman's suffrage in Mississippi.¹

Miss Clay did not believe it desirable or just to support a color stipulation for the franchise. It was unwise for the NAWSA to espouse such a requirement, and it was in opposition to the principles of representative government.

Laura Clay's concern over the Mississippi campaign prompted her to write a letter to Anna Howard Shaw, then president of the NAWSA. She wrote that she was not in favor of the national association endorsing a campaign with the word "white" for a qualification. In terms of expediency, it would be a poor policy for the NAWSA to endorse such a qualification. She also doubted that it would stand the test of constitutionality. As an experimental venture for Mississippi to undertake it was advisable, but to expect it to receive the sanction of suffragists everywhere would be poor judgment.²

¹Kate Gordon to Laura Clay, 11 October 1907, LCP.
²Laura Clay to Miss Shaw, 30 October 1907, LCP.
In terms of justice, Miss Clay was not opposed to negroes voting. She did, however, believe in the necessity of an educated electorate and in justice to the white woman. Her personal view was a "desire to see every fit person endowed with the ballot, as the rightful expression of the inalienable right of self government."\(^1\) Because the ballot gives one the right to rule, not only oneself but others, only citizens who were responsible should have voting power. She believed that her particular audience, the southern people, "do not hate the negro; but they do not indulge in any delusions about a childish and irresponsible race." She held the opinion that people in the South feared being overwhelmed by the negro vote which would cause the loss of "civilization as white Americans have maintained it, and a decline to a state of society suited to the mental and moral development of negroes."\(^2\)

She reiterated her stand against a color qualification for suffrage in a "Woman's Column" reply to a racist argument. In an article, George Wilson had advocated the disenfranchisement of all negroes, remarking that northern Republicans felt that negroes ought not to have political power over southern whites. Miss Clay objected, saying that the sense of justice pervading citizens of both sections would not permit the disenfranchisement of an entire race.

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Laura Clay to Mrs. McCulloch, 13 December 1907, LCP.
She wrote:

What the South has a right to complain of is not that negroes have a representation at the ballot box, but that they have a representation out of all proportion to the intelligence and virtue they bring to the support of Republican government.¹

The problem confronting the South was how to maintain a supremacy of the more highly developed individuals without repudiating the democratic principles of representation for every class.

An educational qualification imposed on a new class of voting women would be an expedient solution. She explained to her southern readers three ways in which women suffrage would help maintain an educated white supremacy. First, as illiteracy was much greater among black than among white women and would continue that way for many years, enfranchisement of educated women would guarantee a preponderance of the white vote. Secondly, she referred to the last United States census which showed that there were more educated women than men, white or black, "so that the votes of educated women would neutralize the vote of illiterate men, and leave a balance on the side of education." Thirdly, even in the two states, South Carolina and Mississippi, where negroes were the predominant race, an additional electorate of educated women "would give the whites a clear majority of eleven thousand votes." Upholding white supremacy in this manner would neither corrupt nor intimidate the

¹Lexington Gazette, n.d., 1890, LCP.
negroes, a method that ran counter to the integrity of democratic institutions.¹

Laura Clay made efforts to adapt her arguments to her audience. The citing of statistics was effective in emphasizing that woman suffrage would not create an insurmountable negro electorate. Miss Clay gave the advice to another suffrage worker that there exists "a very universal habit of greatly exaggerating the number of the vote of negro women" whenever the fact of their voting is used as an argument against woman suffrage.² If one learns the reliable statistics and presents them to an audience, she will allay their fears concerning the number of possible enfranchised negro women. A South Carolina newspaper noted that she tailored her argument specifically for them. "A Southern woman to the backbone," Miss Clay understood the conditions in the state "and was in thorough sympathy with the effort to safeguard white supremacy." In other states she advocated universal woman suffrage, but "here she only spoke for enfranchisement of property-owning women," being aware of the "impractibility of allowing all women of the state to vote."³ It was important also, she felt, to "lay stress on the fact that society loses more by entirely excluding the feminine element from government than it can

¹Ibid.

²Laura Clay to Miss F. Hoge, 4 September 1906, LCP.

³Columbia (S.C.) Daily Register, 24 November 1895, LCP.
possibly be injured by the added difficulty" of the negro woman's vote.¹

She believed that in order to secure the franchise to white women, the negro women might have to wait. However, obtaining the vote for the white women, "will not be taking anything from negro women, and it will improve the laws for both races."²

In spite of all her comments to the contrary, an Oklahoma newspaper censured Laura Clay on grounds of discrimination for her position advocating an educational requirement for voting. She refuted the charge and wrote in a letter to the editor of the Oklahoma Post:

So far from appealing to prejudice, I distinctly pointed out that this solution of the race problem was the one which would insure the most dignified position for the negro voters; because it would be a guarantee that their votes would be as untrammelled as those of any other voters.³

Miss Clay does not seem to deserve the racist label sometimes applied to her. Her personal sense of justice was too strong to permit her to indulge in racial hatred. Perhaps some of this feeling derived from her father's active career fighting for abolitionism. Justice prevented her from denying negroes the franchise, but political expediency made the educational requirement for voting women a wise argument. Nevertheless, even this requirement was

¹Laura Clay to Miss F. Hoge, 4 September 1906, LCP.
²Laura Clay to Mr. Blackwell, 14 October 1907, LCP.
³Laura Clay to Editor of Oklahoma Post, 10 January 1907, LCP.
insufficient to overcome southern objections to female
suffrage.

A potent source of opposition was the conviction of
southern men that it would be more difficult to exclude the
vote of negro women than negro men.\(^1\) A Mississippi senator
phrased the classic objection this way:

We are not afraid to maul a black man over the head if
he dares to vote, but we can't treat women, even black
women that way. No we'll allow no woman suffrage. It
may be right, but we won' have it.\(^2\)

States rights became of paramount importance to southerners
wishing to maintain state control of elections.

As NAWSA enthusiasm for the federal amendment grew, Miss
Clay grew more fervent in her support of states rights.
Unlike her position of woman's role and the race issue, she
could not adopt the northern rhetorical position and espouse
a federal amendment. The next chapter will highlight her
spirited support of states rights which marked the last
years of her suffrage career and charted her course away
from that followed by the national association.
CHAPTER III

LAURA CLAY: SPOKESWOMAN FOR STATES RIGHTS

Whether suffragists should seek enfranchisement via individual state legislation or a federal amendment was a dilemma the NAWSA inherited from its two parent associations which merged in 1890. Laura Clay held membership in the American Woman Suffrage Association which had favored the state-by-state strategy while the National Woman Suffrage Association had supported the federal approach. When the NAWSA was created, an attempt was made to accommodate both priorities for many years. This policy was due, in part, to the deference paid to the old leaders of each association who brought with them followers loyal to their particular approach to gaining enfranchisement. The suffrage movement

1 The cause of abolitionism had spurred women into rhetorical activity leading to their demands for their own emancipation as well. When the suffrage of women was withheld while negroes obtained the ballot, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony reacted by splintering off from the anti-slavery forces in 1868. They organized a National Woman Suffrage Association to promote woman's suffrage. The following year, Lucy Stone, another prominent woman abolitionist leader established the American Woman Suffrage Association which accepted the priorities of the abolitionist movement--negroes first, women second. The method of gaining female enfranchisement was another bone of contention between the two suffrage organizations. Antagonism divided the two feminist factions for two decades until they compromised differences and joined forces to obtain greater strength. Sinclair, pp. 186-191.
had gained new recruits through the personal contacts of
the leaders, by a "laying on of hands."¹

Leaders were important in defining the direction
taken by the national, state, or local suffrage groups. The
assets, liabilities, and views of each leader shaped the
changing nature of the movement concerning the favored
method of seeking enfranchisement and the persuasive tactics
which were used. Under the direction of Susan B. Anthony,
annual conventions of the NAWSA were always held in Wash-
ington, D.C. enabling suffragists to lobby in Congress for
the federal amendment. In her view, it was

the business of the states to do the district work; to create public sentiment; to make a national organiza-
tion possible; and then to bring their united power to the Capitol and focus it on Congress.²

As the suffrage movement became more widespread, the feeling grew among other active suffragists that the conven-
tions should be taken to the people. In 1893, the national association voted to institute this new plan, meeting in various parts of the country and in Washington only on alternate years.³ While Miss Anthony opposed this move, the many suffragists in the areas of the country at some distance from the capitol city applauded the idea of a yearly rotating convention which could ignite suffrage

¹Sinclair, p. 155.
²Flexner, p. 221.
enthusiasm in their respective site.

In order to promote suffragism in the South, Laura Clay proposed in 1894 that the next convention be held in Cincinnati. She observed that the NAWSA wasn't rightfully national because the "'South has not been represented . . . . / sic / the women know nothing about the National-American . . . . . take the convention where they will hear us . . . ."

1 Although the next meeting was not held in Cincinnati, successive conventions did gather in the various cities of Atlanta, Georgia; Des Moines, Iowa; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and New Orleans, Louisiana as well as other regional locales.

Rotating convention sites were not the only changes Miss Anthony witnessed in the suffrage association as the movement entered the new century. The benefits female enfranchisement would give to society was emphasized more than the benefits female enfranchisement would give to women. The movement had grown in respectability, drawing not only bold women willing to speak out, but the more timorous willing to step forward as well. By World War I, it had become socially acceptable to be a suffragist, and millions of middle class women were now numbered in the movement. 2 Wealthy women and wives of professional men also supported the suffragists with both their prestige and


2 Sinclair, p. 226.
their finances. As the needs of laboring women were being heard with increasing concern by the national association's members, the movement began to form a common bond cutting across class lines. Backed by increasing public sentiment, the suffragists boasted of the inevitability of their goal.

The nature of the movement was changing additionally due to the increased membership of suffragists from the South and the West. The growing members of southern recruits brought with them the passion for white supremacy, which merged with the penchant for nativism being expressed in the North. Because hard-fought state campaigns in the West had earned suffrage victories, nationwide state campaigns were on the increase. Subsequently, the federal amendment was not being pressed by any organizational impulse from within the movement. There was no clear-cut federal strategy and the national suffrage movement floundered in "the doldrums."2

The 'doldrums' continued from 1896 to 1910, a period in which women won no additional state suffrage campaigns and the federal amendment seemed forgotten. Part of this indecisive strategy was due to the leadership of Anna Howard Shaw who possessed talents of superb public speaking rather

1 Flexner, p. 258.

2 While women were achieving better status legally, socially, and educationally during the years from 1896 to 1910, the period "came to be known among suffragists as 'the doldrums,'" a term they chose to indicate the lack of suffrage progress. Flexner, p. 248.

3 Ibid.
than policy-making ability. While she was president of the
NAWSA from 1904 to 1915, she did not press the federal
amendment because she feared the antagonism of the South.1

The suffragists' rhetorical strategy was mired in
instructions to "organize, organize, organize, to the end
of educating, educating, educating public opinion."2 This
static approach held little appeal for a growing movement
of suffragists who felt that more decisive action was now
needed. However, after 1910 the movement began to achieve
some advances and to formulate policies under new leader-
ship, mainly that of the superb organizer, Carrie Chapman
Catt, who served twice as President of the NAWSA, 1900
to 1904, and 1915 to 1920.

Several obvious conditions in the 1913 suffrage scene
helped determine future NAWSA policy making.3 These condi-
tions forecast a strategy which would promote the federal
amendment in lieu of the state-by-state method. Specif-
ically, two suffragist victories in 1911, California and Wash-
ington, ended the "doldrums." These triumphs, however also
stimulated increased vigilance on the part of anti-suffrage
liquor and business interests who were not likely to be
cought unaware again.4

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1 Sinclair, p. 301.
2 Flexner, p. 250.
3 Ibid., pp. 260-1.
4 Suffragists continually battled the liquor interests
in their state and federal campaigns. Liquor and beer
A review of the states in 1913 which allowed women some form of suffrage revealed that none was politically important. In future campaigns for politically important states, it seemed logical to assume that the forces of the opposition would increase in proportion to the political importance of the state, making these campaigns much harder for suffragists to win. The question forthcoming was, "Under such circumstances, was the state-by-state 'route' to woman suffrage the preferable and most promising one?"¹ NAWSA members increasingly began to see the plan of concentrating their efforts behind a federal amendment as the most efficient course. While sentiment for a federal amendment was picking up in the NAWSA, other plans for states rights were developing in which Laura Clay would become active as her leadership in the national association was ending.

Ironically, Laura Clay's service as a board member of the NAWSA ended at the 1911 convention held in Louisville, Kentucky. The events preceding that loss evidence the initial stages of the national association's dwindling regard for states rights. A new constitution for the suffrage organization was proposed and Miss Clay heartily opposed it.

suppliers expected enfranchised females to greatly increase the forces of prohibition and used many fraudulent methods to defeat suffragism. Flexner, pp. 222-25; Morgan, pp. 157-65. The business interests were those of southern and northern cotton mill owners who realized that women would effect changes in the child labor laws. Morgan, pp. 166-74.

¹Flexner, p. 261.
She objected to new provisions which would tend to de-emphasize the importance of the state associations and give more power to the central board. Ultimately, she was arguing for a states rights organization within the structure of the NAWSA. She exhorted the association to retain its sectional representation because, in her opinion, it would aid their persuasive efforts.

Miss Clay believed that sectional representation, or states rights, was the just form of government by the people. She chose, however, to argue before the NAWSA that states rights would be an expedient rhetorical strategy to maintain sectional support. In the following excerpt from her 1911 speech against the new NAWSA constitution, she argued for sectional representation within the association as the best method of effective persuasion that suffragists could use as they appealed to the heterogeneous American public.

As the object of the N.A.W.S.A. is propagandism of the principles of Woman Suffrage an essential branch of its service is to present them in an aspect to command them to the unconverted multitudes in all sections of the country, diversified as they are in political opinion, business interests and social views. If the public shall learn that the N.A.W.S.A. in convention assembled had actually resorted to a constitutional revision for the purpose of excluding all women except those in the vicinity of New York from its official honors the effect would be to create indifference or arouse positive antagonism to it among the people of the excluded sections. No plea of increased business efficiency would ever soften the offended feeling. Sectional representation through officials connected with the N.A.W.S.A. which the present constitution and practice emphasize, is the best, the quickest, the easiest and immensely the cheapest means to win friends to its support in the various sections and groups of states. Personal sympathy with sectional feeling, familiarity with the social and political ideas and skill in presenting the suffrage cause in aspects in harmony with them are the
agencies of its usefulness to the Association. It is evident that such service can be rendered usually better by persons living in these sections rather than resident at headquarters, since a little circle in close vicinity to New York could scarcely hope for more of such influence outside of their own sections than might be exerted by the firm of a New York publishing house.¹

Nevertheless, with some compromises, the new constitution was approved in spite of Miss Clay's rhetorical efforts. Laura Clay's second defeat of the convention came during the election of officers.

Although Laura Clay was nominated for four offices in the board election, she was soundly defeated each time. Accounts of the election provide foundation to the charge that she was maneuvered out by an eastern faction wishing to restrict control of the NAWSA to themselves.² Yet, she achieved some triumph in spite of her defeats. Many suffragists wrote to her, complimenting her for her generous, hospitable attitude toward the board during their stay in Kentucky. She received support similar to the following letter which came from a loyal friend within the NAWSA:

'The steam roller went over Laura Clay four times and yet she remains greater than the roller. Your magnanimity of spirits when you continued your constant helpfulness to Miss Shaw on convention business, your generous pledge, your alert attention to details no other board member remembers, all of this has won you friends among strangers...'

¹ "The New Constitution," Speech to NAWSA, 10 September 1911, LCP.
³ Mrs. McCulloch to Laura Clay, 25 October 1911, LCP, quoted in Fuller, p. 286.
Laura Clay continued her membership in the national association, but turned her time and energy to representing the needs of the South which were being neglected by the national suffrage association.

Miss Clay became vice president of the Southern States Woman Suffrage Conference (SSWSC), organized in 1913. It was intended as a "flank movement" for woman suffrage and was not meant to be a rival of the NAWSA.¹ One reason for the existence of this group was given by a suffragist:

"There is so much said by Southern men that Southern women do not want suffrage we just had to have something and call it Southern."² But the major strategic advantage hoped for was that states rights suffrage could be pursued through persuasive tactics aimed at the Democratic party, mainly in the South. With Kate Gordon and Laura Clay as president and vice president, the group attempted to bring the Democratic party to declare for woman suffrage, and made this the "field for immediate, intensive propaganda."³

Members of the SSWSC designed several arguments to compel the Democrats to declare for woman suffrage. Their case was constructed on both threats and pleas premised on party expediency. Pointedly, they threatened southern Democrats that if they did not aid female enfranchisement,

¹Laura Clay to Mrs. Harrison, 30 November 1914, LCP.
²Ibid.
the women of their states would turn to the men in the other sections for woman suffrage. Support for a federal amendment would then be insurmountable. The issue could additionally be force, warned the association, if the Democrats in Western states having woman suffrage would call for the South to incorporate woman suffrage as a means of preserving party unity.¹

The SSWSC appealed strongly to the Democratic party to enfranchise the women of the South by state legislation as a matter of expediency. The Democrats, rather than the Republicans, would thereby receive credit for this last, important extension of suffrage. The association also observed that if the one-party South was slow to act, the states would be presented with a federal amendment. For their own protection, southern Democrats would not ratify the amendment and would thus bear the stigma of this affront to women. Members of the SSWSC believed that "the Democratic Party cannot and will not force on the South a federal amendment contrary to the policies and traditions of the party."²

Laura Clay was not as enthusiastic about a sectional organization as was Kate Gordon.³ Miss Clay assuredly did not want the new organization to alienate the national

¹Kate Gordon to "My Dear Fellow-Suffragist," n.d., 1914, LCP.

²Letter from Kate Gordon, 28 December 1916, LCP.

³Fuller, p. 322.
association's members. As long as the NAWSA pledged to work for appropriate state and federal legislation together, Miss Clay could be happy with its policy. Miss Clay, however, did use arguments espoused by the SSWSC.

Laura Clay had been arguing for several years that the party which indorsed woman's suffrage would receive the loyalty of woman voters. In a *Lexington Herald's* "Woman Column" article, 1892, she noted how the Republicans had gained strength by enfranchising the negroes. The Democrats should be wise, she advised, and follow that example. When women received suffrage, "the party that gives them that will secure their gratitude and their allegiance."¹ She had used this argument of expediency in South Carolina, in 1895, telling her audience that woman suffrage was inevitable and the Democratic party should end this great question and earn "the gratitude of the vast army of new voters."²

To disseminate their arguments, the SSWSC utilized several tactics in addition to public speaking. Kate Gordon directed that

propaganda must be spread through the 5700 news agencies of the south by a capable Press Agent; thro / sic / a series of State and Legislative Conferences; thro resolutions before the business leagues of the south; thro selected literature.³

The group established headquarters in New Orleans and within

¹*Lexington Gazette*, 3 December 1892, LCP.
²*Greensville (S.C.) Daily News*, 30 April 1895, LCP.
³Kate Gordon to "My Dear Fellow Suffragist," n.d., 1914, LCP.
a year was publishing a monthly suffrage magazine, the *New Southern Citizen*. The southern flank movement had to provide its own finances, as the national failed to channel any funds to it. The work of the SSWSC reached a major goal when the Democrats declared for suffrage by state enactment in the 1916 party platform and, for all practical purposes, the association ended its work soon after.

Within the NAWSA two concluding states rights approaches were attempted. The Shafroth-Palmer Amendment, proposed in 1914, was much more to southern liking than the Anthony Amendment. The Shafroth-Palmer Amendment provided that upon petition for woman suffrage by eight percent of the legal voters of a state, that state would vote and decide the question of female enfranchisement within its borders. The effect of the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment was to strengthen the demands of the SSWSC on southern politicians. In the *New Southern Citizen*, articles appeared urging the Democrats to support the Amendment and enfranchise the women of their section. The suffragists of the South, however, were unable to deliver their own enfranchisement within their own states, and in 1915 the NAWSA dropped the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment.

An additional states rights approach was a compromise between the state and federal positions proposed by Laura

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1 Harper, p. 672.
2 Ibid. p. 416.
3 Morgan, p. 95.
Clay in 1914 and called the United States Election Bill. She believed that many southern suffragists would pursue federal work, and that they should be directed by a plan in harmony with states rights. The SSWSC endorsed the Election Bill as did the NAWSA. It was a bill providing woman suffrage for United States Senators, Representatives, and Presidential Electors by the approval of Congress. Congress "had authority over the election of its Representatives" and later its Senators; it could decide the nature of the elections and qualifications of the voters by power conferred in Article I, Section 2, of the Constitution. Miss Clay promoted this plan for federal suffrage in Congressional elections only, feeling that it featured principles both states rights and federal amendment advocates could support. People who believed in states rights and who wouldn't jeopardize their freedom could see that most election policies would still be determined locally. In terms of expediency, proponents of the federal route, she believed, would find the Election Bill a shorter approach than the federal amendment which would certainly be blocked by the South.

Laura Clay lobbied in Washington for the Election Bill with "all the prestige of her family back of her and

1 Harper, p. 424.
2 Fuller, p. 327.
3 Harper, p. 424.
4 Fuller, p. 330.
with all her commanding ability, supported it by unanswerable argument."¹ Neither the Congress nor the NAWSA paid much attention to the United States Election Bill. Aside from being an unexciting plan, similar to the Shafroth-Palmer Amendment, the Election Bill was not in Mrs. Catt's winning strategy which took precedence over all other strategies in 1916.²

The confrontation between a states rights plan and a federal plan came to a head in the NAWSA Atlantic City Emergency Convention called in 1916. Earlier that year, the Republicans, followed by the Democrats, had endorsed woman suffrage via state enactment in their national platforms, an action which was met with satisfaction by southerners. The NAWSA Board was not satisfied, however, and one-half hour after the close of the Democratic Convention, the suffragist leaders met.³ Their major decision was to call an emergency convention in Atlantic City later that year. The board members did not want the suffrage issue to be left to the states or to be captured by one party in the shuffling of campaign promises during the 1916 election year.

Suffragists converged upon Atlantic City in September to convene in this extraordinary session. A "three-cornered debate" on the issue was arranged. The leader of each of the three groups was allowed ten minutes and the second

¹Harper, p. 660.
²Fuller, p. 322.
³Morgan, p. 109.
speaker five minutes to speak on the affirmative side of her question. Laura Clay led the presentation of the view, "Shall the National American Woman Suffrage Association drop work on the Federal Amendment and confine its activities to State legislation?" Her second was Kate Gordon. The other two positions presented were:

Shall the National American Woman Suffrage Association drop work for State Referenda and concentrate on the Federal Amendment? and Shall the present policy of the National American Woman Suffrage Association to work for woman suffrage "by appropriate National and State legislation" be continued?

Discussion from the floor was heard after all six arguments were presented, and then each leader could speak for ten minutes on the opposition given her view.1

In her speech at the Emergency Convention, Laura Clay disclaimed the federal amendment as a "means of saving time and labor; in a word, as a 'short cut' to woman suffrage." She tried to persuade the delegates that the federal route was, "on the contrary, long, drawn-out and precarious." Because proponents of the federal amendment were building a case upon expediency, Laura Clay had to respond by showing that their plan would not, indeed, be expedient or advisable. In trying to make them see the harm in discarding the individual states approach, she drew on the example of historical precedent:

The history of the . . . two war amendments, which are those involving the doctrine of States Rights, is stormy. Congress proposed the 14th Amendment. Only 23 States out of 37 would ratify it. The Congress passed

1Harper, pp. 486-7.
the Reconstruction Acts. The governments of two of the insurgent States were not recognized; they were put under military government and refused re-admission and representation in Congress until the 14th Amendment should be ratified. Under this coercion those ten States ratified the Amendment and carried it; though four non-insurgent States never ratified it.

In that provision of the 14th Amendment by which States were to lose representation in Congress in proportion to the number of male citizens who might be excluded from suffrage there was incorporated in the Constitution for the first time a provision for protecting male citizens which did not extend protection to female citizens and the women of the United States by the result of the Reconstruction Acts were discriminated against in the supreme law of the land and given nearly a million of new political masters in the persons of the emancipated negro man.

The 15th Amendment was carried by the same tactics; though the number of non-insurgent States which did not ratify increased to eight.

The Anthony Amendment is a repetition of the 15th, with the substitution of the word "sex" for "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Before it can become law it must be ratified by the legislatures of 36 States. It is hardly to be supposed that the ten coerced States now will subscribe voluntarily to a principle which they rejected formerly; and if even three of the eight others which refused to ratify the 15th Amendment remain of the same mind the Anthony Amendment cannot be ratified. Nothing but coercion made the 15th Amendment possible; and what reason have we to suppose that anything less than coercion will pass the Anthony Amendment? In fact, I believe it is usually admitted by those most zealous to push the Amendment at any cost that coercion will be necessary; and as military coercion is no longer among the possibilities they propose a political coercion by the votes of women who have won votes by peaceable methods in conformity with the well-defined divisions between State and Federal powers.¹

Laura Clay tried to show the superiority of the states rights plan over the federal amendment method, but she couldn't stop the tide of pro-federal sentiment. The convention heard three positions argued and then decided in

¹"Shall work be dropped on the Federal Amendment and efforts confined to State legislation?" Speech to NAWSA, Atlantic City, n.d., September 1916, LCP.
favor of a resolution for the federal amendment. The resolution proclaimed that

all forces be concentrated on the Federal Amendment in the last session of the 64th Congress; pledging the support of the state organization; and authorizing the national board to take such direction of the work in the states as may be necessary to accomplish this end.¹

Laura Clay and Kate Gordon went on record as opposing the last part of the 1916 resolution. When asked at the convention whether they would vote if woman's suffrage were granted by a federal amendment instead of state action, Kate Gordon staunchly replied no. Laura Clay, however, answered, "Yes, I reckon I'd vote no matter how the ballot came to me!"²

An explanation is necessary to understand the position of the ardent Kentucky campaigner for states rights. The right of suffrage was such a vital and just power for women to possess, she could not, in all honesty, reject it no matter how it might be offered. Also, the explanation has been advanced that Miss Clay "never believed that the situation which she faced in 1919 would come about: accepting the federal amendment or opposing her own enfranchisement." She viewed the federal plan as a misfortune rather than an inevitability and could express the opinion that she "would rather it came that way than not at all."³ Her vocal and


²Ibid.

³Fuller, pp. 323-4.
written opposition to the Anthony Amendment had always been confined to the enforcement provision which it contained, not its suffrage clause.

Laura Clay renounced this enforcement provision on many occasions. Southern opposition to the Anthony Amendment was often construed to be caused by racism. Her position was not one of racial prejudice, however, but of opposition to federal interference in what she presumed to be state affairs. In a letter to another suffragist she wrote:

I do not at all desire that either party shall advocate a qualification of color; or even that a section of the country shall do so; but I do earnestly hope that it may turn out that there is no constitutional bar to an individual state's regulating woman suffrage by such qualifications as it feels necessary for its own prosperity.¹

She made clear her objection to federal enforcement, not negro enfranchisement on many occasions. In a letter to the editor of the *Lexington Leader* she wrote:

I observe in your issue of March 26th that in the report from the Suffrage Convention held in St. Louis to which I went as a delegate, in the account of the discussion about renewing the effort for the passage of the Anthony Amendment by Congress I am said to have objected, 'with particular reference to those parts that would permit enfranchisement of negro women of the south.' I wish to disclaim that report. My remarks were necessarily extemporaneous, but I should be ashamed of myself if even in the impulsiveness of such remarks I had abandoned my consistent stand for equal rights with men for women of every race and section. But I did not. It was a mere assumption of the reporter because I objected to a repetition of the enforcement provision of the Fifteenth Amendment by the enforcement provision of the Anthony Amendment. . . .²

¹Laura Clay to Mrs. McCulloch, 13 December 1907, LCP.
²*Lexington Leader*, 3 April 1919, LCP.
Laura Clay stipulated in a letter to a friend that she "would be equally opposed to the Anthony amendment if there were not a negro voter in the country." She wrote her sister that her "adherence to States' Rights" was because she believed "a country with diversified interests like ours can never enjoy domestic tranquility unless a very large share of state authority" was kept to the states. While she persisted in campaigning against the federal amendment, the NAWSA was preparing to assure its passage.

With a clear-cut policy to seek a federal amendment and the tireless organizational abilities of Carrie Chapman Catt, the NAWSA entered a new mature era. Under Mrs. Catt's efficient leadership, the "day for the amateur reformer had given way to the professional organizer." Mrs. Catt's strategy had several elements, one of which necessitated persuading President Woodrow Wilson to speak out for female suffrage. The President favored states rights; it was her task to persuade him to promote federal legislation. She accomplished the feat by keeping the communication lines open between them, stressing that the rights of states could not be considered violated by a federal amendment which needed three-fourths of the states to comply in its ratification. More persuasive was the reality of political expediency. If

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1 Laura Clay to J. M. Carey, 11 August 1919, LCP.
2 Laura Clay to "My dear Sallie," 21 January 1918, LCP.
3 Flexner, p. 274.
4 Ibid., p. 278.
President Wilson could not get the southern Democrats to back passage of the Anthony Amendment, he and his party might lose popular support. By 1918, factors were building up to encourage Congressional passage of the Amendment, e.g., increased state suffrage victories, party necessity, growing personal conviction, greater efforts by the suffragists, and the psychology of an Administration at war.  

World War I had come at a time when suffragist persuasion was making steady gains. The Civil War had been the "negroes hour," but had interfered with the progress of women toward their rights. The present war must be made the "woman's hour." Suffragists doubled their efforts for the vote. They took up their war work in one hand and with the other penned arguments drawn from the war situation. Votes for women had received some objections because women did not serve as soldiers—the ballot was equated with the bullet. Yet, women did serve as homefront soldiers, which suffragist rhetoric pointed out, as Laura Clay did in a 1917 speech:

The war has shown to the world in a way it never knew before that women's part in war is as necessary as men's. Under modern conditions, there is not an army in the field that could be sustained there without the support of the women in the industries at home.  

The services required of women in the "industries at home" was also another breakthrough in the traditional conception

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1Morgan, p. 123.

2Speech in celebration of the New York suffrage victory in 1917, n.p., n.d., LCP.
of woman's role.

Laura Clay's rhetoric included another wartime appeal—the peacemaking nature of women. In "Women and Patriotism," she explained how the gentle sex would be an asset to a society in which they voted.

Justice demands that those who share in war shall have an equal voice in the government which decides for peace or war. Our country needs the votes of women as well as of men. The over-masculinization of governments in Europe has allowed unchecked action to the passions of commercialism, imperialism and militarism, and the feminine forces suited by nature to act as checks and balances to them have been excluded from government. In the co-ordination of the two, the masculine and the feminine, in free and equal shares in government, there resides the best hope for the future peace of the world.

The Wilsonian slogan, "make the world safe for democracy," rang hollow in an America permitting only half of its population to participate in that democracy. The wartime suffragist rhetoric, coming when suffragism was already popular and politically expedient, prompted President Wilson to pressure Congressional Democrats for passage of the Anthony Amendment. He reasoned that its passage was "vitally essential to the successful prosecution of the great war of humanity in which we are engaged." 2

The NAWSA had sought the President's open approval as a means of converting enough southern votes in Congress to pass the Amendment. Thirty-six states were needed for ratification, meaning that some southern states had to be won,  

2Morgan, p. 126.
If the solid South remained unbroken and found two other state allies, ratification would be prevented.  

Mrs. Catt indicated to President Wilson that her work was made more difficult among southerners because they believed him to be opposed to the amendment.  

Republicans were counting on achieving a moral victory, expecting the Democrats to fail to rally around the Anthony Amendment. After the House passed it in 1918, the President spoke to the Senate in hopes that his influence could cause a like result. His speech, "a masterful national appeal," was "clearly directed at some Southerners who, it was felt, needed such an appeal to protect themselves in their states if they switched."  

In spite of his appeal, the South defeated the amendment, and the Republicans anticipated achieving a majority in the next Congress, when they would at last acknowledge the full citizenship of women and grant their enfranchisement.  

Wilson's blessing on the federal amendment had more effect on Laura Clay than it did on the Congressmen. She disclosed to Carrie Chapman Catt that

I have changed my attitude to the S. B. Anthony Amendment since Pres. Wilson has expressed a view of it which I never expected from him. I am indeed strongly attached to the states' rights doctrine but I think an individual's support of an aspect of a governmental doctrine is of no service when it is not supported by dominant political opinion. Therefore, when a great statesman, as Pres. Wilson is conceded to be, and one weighted with

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1 Ibid., p. 88.
2 Ibid., p. 122.
3 Ibid., p. 126.
responsible in the world-war, declares that he thinks the Amendment does not impair states' rights, and that it is expedient in the exigencies of this war, I am unwilling to jeopardize any chance for my enfranchisement by opposition to it. . . . Also, as far as time and my opportunities have allowed, I find that other women have changed their point of view more or less for the same reasons; and I believe if the S. B. Anthony Amendment reaches our legislature in time for action, it will receive the united and hearty support of the Ky. E.R.A.

In her letter, she also spoke about plans for a Kentucky state campaign which she was hoping Mrs. Catt would support. She commented,

I have changed my attitude on account of facts: I wish you could see your way clear to change your attitude towards the Ky. situation also on account of these facts.¹

Miss Clay's change of attitude was happily received by Mrs. Catt who replied she was "more glad" than she could say that Miss Clay had changed her "attitude toward the amendment" and would support ratification of a federal amendment.² But, Mrs. Catt also strongly discouraged Laura Clay's plan to submit another state amendment, fearing that state referenda would weaken suffragist strength which was needed in Washington, D.C. Apparently, Miss Clay could not accept this restriction of her state activity, and her change of heart was very brief.

Shortly thereafter, Laura Clay returned to her previous zeal for states rights. During 1919 Congress gained momentum to pass the Nineteenth Amendment, which it did on June 4, and the states began the ratification process. Meanwhile,

¹Laura Clay to Mrs. Catt, 16 January 1918, LCP.
²Carrie Chapman Catt to Laura Clay, 22 January 1918, LCP.
Laura Clay kept up her rhetorical salvos in opposition to giving Congress a "new power without any constitutional checks upon it."¹

She resigned from the KERA and formed the Citizen's Committee for a State Suffrage Amendment, a group dedicated to obtaining female enfranchisement through state action alone.² She outlined the rationale for her action in several letters to the *Lexington Herald*. In these letters she was trying to awaken in Kentuckians a realization of the threatening aspect of the federal amendment. The letters also reveal her conception of justice inherent in states rights versus the injustice of federal control. In one letter she pointed out that the Anthony Amendment contained, in addition to the woman suffrage clause, a political provision which was not popularly commented on, the provision of federal supervision of state elections. She protested that if suffragists must have a federal amendment for woman suffrage they should propose one which would accomplish their object without injuring the rights already secured to the people.³

In another letter, she extended her argument, calling woman suffrage the "minor proposition" of the Anthony Amendment. She accumulated facts to show that when fifteen States have full suffrage already and twenty-five have partial suffrage by State action; when women

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¹*Lexington Herald*, 16 February 1919, Letter to the Editor, LCP.

²Goodman, pp. 60-61.

³*Lexington Herald*, 24 February 1919, Letter to the Editor, LCP.
can vote for 336 out of the 531 presidential electors and every political party of 1916 declared for woman suffrage,¹

a federal amendment calling for woman suffrage was too late to be a major necessity for enfranchisement. It would be more accurate to consider it from another vantage point, as she did in a succeeding letter to the Lexington Herald.

In my opinion to call the Anthony Amendment a suffrage amendment at all is a deceptive misnomer. Of course, incidentally it does secure suffrage to women where there has been no state provision to give it to them. But judging and naming it by its most extensive and permanent effect it should be called plainly an amendment to establish federal control of state elections. For it is obvious that its power over state elections extends to all states, in every election, and for all time unless repealed. . . . There is nothing in the suffrage situation which extenuates the revolutionary sacrifice of state control of state elections which is designed by the Anthony Amendment.²

But the affixing to the Constitution of a Nineteenth Amendment for woman suffrage was becoming a reality, state by state. On January 7, 1920, Kentucky became the twenty-third state to ratify the Amendment.³ Finally, 35 states had ratified the new law—only one more was needed.

Except for some border states, the South had solidified in its opposition to ratification of the new law. Therefore, the choice open to suffragists was to gain ratification from either Vermont or one of the remaining border states.⁴

¹Ibid., 16 February 1919.
²Ibid., 9 June 1919.
⁴Sinclair, p. 335.
After delays in other states, Tennessee became the center of the vigorous, final suffragist exertion. The Tennessee ratification was the climactic event in the "Suffragist mythology," the decisive struggle between the forces of suffragists and antisuffragists. "On those hot Tennessee days in August 1920, Suffragists remembered, the American soul was fought for by the forces of good and evil."\(^1\)

Suffragists from all over the United States were present to fight for justice and reform against the corrupt powers of vice, liquor, and ignoble business interests. There were southerners "defending 'Home, Bible, and Anglo-Saxon civilization' against all comers."\(^2\) And, as some accounts presented it, Laura Clay and Kate Gordon were with the opposition, "appealing to Negrophobia and every other cave man's prejudice."\(^3\) These accounts do Miss Clay a great disservice. She was there not because of racial prejudice, but because of her principles concerning representative government.

At Kate Gordon's request, Laura Clay journeyed to Nashville to lobby against the Anthony Amendment. She responded to Miss Gordon's appeal for help because she would do all she could to defeat the federal amendment. Although

\(^{1}\) Morgan, p. 150.

\(^{2}\) Ibid.

she felt "a great distaste to working with those who are avowedly opposed to suffrage," she would work under Kate Gordon's leadership as president of the SSWSC. "That would place me under my true colors," Miss Clay wrote; so it was "a call from" Miss Gordon that she would obey. Miss Clay worried whether her "appearing in Nashville under the auspices of antisuffragists would do anything but mischief," and she doubted she would go to Nashville if those were the circumstances. "But," she declared to Miss Gordon, "if you are going to be there, and want my assistance, I shall most willingly give it." ¹

A more correct interpretation of the presence of Laura Clay and Kate Gordon in Nashville was given by another author. With insight into the feelings of the two leading southern suffragists, he wrote:

Jointly they endured the fellowship of the wet, vice, and business lobbyists; together they watched the distribution of pamphlets accusing all Suffragists of being atheistic feminists threatening the Bible, family life, the honor of Robert E. Lee, and that of the United States. ²

Laura Clay belonged to neither side—not to those pressing the ratification of the federal amendment or to the anti-suffrage believers agitating against it. After reaching the end of the long road to suffrage, her first vote must have been cast with pangs of sadness.

Miss Clay's suffrage rhetoric had done much good for

¹Laura Clay to Kate Gordon, 31 July 1920, LCP.
²Morgan, p. 150.
the movement. She had traveled many miles and delivered numerous speeches to fulfill the dream begun years before at the Seneca Falls Convention. An examination of her speaking ability through the descriptions of those who listened to her words will yield on final glimpse of her long career as Kentucky's pioneer suffragist rhetorician.
CHAPTER IV

LAURA CLAY: "THE GOOD WOMAN SPEAKING WELL"

Within Laura Clay's lifetime, two large groups of Americans, first negroes and finally women, won access to the voting booth. Kentucky's pioneer suffragist was instrumental in the latter struggle for the extension of the last great right of citizenship. She spent her energies, her words, and much of her lifetime in securing the rights for women to exist on an equal level with men in many aspects of life. Her work for the KERA began when she was thirty-nine years old, and she was not enfranchised until she was the age of seventy-one. Through her constant efforts, the legal, educational, and political conditions for women in Kentucky were improved, and she also campaigned in many other states to elevate the status of women. Much of her persuasion was accomplished through her speeches. She impressed her audiences with her clear delivery, sincerity of purpose, and logical presentation of facts concerning the suffrage situation.

To those who saw Miss Clay in her prime as a suffragist rhetorician, she was an "unusually large woman" with a "broad and pleasant face."\(^1\) She was a "middle-aged woman of

\(^1\)Louisville Courier-Journal, 11 February 1892, LCP.
striking personal appearance" upon "whose face character and superior intelligence" were written. When she smiled, she had a "peculiarly genial smile" but she could "in an instant become very grave and severe" as she explained her views in a voice that was full, clear, and even, "varying only a very few notes between her highest and lowest tones."  

As she spoke, Laura Clay evidently did not use many gestures. Her delivery, accomplished with "her hands at her sides," was appreciated by a reporter who took notice of it as "a living lesson to the very large number of men who seem to think that oratory is impossible without breeches pockets and coat lapels." She reserved her gestures for times when she was earnestly stressing a point, then she used her hands "gracefully and easily." Instead of using many hand gestures, she emphasized most of her speaking points "by bending forward," and the reporter claimed "she made a great many points."  

Advance newspaper notices about Laura Clay's speeches utilized the fame of her family name and background. Northern newspapers in Michigan and Minnesota as well as newspapers throughout the South used the Clay name as an inducement for the public to come and hear the suffragist orator.  

1 Charleston (S.C.) News and Courier, n.d., 1896, LCP.  
2 Greensville (S.C.) Daily News, 30 April 1895, LCP.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Pontiac (Mich.) Press Gazette, n.d., 1913; Minneapolis Times, 23 April 1901, LCP.
In the South, her refined background was especially important in drawing audiences. She was a credible female speaker because she was neither a radical nor a northerner unfamiliar with the problems faced by southerners. The Dixie press observed, for example, that Miss Clay had "the blue blood of the old aristocratic south in her veins"; was a "distant relative of the great commoner Henry Clay"; was the "grandniece of Henry Clay, the man of astute statesmanship"; and was the "daughter of the late Hon. Cassius Clay, senator from Kentucky and United States minister to Russia." The persuasive effect of her name was realized by other suffragists, one of whom asserted that the "'Clay name means power in the whole South.'"

Laura Clay, however, was developing a reputation for speaking and leadership in her own right. One newspaper claimed that among suffragists she was the most prominent figure in the South and boasts a more potent aristocracy than that of mere birth, the aristocracy of the great brained and the great souled, whose idea of life is service. Her own "earnestness and evident sincerity of thought and purpose" expressed as she spoke made her an esteemed figure before her audiences. In addition, she radiated "a charming

1 Knoxvillle Tribune, 28 January 1913; Morristown (n.p.) Gazette, n.d., January 1913; Chattanooga News, 11 January 1913; Knoxville Tribune, 28 January 1913; LCP.

2 Anna Howard Shaw (quoting Suffragist Belle Kearney) to Laura Clay, 4 January 1907, LCP.

3 Knoxvillle Tribune, 28 January 1913, LCP.

4 Charleston (S.C.) News and Courier, n.d., 1895, LCP.
personality" that was "an argument in itself" for the suffragist cause.¹

Miss Clay was as adept in her speech content as in her delivery, relying on a logical presentation with factual support in advancing her ideas to her listeners. In her speeches, she "did not indulge in sentiments or ranting denunciation." Instead, she "brought an array of hard-headed, unadorned facts and figures which must have been very convincing to her listeners."² Another reporter remarked that she "introduced facts and clinched them with the most solid logic," demonstrating that women have quite a bit of "political perspicacity."³

Careful preparation aided Miss Clay's ability to be a good speaker. The knowledge revealed as she spoke showed that "she had evidently studied her subject thoroughly." A speech she delivered before a convention in Frankfort prompted a reporter to write that, in the opinion of the men and women listening to her, "it would hustle the best man in the convention to get up as good an argument."⁴ She was one of the delegates at the 1892 NAWSA convention who attracted "attention by her fine appearance and her clear and impressive style of expression," evidencing "gifts of more than usual excellence." Due to her "good judgment, keen insight,  

¹Salem (Ore.) Capitol Journal, N.d., 1905, LCP.  
²Grant's Pass (Ore.) Journal, n.d., 1905, LCP.  
³Florence (n.p.) Daily Times, 10 May 1895, LCP.  
⁴Louisville Post, 10 October 1890, LCP
and logical reasoning," she would have achieved a high place in the political sphere "if she were a man."

Thorough knowledge of her subject also made it possible for her to refute objections. With "wit and eloquence," Laura Clay "answered one after another of the arguments" used against woman suffrage. Because she was well-prepared and, probably because she had a strong character, "interrogations never discomfit her" and she possessed the "happy knack of readily and thoroughly answering any objections" advanced by a person with whom she was discussing woman suffrage.

On numerous occasions, her use of humor was an integral part of her speaking manner. In fact, one newspaper compared her on this point to the greatest suffragist orator of her time. Laura Clay, the paper noted, was similar to Reverend Anna Shaw, a "dignified and convincing speaker with a keen sense of humor."

It must be noted that along with her strong reliance on logical appeals supported by facts, Miss Clay did depend on some emotional appeals to her audiences. Her arguments deducing the right of women to vote from basic Christian and natural rights principles were also appeals to associated

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1 Springfield (n.P.) Daily Republican, 22 January 1892, LCP.

2 N.P., Times News, 30 March 1913, LCP.

3 The Columbia (S.C.) Daily Register, 24 November 1895, LCP.

4 Pontiac (Mich.) Press Gazette, 10 March 1913, LCP.
feelings of righteousness she hoped were in the hearts of her listeners. Her concept of the degraded state of pre-suffrage women carried with it the arousal of feelings of pity and indignation. During the war years, she appealed to the cultural heritage of patriotism as she enlisted the cooperation of women to buy war bonds, and asked that men, in recognition of women's service, enfranchise the homefront soldiers.

Emotional appeals abounded in her speeches, but logical appeals were her mainstay as she sought to persuade her audiences. The various abilities of Miss Clay as a speaker were summed up in a news article that observed:

The address of Miss Laura Clay of Kentucky was a revelation of the possibilities of success in public speaking on the part of women; and while many left unconvinced of the expediency or necessity of encumbering women with the more than doubtful blessing of the ballot, those who 'came to scoff' were full of admiration for the fair speaker's powers of argument, interspersed with pleasant sarcasm, and brimful of information, historical, sociological and scientific.¹

It may be noted also that the surprise experienced by those who heard a good woman speaker attests to the fact that, in the South, public speaking done well by women was still somewhat of a novelty deserving of newspaper comment.

In her extensive speaking career, Laura Clay addressed many types of audiences. She encountered all female audiences as she spoke before the small local suffrage and church groups, and audiences composed of both men and women when she addressed temperance groups, the NAWSA conventions, and on stump speaking campaigns in various states. She also

¹Charleston (S.C.) News and Courier, n.d., 1896, LCP.
addressed the all male audiences of the Kentucky legislature and United States Congressional Committees. After her many speaking experiences, she recalled that no audience had ever heckled her or treated her rudely.\(^1\) Her straightforward, sincere manner and logical approach no doubt prompted a favorable response from the audience.

Although most of her speeches were given at indoor occasions, Laura Clay was also acquainted with outdoor speaking situations. Her voice, she observed, was "well-adapted" to open air meetings.\(^2\) She liked to know in advance whether she would be speaking indoors or out so she could prepare properly. In her judgment, meetings held outside necessitated a change in speech content, "as a sustained argument which is suitable for a seated audience is not altogether suited to a moving one."\(^3\)

Miss Clay wrote her speeches out in full manuscript. She often used the same speech before different audiences, perhaps making some minor variations. Sometimes she spoke for as long as forty minutes, but she did not tax the patience of her audiences as is evidenced by the following account: "The lecture was very lengthy, but not the slightest systems of ennui or disquiet were visible throughout the vast assembly."\(^4\)

\(^1\) Lexington Herald, 30 June 1941, LCP.
\(^2\) Laura Clay to YMCA, 16 October 1918, LCP.
\(^3\) Laura Clay to Mrs. Lucy B. Johnston, 2 July 1912, LCP.
\(^4\) The Lawrenceville (S.C.) Herald, n.d., 1896, LCP.
Newspaper reports establish Miss Clay as a successful speaker, and her willingness to repeatedly step behind the rostrum indicates that she enjoyed her public speaking situations. Whenever a cause called forth her support or an invitation to speak was extended to her, she was ready to use her talents. The label of suffragist speaker was no longer applicable; now she was termed a "civic leader."\(^1\) College students graduating from Sayre Institute heard her eloquence at commencement exercises.\(^2\) At the age of seventy-nine, she delivered a dozen speeches in support of the 1928 candidacy of Alfred Smith for president.\(^3\) Throughout her life, she remained a staunch Democrat and occasionally was invited by the Democratic Women's Clubs of Fayette County to their meetings in honor of her birthday or to give "members an opportunity of hearing her express her views."\(^4\) She had been honored even more by the Democratic party in 1920. As a delegate to the convention in San Francisco, she watched as the deadlock ensued over the presidential nomination of William A. McAddoo or James M. Cox. She had the pleasure of having her own name placed in nomination for president and received one vote on the thirty-sixth ballot.\(^5\)

\(^1\) Lexington Herald, 30 June 1941, LCP.

\(^2\) Speech to graduating class, Sayre Institute, Lexington, Kentucky, 31 May 1928, LCP.

\(^3\) Lexington Herald, 30 June 1941, LCP.

\(^4\) Lexington Herald, 1 July 1941, LCP.

\(^5\) Lexington Herald, 30 June 1941, LCP.
When Miss Clay died at the age of ninety-two, she was remembered for having directed her speaking and leadership talents for much of her life to the service of others. An appropriate tribute by the Lexington Herald marked her passing: "the voice of this great woman, whom all Kentuckians admired and esteemed, is stilled."\(^1\) She was deserving of the admiration and esteem of Kentuckians, and perhaps fits the classic description of an orator, a good "woman" speaking well who never used her voice to articulate arguments proceeding from base motives.

Miss Clay had argued for woman's suffrage on the three issues of woman's traditional role, unlimited suffrage and states rights. She accepted the prevailing national suffragist position that women had the same rights as men based on the doctrine of natural rights incorporated into America's democratic documents. Her belief in the Christian doctrine gave her an additional premise upon which she advocated a new equal and just role for women to her conservative southern audiences.

On the issue of unlimited suffrage, she had espoused enfranchisement coupled with an educational prerequisite because she believed in a responsible electorate. Although she agreed with the popular idea of her time that the white race was superior to the black race, she could not promote southern racist plans to disenfranchise citizens because of their color. She spoke to this point often during her

\(^1\)Lexington Herald, 1 July 1941, LCP.
life and supported her words with deeds which included helping the Black Episcopal Church in Lexington and aiding the attempts of a Negro Woman's Club to affiliate with the NAWSA. The racist principle was superseded in Miss Clay's mind by the greater principle of every citizen's right to participate in a democratic government.

Democratic government implied to Miss Clay that the individual's freedom of states rights would be threatened by federal control. Miss Clay supported the policy of sectional representation because it was the only position she and her southern audiences would accept. In short, Laura Clay had guaged the South correctly, for the Nineteenth Amendment was received as "the bitterness of a sectional defeat." The southern states had to be coerced into accepting the federal woman suffrage law with Georgia holding out until 1921.

Laura Clay grappled with the rhetorical problem of motivating southerners to embrace woman's suffrage. She assumed she understood her southern audiences: they were conservative, racially prejudiced, and zealous states rightists. Her assumption was correct, but she underestimated the hold of tradition on southerners, especially

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1 Fuller, pp. 373-4.

2 After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, state Enabling Acts were necessary to formalize the new female electorate. When southern governors balked, citing the expense of the special sessions, etc., they were "none too gently reminded of Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment" which stipulated federal power over elections. Afraid to rish opening the Pandora's box of southern voting policies, the governors in the South at last gave way. Morgan, p. 152.
concerning the race issue. For many members of her Dixie audience, the compromise of an educational prerequisite was not enough. She had indicted "privileged" women and "selfish" men for not seeing the broad principles behind the issue of human rights. In spite of her efforts, many of them never came closer to those broad principles which had guided her.

In addition to her speaking and writing, the rhetorical strategies utilized by Laura Clay centered on originating petitions, designing the Kentucky membership plan, and urging state campaigns. Miss Clay was familiar with the use of petitions by both the KERA and the NAWSA. The purpose of these petitions was to show support for woman's suffrage, but it was difficult to obtain an impressive number of signatures. Miss Clay had learned from experience that success depended on distributing eight to ten times more petition sheets than were desired back.1 She knew also that as suffragists carried the petitions from door to door, they would often garner new members for their association.2

The Kentucky Plan was Laura Clay's design for securing a greater showing of enrolled suffrage members. She believed that the "simplest basis of membership" was the best for the state suffrage associations to use.3 In 1902, the NAWSA

1Laura Clay to Anna Howard Shaw, 14 September 1906, LCP.
2Laura Clay to Miss Rugg, 14 June 1909, LCP.
moved to adopt the method of Kentucky "and induce suffrage sympathizers to join the Association, if they can only aid our cause to the extent of their names and dues."¹ More people would be willing to join suffrage associations if they were not required to work or to pay a large amount of dues, and the enrollment method designed by Miss Clay met these requirements.

Laura Clay also believed that a state campaign was an effective strategy despite all the hard work and money invested in running it. She believed that it "takes a campaign to make an issue, to get these persons to think. After that, they will have an opinion."² Miss Clay had, therefore, spent much time getting people in many states to think because even "a victory in Oregon will be of more value in creating suffrage sentiment in Ky. / sic / than a ten thousand dollar educational campaign."³

Her speaking, writing, use of petitions, Kentucky Plan, state campaigning, and personal behavior indicate that she understood how to employ rhetorical strategies to aid her persuasive efforts. In utilizing these strategies, she never exhibited any extreme manner of behavior. One of her major contributions to the rhetoric of the woman's movement in the South, therefore, was her dignified ladylike demeanor which


² Laura Clay to Mrs. Biggers, 27 November 1909, LCP.

³ Laura Clay to "My dear Sallie," 14 September 1905, LCP.
helped to make the movement acceptable. No other southern woman exceeded her ability to lead forward the reluctant southern public. She was respected by the men while most northern suffragists were not, and she set an example in her suffrage activity and enthusiasm for other women to follow.

By taking the suffrage message to the people, she made a second major rhetorical contribution to the movement. In an era lacking radio and television communication, the American public had to be apprised of suffragism through speaking and writing campaigns. For thirty-two years Miss Clay spent her time and money to travel throughout the United States, publicizing the needs of women.

If, in the final analysis, the terms justice and expediency are applied to her total suffrage career, what is the outcome? In terms of justice, Miss Clay cannot be faulted, because her attitude toward women, toward negroes, and toward states rights emanated from a heart and mind committed to the highest ideals of individual freedom defined by the laws of God and of man.

In terms of expediency, Miss Clay does not fare as well. The state-by-state method, tiring and expensive for suffragists, was not the better choice to be made. After a seventy-two year struggle, the suffragists could be expected to prefer the more expedient federal route. Although the solid South did have to be coerced into accepting the Nineteenth Amendment, Miss Clay's fears of the enforcement provision were unrealistic. It would take thirty years and an
entirely new movement to bring federal intervention into the racial policies of the South. Nevertheless, her fight, guided by principles she believed were best, was successful in that she made the lives of many women better by her southern argument for woman suffrage.

The women of Kentucky and the South were especially indebted to Miss Clay for her crusade to improve their lives. The following tribute, paid to Laura Clay at the celebration of Kentucky's ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, acknowledges the extent of the debt:

. . . it is only proper that recognition should be given to Miss Laura Clay, who for a quarter of a century when the cause of woman suffrage seemed but an incandescent dream, labored, toiled, spoke, spent herself and her wealth to advance that cause. Due to her convictions about States' Rights she separated herself from the forces that led the fight in the past few years and have brought it to triumph. But in the future recollection of her separation will be forgotten, as it should be forgotten, by those who wish to give credit to the pioneers of this movement for the extensions of human rights.  

Laura Clay should be remembered as a woman of high principles who served the needs of others with all the rhetorical skills at her disposal. She held in sight a vision of a just society for women, and during her lifetime saw the chasm between reality and that vision lessened through the efforts of numerous dedicated women of America, among which she must be numbered in the vanguard of suffragist rhetoricians.

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1 Lexington Herald, 8, 9 January 1920, quoted in Fuller, p. 368.
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