The Impact of the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 on the Discourse on Womanhood

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THE IMPACT OF THE ATLANTA RACE RIOT OF 1906 ON THE DISCOURSE ON WOMANHOOD

By

PAMELA LOGAN

Under the Direction of Reiner Smolinski, PhD

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the twentieth century, traditional discourses on Southern womanhood were being challenged by the women’s movement, industrialization that increased female employment, and many other social forces. The increased agency of women and burgeoning black financial autonomy challenged white male paternalism, and in response, Southern white men filled newspapers with rhetoric that accused black males of raping white women and instigated racial violence. Such rhetoric, which encouraged white women to fear black men and depend on white men for protection, was used to initiate the Atlanta riot of 1906. However, instead of retreating to their homes for protection, many women published confident and coherent responses to the riot. After the riot, newspapers were reprimanded for publishing incendiary editorials, and they instead presented new images of Southern women with greater agency. This more stratified representation suggests that the riot had a subtle impact on the discourse on Southern white womanhood.

INDEX WORDS: Atlanta riot, Female agency, Womanhood, Female autonomy, 1906, Atlanta
THE IMPACT OF THE ATLANTA RACE RIOT OF 1906 ON THE DISCOURSE ON WOMANHOOD

by

PAMELA LOGAN

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1 INTRODUCTION
The beginning of the twentieth century marked a time of great change in the social status and perceptions of women in the United States. Traditional discourses that relegated women to subservient roles in the home and in society were being challenged by the women’s movement, industrialization that increased female employment, and many other social forces. These societal changes also challenged the white male-dominated society in the South. In response to growing female autonomy and African-American financial independence, Southern white gentlemen developed lynching rhetoric that accused black males of raping white women and suggested that without violence to subdue blacks such episodes would continue. The rhetoric also encouraged white women to fear black men and depend on white men for protection.

Lynching rhetoric was used to initiate the Atlanta riot of 1906. In response, many white women were afraid, and they retreated to their homes and the protection of men. Others, however, were unwilling to return to a life filled only with domestic concerns and service to men. These women, because of their experiences with labor disputes, the women’s movement, and other social endeavors were able to respond to the violence of the riot instead of allowing it to crush their burgeoning independence. African-American women, many of whom were victims of violence during the riot, also responded.

After the riot, a Fulton County Grand Jury admonished newspapers in Atlanta for their incendiary reporting, and images of weak, defenseless women were removed from news reports. Instead, women were depicted in a more confident and independent manner, suggesting a change in the discourse on Southern womanhood. In my thesis, I will explore the changing discourse on Southern womanhood and responses of black and white women to the Atlanta riot of 1906. To argue that the rhetoric of lynching advocates that incited the riot presented new ideals and
promoted a change in the accepted discourse on Southern white womanhood, the first section will begin with a discussion of the discourses on Southern womanhood prevalent during the Atlanta riot of 1906. To assert that these movements increased the independence of women and promoted their ability to respond in a confident manner to the violence of the Atlanta riot, the second section will continue with a discussion of the impact of the women’s movement and industrialization in the South on female agency. The thesis will conclude with an examination of the responses of women to the Atlanta riot of 1906.

2 SECTION 1

Many social forces during the early twentieth century challenged traditional discourses on female behavior. Chief among those forces was the rhetoric developed by lynching advocates to instigate race riots and lynchings of African-American males in response to accusations of rape of white women. In the rhetoric, white men presented white male readers with a moral challenge to protect Southern white women who were compared with goddesses, and white men encouraged white women to fear black men and depend on white men for protection.

Typically, before a riot or lynching, the inflammatory rhetoric had its greatest impact as it filled local newspapers, sermons, and popular literature and the public was continually exposed to it. Before the Atlanta riot of 1906, like most violent riots of the era, newspapers printed numerous accusations of rape that intensified racial concerns in the city. As rioters in Atlanta and other Southern cities responded to moral imperatives to harm and kill blacks and protect white women, the importance of white women in Southern society increased.

Southern women of color, however, were completely excluded from the rhetoric of lynching advocates. These women were typically sexualized in newspapers and literature of the era, and the efforts of upper-class blacks to change perceptions were largely unsuccessful. During the Atlanta riot, instead of being compared with goddesses and protected like their white
peers, black women were targeted for violence. In this section of my thesis, I will discuss the discourses on Southern womanhood prevalent during the Atlanta riot of 1906 to argue that the rhetoric of lynching advocates promoted a change in the accepted discourse on Southern white womanhood.

The Atlanta riot began on September 22, 1906, and lasted three days. It resulted in at least 26 deaths and hundreds of injuries. Property damage and the loss of productivity was also a major burden for the city. Businesses owned by African Americans and neighborhoods of African-American upper-class citizens bore a disproportionate burden of the destruction.

Historians have argued that many factors encouraged the riot, including economic tensions between working-class whites and middle-class African Americans, a gubernatorial campaign in which candidates used the disenfranchisement of blacks as part of their platform, and an anti-vice and prohibition campaign which targeted Negro bars as centralized locations for prostitution and other vices that violated Southern codes of conduct. However, scholars agree that a series of special edition newspaper reports that suggested racial violence in response to alleged sexual attacks of white women by African American males were a major instigating factor.

On September 22, the first day of the riot, two newspapers, The Atlanta Georgian and The Atlanta Evening News, produced multiple reports detailing numerous alleged rapes, indicating that mobs were forming, and suggesting that others join the violence.¹ For example, on the front page of the Atlanta Georgian Sporting Extra, an article with the following inflammatory title was printed: “Burly Negro Attacks White Woman but is Frightened Off: Mrs.

¹ Circulation for the Atlanta Georgian was estimated at 23,000 in the October, 17, 1906, afternoon edition of the paper. Circulation for the Atlanta Evening News was estimated at 24, 230 in the October 4, 1905, edition of “A Roll of Honor” found in Printers’ Ink: A Journal for Advertisers.
Mary Chafin is Victim of an Attempted Assault; Mob in Chase of Negro.” The article states that “the negro was frightened away, and a mob of seventy men is now in pursuit” (“Burly,” 22 Sept. 1906, 1). Accompanying the former ran an article entitled “Young Girl Says Negro Kissed Hand” and another entitled “Police Begin Work Against Negro Clubs,” which detailed the finding of a “large framed picture of a nude white woman” in a “Negro club” (“Police,” 22 Sept. 1906, 1). The club owner was to be fined and prosecuted, because displaying nude images of white women was against the law. In the same newspaper edition, readers found “Improper Remarks Bring Heavy Fine for Negro Youth: Was Heard to Make Insulting Remarks About Young Lady,” an article which detailed the fining of a youth and several African-American adults for making “disrespectful” comments to white youths (“Improper,” 22 Sept. 1906, 3).

Another article ran “Citizens Want a Mass Meeting to be Held Soon,” and called for a meeting “to consider the prevailing state of terror in and near Atlanta following the numerous assaults by negroes” (“Citizens,” 22 Sept. 1906, 2). The tabloid journalist suggests that rape of white women is associated with alcohol use by African Americans males in “Negro clubs” on Decatur Street:

    On Decatur Street last Saturday night there were more than 2,000 negroes. In that mass there was enough potential rape and outrage to make our faces turn pale. . . . Every white woman in Atlanta needs relief from the shadow now hanging over us. Every good interest of religion and business calls us together to do something decisive toward the pest breeders and the rape feeders in Atlanta. (“Citizens,” 22 Sept. 1906, 2)

A letter from a local minister whose daughter was allegedly assaulted was also included in the edition. In the letter, the minister suggested that it was the Christian duty of men to join mobs and avenge Southern white women:
Since I am a local preacher in the M. E. Church, South, some have thought it strange that I wanted to mob the negro. Just wait, gentlemen, till it strikes your home, then there will be nothing strange. . . . Our immediate work is to put out of business this loafing class [of Negroes]. . . . Let us have your meeting of the citizens, and have it next Sunday. Let us open with prayer, then on Monday get a new supply of ammunition. (“Father,” 22 Sept. 1906, 2)

An editorial written by John Temple Graves, “Let Us find the Germ of the Rapist,” was also in the newspaper on September 22. In this piece, Graves urges public officials to study African American behavior:

We need to know who these monsters [Negro rapists] are, the environment from which they come, the conditions which surround them and the circumstances which inspire their hellish passions to expression. We respectfully urge upon our solicitors, sheriffs and other officers to make every effort to obtain all such information about every negro criminal who comes before them charged with this crime [rape]. . . . We have practically exhausted the influence of passion and of revenge, although perhaps as long as the world stands these expressions of outraged society will continue. But the deeper and the profounder question is to see if we cannot come back to the fountainhead of this criminology as a sensible people ought to do and destroy the evil by striking it at the heart. (“Let,” 22 Sept. 1906, 8)

Articles in this newspaper were clearly incendiary. While their purpose may not have been to incite a riot, many of the columnists suggested rioting as the appropriate response to the unacceptable social conditions of the city. Many historians, including Rebecca Burns who wrote a book-length history investigating the newspaper coverage of the riot, have suggested that the
volume of negative depictions of African Americans on the day of the riot likely instigated the violence, but it is important to note that most newspapers in the city had been publishing inflammatory editorials about alleged sexual attacks on white women for an extended period of time before the onset of the riot (18).

In November 1898, Rebecca Felton, a Georgia lynching advocate and frequent newspaper contributor on issues of domesticity, suggested that lynching was required to protect the “best part of God’s creation who are trembling and afraid to be left alone in their homes. If it requires lynching to protect woman’s dearest possession from rapine, drunken human beasts, then I say lynch a thousand times a week if it is necessary” (“Mrs. Felton’s,” 16 Nov. 1898, 4).

In a 1903 speech, the editor of the Georgian, John Temple Graves, posed the question “how shall we destroy the crime which always has and always will provoke lynching? The mob answers it with the rope, the bullet, and sometimes, God save us! with the torch. The mob is to-day the sternest, the strongest, and the most effective restraint that the age holds for the control of rape” (“He Defends,” 12 Aug. 1903, 9). In an August 1906 editorial in the Atlanta Georgian, Graves stated that “killing, shooting, burning has ceased to terrify them [black rapists]” and suggested a more violent means to deter African-American rape of white women: “a new and mysterious mode of punishment - the passing over a slender bridge into a dark chamber where in utter darkness and in utter mystery the assailant of woman’s virtue would meet a fate which his friends would never know and which he himself would never come back to make them understand” (“Reign of Terror,” 21 Aug. 1906, 6). Graves does not identify the specific punishment he wants instituted, but his editorial suggests that it would be worse than the heinous lynching practices his audience was familiar with and that the mystery surrounding the method of killing would be frightening enough to deter future rapes.
Although no ruling was made about editorials printed before the riot, a grand jury labeled those printed on the day of the riot as sensational and “calculated to create a disregard for the proper administration of the law, and to promote the organization of citizens to act outside of the law in the punishment of crime” (“Evening,” 28 Sept. 1906, 7). Editorials like these have been of particular interest to historians including Rebecca Burns, David Fort Godshalk, Gregory Mixon, Mark Bauerlein, and others who have used them to explore issues of race and class as they studied the causes and outcomes of the riot. Racial violence and social reform, freedom of the press, and the response of influential historical figures to the riot have been the focus of numerous studies; however, the impact of the editorials and the resulting riot on the traditional discourse on Southern womanhood has been largely ignored. No studies have evaluated the impact of the riot on the discourse on Southern womanhood.

While some scholars may question the connection between the riot and the discourse on Southern womanhood, it should be noted that the rhetoric of the sensational editorials was derived, in part, from the traditional discourse on womanhood, called “the cult of domesticity” or the “cult of true womanhood.” Through this traditional discourse, the behavior of women was clearly defined: “the attributes of True Womanhood by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. . . . Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes” (Welter 152).² This conservative attitude toward women dominated the literary discourse of the time and can be seen in a number of

² In her 1966 journal essay, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” noted historian Barbara Welter defined the traditional discourse on womanhood seen in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain and the United States. Her research has influenced countless feminist studies on the rhetoric concerning expectations for female behavior.
contemporary works. Magazines, newspapers, and other works of literature popular among women during the early twentieth century reinforced these conservative ideals.

_Godey’s Lady’s Book_ and _Peterson’s Magazine_, which promoted traditional conduct rules, were two of the most widely circulated women’s magazines of the era. These publications typically featured short stories, poems, and articles on fashion and arts and crafts. In the short story “Better Than Gold,” published in the September 1855 edition of _Godey’s Lady’s Book_, traditional conduct rules are encouraged by depicting the female protagonist being admired and gaining affection for her piety and submissiveness:

> And all this the spiritual Linaden saw, and for all this humbly thanked God. He had found at last the treasure so long sought; he had found humility waiting upon regal beauty, gentleness joined hand in hand with lofty genius, and seemingly genuine piety following all her words and works. The time came in which he resolved to unfold his love. (Denison 233)

In this short story, the love that is to be bestowed upon the female protagonist is depicted as a valuable treasure that she earns only by exhibiting the traditional values. Many novels and poems published during the era also focused on reinforcing the values of the cult of true womanhood. Cautionary novels depicting negative outcomes for female characters who abandoned traditional roles were very popular. These novels suggested to readers that “to abandon domesticity and gentility was to abandon respectability, prosperity and happiness” (Fitts 117). Likewise, poems which praised women for espousing cult values were also popular. Coventry Patmore, a British poet and critic, became famous for his poem _The Angel in the House_ that describes women being cherished for their submissive role:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is the woman’s pleasure; down the gulf

Of his condoled necessities

She casts her best, she flings herself. (775-78)

This poem suggests that women should take pleasure in fulfilling the needs of men. Popular poems like this served to reinforce the belief that a woman’s greatest work was to make her husband happy.

Conduct books that described the proper cult of true womanhood behavior for a variety of circumstances remained popular during the era. For instance, Eliza Leslie, an American cookbook author and novelist, wrote a conduct book in 1854 titled The Behaviour Book: A Manual for Ladies. In this work, Leslie focused several chapters on piety and the proper behavior for ladies in church:

We wish it were less customary to go to church in gay and costly habiliments, converting its sacred precincts into a place for the display of finery, and of rivalry to your equally bedizened neighbours. . . . Endeavor always to be in your pew before the service commences and do not hurry out of it, hastily, the moment the benediction is finished. . . . No good can result from taking children to church when they are too young to read or understand. . . . We are sorry to see young ladies on their way to church laughing and talking loudly and flirting with the beaux that are gallanting them thither. It is too probable that these beaux will occupy a large share of their thoughts during the hours of worship. (299-303)

While Leslie focused much of her work on behavior in church, other conduct manual writers focused on the proper etiquette of women in the home. Sarah Ann Sewell, in her conduct book,
Women and the Times We Live In (1896), reinforced the importance of submissiveness in the home:

It is a man’s place to rule, and a woman’s to yield. He must be held up as the head of the house, and it is her duty to bend so unmurmuringly to his wishes, that the rest of the household will follow her example, and treat him with the due respect his sex demands. (839)

Conduct rules such as this were intended to restrict the behavior of women and ensure the status of men was maintained in the patriarchal society. While rules were particularly important for governing the behavior of uneducated women in the domestic realm, such rules were also encouraged for educated women in their efforts outside the domestic realm. Even speeches presented before educated women frequently focused on conduct rules. Sallie Southall-Cotton, a women’s club officer and influential advocate for women, in a speech delivered at the Federation of Women’s Clubs Meeting, in 1895, suggested that domestic science training be provided for women, because domestic work was their greatest priority:

Woman’s eligibility to the coveted privileges of citizenship has many champions and in time she will doubtless add the ballot to her responsibilities; yet the ballot will turn to ashes in her grasp unless she realizes that the casting of a vote is less important than the training of a voter. The crown of womanhood is motherhood; and the glory, and pride, and hope of a nation all concentrate in its mothers. (Cotton)

Mrs. Cotton, like many other women and men of her era, believed that women should perfect their domestic skills rather than seek to gain a formal education and participate in the political system. Even women who were formally educated were consistently reminded about the importance of domesticity. In a speech to female graduates of Southern Baptist College,
delivered in 1895, the speaker repeatedly praised women for their virtue and purity. The journalist who covered the commencement commended the speaker for his “vivid picture of the woman who made home happy”:

He said the ideal woman was industrious. She did not spend her mornings in slumber, her evenings in dress and her nights in dissipation. She was careful of material as well as spiritual things. She was thoughtful, virtuous, sympathetic and strong. She was strong against temptation and was not easily moved by solicitation. (“To Young,” 20 May 1865, 2)

The journalist concluded that the speaker “dwelt powerfully on the influence of woman, when rightly exerted in shaping the destiny of nations and of men,” because the speaker extolled to the college graduates the impact of women focused on domesticity.

In most discussions of womanhood in the era, women were valued only for their ability to fulfill domestic functions and to serve as guardians of virtue in the home. However, John Temple Graves and other lynching advocates in the South suggested that virtue and purity make white women godlike. Through a national media campaign of newspaper editorials and lectures intended to promote the legalization of lynching, Graves and others frequently compared white women to Jesus Christ and the Roman goddess Venus, and thus, elevated the position of women in society from subservient, domestic drone to deity. Graves’ speech at a 1903 conference on lynching is representative of this rhetoric:

I am free by the record to assert that no people in history have ever compassed with greater tenderness and with more reverential chivalry the females of their race. Next to the divinity of Christ, the gentleman of the Old South always worshipped the women of his race. . . . To this fine old product the sex of his mother carried with it a reverence that
made her only a little lower than the angels. Her virtues and graces were set up as the sacred alters of his house. . . . Throned in the pedestal of her purity, she was the Empress of his civilization, and she was ever an abstraction in his eyes, as beautiful as Venus the mythical goddess, or beautiful as Venus, the evening star. . . . To insult her was a crime punishable by death and to degrade her person was, in the sight of God and man, the unpardonable sin! (“The Mob” 12)

Graves’ discourse suggests women are worthy of adoration as he compares them to a deity instead of focusing on the subservient role of women promoted by the cult of true womanhood. However, Graves does not attribute to women the power typically associated with a deity. Instead, his rhetoric harkens back to the idea of female helplessness and passivity and suggests that all white women require the “reverential chivalry” of men when “insulted” (“The Mob” 12). Like the rhetoric of the cult of true womanhood, the lynching rhetoric placed value on the virtues of women. However, lynching advocates, in suggesting that all white women were virtuous, eliminated class distinctions promoted by the cult of true womanhood and placed them on the same pedestal. According to lynching advocates, all white women were at risk of rape and needed protection from African-American men. In fact, most of the women who were allegedly raped prior to the Atlanta riot were of the working class and lived in rural areas or urban working-class communities. While these women were not affluent, their reports of abuse were accepted uncritically and alleged perpetrators were sought for punishment, because of the inclusiveness of the lynching rhetoric.

While the rhetoric of the cult of true womanhood and that of lynching advocates were pervasive in the early twentieth century, it did not apply to all women. African-American women, most of whom were only three decades removed from slavery, were excluded from this
discourse. At the turn of the century, most African Americans were focused on obtaining the means for survival, not on female behavior. However, within the masses of African Americans were individuals whose families had never been enslaved and others whose families had gained freedom in earlier generations. Conduct rules, similar to those of the cult of true womanhood, mediated the behavior of women of this more affluent group. Through these rules, African-American upper-class women were encouraged to be pious, pure, and focused on issues of domesticity.

The news coverage of the July 1906 convention of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in Detroit, Michigan, which advocates purity, typifies attitudes regarding African-American upper-class womanhood:

The earnestness and enthusiasm that pervaded the meeting are easily accounted for when we realize that the delegates present knew how very much the future of the Negro people depends upon the influence and carriage of Negro women. . . . We shall not speak of the officers, as each one has her own individuality which impresses all: each is a strong character and all are trying to live pure and noble and helpful lives. . . . If the welfare of the race depends on such women, there is no cause for being pessimistic about our future.

(“National” 196, 7)

One NACW club member was quoted as she complimented meeting attendees, not for their thoughtful speeches, but for their conduct: “the women were modest in demeanor, so quiet in dress, so sane in their deliberations that I was proud to be identified with them” (“National” 197). Just as in club meetings of their white peers, during African-American club meetings, traditional values remained of consequence and intellectual concerns were less important.
In a collection of essays written by African American women in the *Colored American Magazine*, conduct rules for African American women were well defined. Even though many of the contributors to the collection were wives of influential church pastors or officers in national women’s clubs, all the essays emphasized the importance of domesticity, virtue, and piety for African American women. These qualities were particularly prized because they were considered essential for child rearing. In the first and longest essay, ideals of motherhood are described as follows: “The mother should be pure and holy, honest, faithful and careful, remembering that good mothers make good children, good children make good men and women, and it is only the good men and women that can make a good race of people” (“Women’s Part” 53).

Domesticity was another favorite topic. Homemaking skills were intended to improve the quality of life for husbands and children:

She should have a distinct individuality, compelling the respect of the world by her virtue and womanly qualities. She should be a good homemaker and home keeper. . . . Now since home is where the heart is, it should be made a pleasure resort, a place of consolation, a haven of rest for husband and children. (55)

Like white females, upper-class African-American women were encouraged to publish essays, short stories, and poems to provide instruction to other women on issues of domesticity and religion. While there were no women’s magazines that specifically targeted African-American women, female authors contributed to and read black news magazines like the *Colored American Magazine* and the *Voice of the Negro*, which frequently presented articles on proper female behavior. Although white women were generally restricted from commenting on issues outside the domestic realm, African-American upper- and middle-class women were encouraged
to expand their scope to include all issues that could educate the nation on the value of black Americans. As they lectured, wrote books and essays, and conducted themselves in society, African-American women were called upon to uplift their race. This role of race representative was also clearly detailed in essays of the *Colored American Magazine*:

> Never before in the world’s history has the Negro woman’s force been so sensibly felt nor her influence so far-reaching in the public life of the nation. If she makes the most of her broad opportunities as she is heard from the lecture platform, through the press, through her club relations, through her influence as a teacher and as a mother who is contributing sons and daughters to the national and civil life; and if she witnesses in no uncertain way for an application of Christian principles, her part in the solution of racial problems will be well played. . . . At this period, when the Negro race is on the verge of crisis, I would call on the women to come forward and contribute their full proportion towards the saving of the race. But I would call them to come forward without departing from the refinement of their character. I call them to the best and most appropriate exertion of their power to raise the depressed moral tone of our race. . . . The work of the Negro women is different from that of the women of other women races. She must not only carry her own burden, but her sister’s burden also. (Women’s Part 60, 61)

This essay clearly articulates the expected role of African-American women in society. In addition to influencing their children and club associates, members of the upper class were expected to influence all of society to value people of color. Because of this added responsibility, the conduct of black women was well defined and highly scrutinized. Even in the role of race advocate, African-American women were expected to exhibit the traditional attributes of gentility and refinement.
Short fiction, magazine articles, sermons, lectures, and speeches were used to communicate societal expectations to African-American women, just as they were for white women. Many short stories published in news magazines of the era depicted women conducting themselves in a manner intended to uplift their race. An example of such a story is found in the April 1906 edition of *The Colored American Magazine*, “A Case of Measure for Measure,” written by Gertrude Dorsey Brown. In this story, a white homemaker describes her respect for her intelligent, colored maid:

You are certainly decent— you are not just like other maids I have had. . . you are so perfectly correct or so correctly perfect that I can’t quite get used to you. You are a genuine treasure for you do your work so well and seem to fall in with my ways so intelligently and so readily, and yet I cannot command you. I am sure to request instead of command. (Brown 253)

Through these depictions, *The Colored American Magazine* and other news journals hoped to model how “proper” behavior of women would encourage whites to respond with respect for African-Americans. Stories of this type may have been intended to educate both black readers on how to conduct themselves and white readers on how to respond to “proper” behavior from blacks.

Although women were being encouraged to take an active role in shaping opinions on issues of race, African-American men were being urged to work more and allow their wives and daughters to stay in the home. In a report called “Progress of the Negro Race,” published in the *Colored American Magazine* in 1906, men were praised for their efforts at keeping women in the home engaged in domestic work:
It is to the credit of our men that they are more and more keeping their wives and daughters at home to care for the family, but we are still behind the white people in this respect. Eight times as many Negro wives have to work out to-day as among white people who work. If we trained ourselves to more different kinds of work we would be better able to keep our wives home, and in order to make home what it ought to be, our wives must work at home. (Vass 365)

As women were encouraged both to stay home and fulfill a domestic role and also to engage in activism to improve race relations, the thrust of the argument appears to be at cross purposes. However, the suggested roles may have been intended for different audiences, and only upper- and middle-class women who had leisure time and more education were encouraged to engage in activism, while lower-class women were being prompted to engage in domestic chores. This rationale is supported by the fact that the rhetoric about working-class African-American women was different from that of their upper-class peers. While the latter were considered arbiters of proper behavior by which their race could be lifted, working-class African American women were considered to be lazy, immoral, and dirty.

In an article in the *Atlanta Constitution* dated December 1, 1901, “Has Done No Good: Bill Arp Says Educating the Negro Has Been a Failure,” Bill Arp, a Southern gentleman and former Georgia slave-holder, described the characteristics of the African-American working class:

Our old time slaves were better educated for usefulness and happiness. . . . They had more common sense and far more morality. . . . What is wanted is good moral training and the fear of punishment for crime. . . . We have not had but one domestic servant in twenty-five years who would not steal, or as they call it, take little things on the sly. We
expect them to steal and are never disappointed. It is just as much a race trait in the
Negro as it is in the Arabs or the posterity of Ishmael. . . . But the most alarming trait
among the Negroes is their utter disregard for chastity and their conjugal obligations. A
large majority of the Negro women are harlots and their children are bastards. (Arp, 1
Dec. 1901, 9)

Arp’s opinions reflect the dominant discourse on African Americans. Many white citizens of the
era believed that dishonesty and promiscuity were traits of all individuals within the race. While
upper-class African Americans were working to dispel these beliefs about themselves, the lower-
class was defenseless against the rhetoric.

White homemakers in Atlanta seemed to have an even more critical view of working
class African-American women. In a June 1904 letter published in the Atlanta Constitution, a
white female homemaker suggested that African-American women had poor hygiene and
domestic skills:

The present contingency of Georgia negro is a race distinct from all other races. They
stand alone in ignorance, laziness, viciousness, thieving and filth. . . . I observe many
shortcomings in the average colored servant for which she is hardly to blame. . . . Instead
of taking the trouble to teach the menial cleanliness, honesty, good manners, ability or
deftness, there are those housekeepers who are willing to accept them as they are, down
in heel and mouth, inordinately dirty, rude and unable to keep a house in any order, serve
a meal with any tact, or cook the meal so that it may be digested without the aid of the
family physician. (Dooly, 5 Jun. 1904, B4)

Numerous accounts such as this were published in newspapers in the South, indicating that such
negative views were widespread. They were so pervasive that environmental history studies
have been conducted for several cities to learn the validity of the accusations. Bartow Elmore in his essay on the environmental history of Atlanta asserts that African Americans were unfairly judged in editorials like these and that environmental conditions and not behaviors were responsible for most of the concerns about hygiene:

Though blacks living in the sinks of the city suffered from specific environmental disadvantages that made them more susceptible to disease, white Atlantans argued that it was the backward behavior of former slaves, not their natural surroundings, that explained the high disease rate in their neighborhoods. (35)

Differences in disease rates and cleanliness were likely due to environmental factors, as Elmore suggests; however, knowledge of environmental factors and disease transmission was not readily available in the early twentieth century. When working-class blacks exhibited higher disease and death rates, other groups could only point to behavior to explain the conditions. Newspaper editorials of the period suggest that even upper-class African Americans believed the lower class were immoral, dirty, and potential criminals. In an editorial dated August 28, 1906, approximately one month before the Atlanta riot, Henry H. Proctor, the minister of First Church, an elite Atlanta church with upper-class membership, preached a sermon to distinguish the differences between upper- and lower-class African Americans:

The better element of the race has no agreement whatever with this [lower-class] element who in every case are ignorant, irresponsible vagabonds. . . . To prevent future criminals the streets should be cleared of boys and girls at night, and especially of women who prowl the streets bent on evil. (“Wants Loafers,” 28 Aug. 1906, 4)

While Proctor seems to have a negative opinion of all lower-class individuals, it is important to note that he made a distinction about lower-class women. He compares women to wild animals
by suggesting they prowl at night intending “evil.” Proctor argues that lower-class mothers are
careless because they allow their children in the streets at night. Beliefs about the lower class
were also delineated in an article on the success of African-American women’s clubs. The
article describes the conditions that club members were attempting to address:

The club... has taken hold on the social problems that arose from the downfall of
slavery. With freedom came... a poverty-stricken ignorant existence without acquired or
cultivated tastes, or hereditary instincts for home life... The conditions arising from
the unmade home—illy cooked food, unsanitary surroundings, unclean bodies, physical
disabilities, racial tuberculosis tendencies, the rapid death rate, or the moral status of a
people with these worst possible environments. (“Club” 83)

From these statements it is clear that black upper-class women saw working-class women as an
entity distinct from themselves. While club women should be lauded for their efforts to improve
social conditions, their preconceived notions about the depressed moral status of the lower class
should be questioned. Upper-class African Americans seemed to exhibit the same prejudices as
whites against the lower class members of their race.

In addition to considering them the cause of crimes in the city, many upper-class,
educated African Americans considered their working-class sisters to be sexually “immoral.”
This myth was so ingrained that even Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute,
in a speech at Vanderbilt University, suggested that African-American women willingly engaged
in “immoral” sexual relationships with white men:

I believe that you can help us in the lifting up of our race and especially of our women
by generating in your social and educational circles a public sentiment which shall
ostracize a white man who has immoral relations with a colored woman. It is not always
easy for us to draw the line, it is not always easy for us to make sure a woman feels the weight of our condemnation when in too many cases she is supported in ease, sometimes in luxury, by members of your race. (249).

In this speech, Washington seems to suggest that large numbers of African-American women had agency and willingly traded sexual acts for money and comfort. This thought was prevalent and was reported in numerous newspapers. However, it should also be considered that Washington may have felt pressure to present this subject as a problem of black women and black society instead of white society. Discussing the problem in this manner allowed Washington to broach the topic without condemning the white men and women in his audience. This approach would have increased Washington’s chance of gaining support in his efforts to decrease inter-racial sexual relations.

Although Washington was unwilling to accuse white men, many reports in black newspapers accused both white men and black women in discussions of their “improper” relations. One such article was found in an African-American newspaper, The Broad Ax, on October 6, 1906, within days of the Atlanta riot:

At the present time, there are many fast houses in that city [Atlanta], filled with Colored women running at full blast for the benefit of white men and the best business men, the leaders of the most fashionable society among what is called the superior race. . . . Others may be seen mingling with their private Colored mistresses whom they maintain in grand style. (“John,” 06 Oct. 1906, 1)

While Washington’s view of working-class women being sexually “immoral” was widely accepted, many argued that it was social conditions and not promiscuity that encouraged sexual relations between white men and working-class women. Noted sociologist, W. E. B. Du Bois, in
an essay originally published in 1901 on African American laborers in Dougherty County, Georgia, described sexual relations among unmarried African-American female laborers:

Such postponement [of marriage] is due to the difficulty of earning sufficient to rear and support a family; and it undoubtedly leads, in the country districts, to sexual immorality. . . . There is little or no prostitution among these Negroes, and over three-fourths of the families, as found by house-to-house investigation, deserve to be classed as decent people with considerable regard for female chastity. . . . The plague-spot in sexual relations is easy marriage and easy separation. . . . It is the plain heritage of slavery.

(92-3)

In this essay and in his study of urban populations published in 1899, *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois examined the social conditions which fostered promiscuity. Unlike Washington and others in the media, he did not assume that working-class women simply chose to be promiscuous. In fact, Du Bois’ findings suggest that there was very little prostitution among the working-class population, and sex outside of marriage was due in part to lessons learned during slavery from association with whites.

Others also believed that social conditions were responsible for extramarital sex among the working class. An essay in the *Colored American Magazine* on preserving race integrity, “Race Integrity: How to Preserve It,” suggested that social conditions, especially those in the South, encouraged sexual immorality among African-American women. The author, Daniel Murray, asserts that white men targeted black women for sexual “seduction” because laws that prevented miscegenation ensured white men would not be forced to marry or otherwise care for these women after sexual relations:
I believe only a minority of white men in the Southern states are seriously interested in preserving their race’s integrity, and that the majority are either indifferent or are engaged in destroying it by fathering a mixed-blood progeny. These same men are very desirous of preserving the integrity of their women, but wholly indifferent as to their own. . . . In the past and now, the white man ever refuses to put restraint upon his passions when it is possible to induce a Black woman to tolerate his advances. . . . Wherever it [the law] relieves the white man of the fear of criminal proceedings for seduction when a colored woman is concerned observation has shown that where such conditions prevail nine out of every dozen white men prefer the loose relations to the obligations and restraints of marriage, and without a shadow of fear seek the black women. (Murray 370)

While Murray does not use sociological data to argue his position as does Du Bois, he makes a striking observation. Murray’s intention was to open the discussion by presenting an alternate view of what was taking place in working-class communities. Although there were no letters to the editor or other feedback on how the essay was received, it supplemented the voices suggesting that more research was needed to explain the sociological causes of extramarital sexual relations among working-class women.

Like Murray, W. E. B. Du Bois seemed to seek alternate views of the sexual relations between white men and working-class women. In his collection of essays, The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois argued that the sexual abuse of African American women that began during slavery continued through the time of his writing, as working-class women were frequently forced into sexual relations with white men:

The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity,
but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home. . . . The wrong which your gentlemen have done against helpless black women in defiance of your own laws is written on the foreheads of two millions of mulattoes, and written in in effaceable blood. (14, 72)

Du Bois, like Murray, holds white males responsible for the sexual relationships they engaged in with women of color. While Du Bois defines the negative impact these relationships had on black women and their families, he also makes a political statement, as does Murray, about the laws that condoned such behavior during slavery and those that were not effective enough to prevent it in the early twentieth century.

African-American newspapers and news magazines frequently ran reports that described sexual relations between white men and working-class black women. While most presented working-class women as promiscuous and responsible for their behavior, others presented the views of individuals like Du Bois, who suggested that social conditions prompted this behavior. However, in white newspapers during the era, relations between white men and African-American women were rarely mentioned. Even rapes of black women were omitted. In fact, the Colored American Magazine accused Southern newspapers of systematically eliminating reports of white men raping African American women: “No other press except the Southern serves up offenses of this kind [black males raping white women] so flagrantly. Yet it carefully suppresses all accounts of white men’s assaults on colored girls— there were two in Atlanta recently” (“Sentiments” 338). Despite suppression of such concerns in Southern newspapers, in August 1906, an unidentified woman wrote a letter to the editor of the Atlanta Georgian newspaper about white males raping black women. Her letter suggested that this was a widespread concern:
While the awful question is before us, what must we do with the black brute? Let me ask, What are we going to do with the white brute? Can the color change the nature? How many colored girls of Georgia reach the years of maturity before they are in the toils of some white, must I say, man? No, a thousand times, no. I would not so insult my Maker, who created man in His own image, and I am quite sure that does not express the creature of today. (“A Home,” 29 Aug. 1906, 2)

From these reports and essays, it is clear that many people believed a large number of African-American women engaged in extramarital sexual relations considered immoral. While some viewed these relationships as symptomatic of unfavorable social conditions, others used the relationships to stigmatize lower-class black women. Because of this binary argument which labeled working-class women as sexually immoral, dirty, and lazy, many women of color who reported rapes were simply ignored. Newspaper coverage indicates that even the murder of black women did not receive the same response as the murder of their white peers. A September 1906 edition of the Broad Ax, describes the story of an African-American woman being shot by a white man. After the shooting, the man was chased by a mob of white men brandishing pistols and shotguns who believed the injured woman was white. The mob cornered the shooter in a house, but “it was found that the woman was Colored and the mob dispersed” before the police arrived (“White Brute,” 29 Sept. 1906, 1).

Reports such as these of working-class women being raped or murdered without appropriate response suggest that the discourse on racial uplift promoted by upper-class African Americans was not being heard. Black women of all classes were still considered to be promiscuous and unworthy of defense against violence or unwanted sexual advances. Despite the negative view of society, upper-class African Americans persisted in their beliefs that
through a focus on purity, piety, and domesticity, black womanhood could redeem the race. While some upper-class black women tried to share their ideals of true womanhood with their lower-class peers through the efforts of women’s groups and church organizations, others tried to distance themselves from their less well-off sisters. However, during the Atlanta riot, none of these ideals mattered. Race mobs disregarded the positive rhetoric of the black upper class, and any African-American woman who encountered rioters could be assaulted, without any regard for her economic status or moral standing.

Like the rhetoric of the African-American upper-class on black womanhood, the rhetoric of lynching advocates differed from the traditional discourse on Southern white womanhood. While traditional rhetoric encouraged Southern white women to be pious, pure, and concerned with domesticity to attain true womanhood, lynching rhetoric stereotyped women as deities. Further, lynching rhetoric encouraged retribution for the rape of all white women, suggesting that upper- and lower-class women should be valued in the same manner. Alternatively, the cult of true womanhood suggested that only upper-class women of high moral character were worthy of appreciation. During the riot, lynching rhetoric, which elevated the value of all white women, eclipsed the traditional rhetoric of the cult of true womanhood as the volume of newspaper coverage that focused on the need to punish rapists without regard for the moral character or class of the victims increased. Apparently, rioters, who had been repeatedly exposed to lynching rhetoric, had come to accept that all white women were highly valued and worthy of the “reverential chivalry” of white men (“The Mob” 12). Thus, the excesses and racial stereotypes employed by the advocates of lynching impacted in subtle ways the discourse on Southern womanhood.
3

SECTION 2

Prior to the Atlanta riot of 1906, many factors worked together to form the discourse on Southern womanhood. While “cult of domesticity” values were still adhered to, the rhetoric of lynching advocates was influential, particularly in Southern cities. Lynching advocates continually filled newspapers with their comparisons of Southern women to goddesses. Their numerous reports of brutality supported the societal belief that black males were savage and white women were helpless. News coverage suggests that many women were frightened and looked to white men for protection; however, others sought greater autonomy. The national women’s movement and industrialization taking place in Atlanta and throughout the South brought new opportunities for white women to become active in society. As these initiatives encouraged women to seek employment outside the home and develop new interests, they liberated women from the shackles of domesticity. African-American women lacked access to employment in most factories, and their women’s groups generated less money and influence than those of their white peers. However, the same movements that increased independence for white women increased their agency as well.

White males, however, pushed back against the burgeoning female agency and black autonomy; this tension may have been a contributing cause to the Atlanta riot of 1906. The inflammatory news reports with their detailed descriptions of assaults were intended to instill fear and cause Southern females to welcome white male protection and dominance; concomitantly, the violence of the riot and the resulting Jim Crow legislation was meant to subdue African Americans. Gregory Mixon, in his history of the riot, The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City, asserts that “the Atlanta riot was one of several in U.S. history to combine ‘reform,’ disfranchisement, and antiblack violence in order to resist black autonomy and urban community development” (74). This sentiment was shared even by
scholars during the early twentieth century. Pauline Hopkins, the editor of the *Colored American Magazine*, in a November 1902 editorial, “Munroe Rogers,” suggested that the burgeoning black wealth and autonomy caused much of the white hatred that led to violence in the South: “it is a startling fact that if our prosperity increases in the present ratio, the Negro in fifty years from now will own the greater part of the private landed property in several Southern states. Herein lies the prime cause for Southern antipathy” (23). Arguments like those of Hopkins and Mixon suggest that the riot occurred as a response to the developing African-American autonomy. However, women were making great strides and challenging white paternalism too. The riotous response to black autonomy allowed white men to also discourage growing female autonomy in the South. Estelle B. Freedman in her study of the racialization of sexual violence in white newspapers from 1870 - 1900 suggests that historians who studied the impact of reports of rape on female agency have found that such reports were used extensively from the eighteenth through early twentieth century to “undermine women’s autonomy in England and Canada by creating female dependence on men as protectors” (Freedman 467). While rape reports associated with the Atlanta riot did instill fear for many women, they did not crush growing female independence. Instead, women used the riot as another platform to enhance their position in society. In this section, I will discuss the impact of the national women’s movement and industrialization in the South on the discourse on womanhood to assert that these movements, along with the rhetoric of lynching advocates, changed the discourse on female dependence and enabled women to respond to the Atlanta riot of 1906 in a much more vociferous and confident manner.

Much of the feminist discourse popular in the United States in the early twentieth century originated in Britain. Mary Wollstonecraft, an early British feminist, developed many of the
ideals. In her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, Wollstonecraft engaged history from the beginning of civilization through the French Revolution to argue against the status of women in British society. Other feminist publications in Britain, including Mary Hays’, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, in 1798; Florence Nightingale’s, “Cassandra,” in 1852; Harriet Taylor Mill’s, *The Enfranchisement of Women*, in 1851; and Harriet Martineau’s, *Household Education*, in 1848, focused their attention on arguing for educational and professional opportunities for Victorian women.

The British feminist discourse became pervasive in the United States as many American women—regardless of race—became familiar with the work of British feminists. For instance, Caroline Wigginton, in her essay “A Late Night Vindication: Annis Boudinot Stockton’s Reading of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,*” argued that Boudinot Stockton, an elite American poet, like many other American women of the era, was empowered by Wollstonecraft to use personal letters to engage with political and domestic concerns. Wigginton suggests that these letters allowed “a woman author to gain an audience beyond her home and family while also avoiding the cultural ridicule often directed at vocal women” (226). Although some women may have started their feminist efforts with personal letters, American feminists, like those in Britain, quickly became vocal about their beliefs. Feminists, including Margaret Fuller, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Susan B. Anthony, organized themselves to campaign for suffrage, formal education, and employment opportunities for women. While many American feminists were wealthy white women from the North who worked under the auspices of civil rights, religious, and civic organizations, their ideals were disseminated in the South through lectures, pamphlets, and essays.
In the early twentieth century, Southern women were just beginning to get involved in activism outside the home. Their initial efforts were channeled through women’s clubs that focused on providing kindergarten education for children, assistance to the poor, and improvement of city parks and of other civic sites. With this limited focus, women became active in society but were still hamstrung by issues in the home. The importance for women of maintaining their interests in the domestic realm was highlighted in the 1898 annual meeting of the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs held in Atlanta. The majority of their public addresses centered on “reforms [that] tended toward the improvement of the conditions morally and educationally surrounding the women and children of our state. These reforms,” the speakers insisted, “are surely legitimately in the line of woman’s highest work and advancement” (“Annual Official Call” 24 Oct. 1898, 8). Despite their preoccupation with domesticity, the 1898 meeting attendees also discussed feminist issues. Speeches such as “Should women serve on school boards,” “Should women be admitted to the textile school,” “The condition of wage-earning women and children in Georgia,” and “How can we improve the surroundings of our Country Women” encapsulated the principal concerns of women in the South. The titles of these presentations suggest that while women continued to maintain their focus on matters of the home and hearth, they also pursued roles outside the home.

In 1898, the Atlanta Women’s Club also held a meeting in Atlanta. During this meeting, women discussed issues related to the development of a city market, support of working women, and the inclusion of domestic instruction in public schools. News coverage of the meeting revealed that domestic training was more important than other subjects typically taught in school: As one speaker pointed out, “The real remedy of domestic difficulties is to teach the great mass of girls that to know how to live intelligently is of more worth to them and their
country than literature or mathematics! And the only way to teach this lesson is to put domestic
science into our public school course” (“Atlanta Women’s” 10 Oct. 1898, 9). Although this
statement suggests that club efforts were strictly domestic in nature, the speech of Mrs. Burton-
Smith, the president of the Atlanta Women’s Club, suggests that its members were also grappling
with balance between domestic functions and important civic activities:

Perhaps the greatest lesson women are learning today is the full meaning of

. . . responsibility — responsibility for what we think and what we say and what we buy
and what we do! Responsibility in directing intelligent home life that the home may be a
haven of rest and a school of good citizenship—in responsibility as “our brother’s
keeper” that society may become purer and more genuine, education more rational and
thorough, the way of the bread-winner easier and the whole world better and
brighter” (9).

Much of this speech is dominated by rhetoric on domesticity that encouraged women to make the
home a haven and place of rest. This type of discourse was common during the era. However,
the speaker deviates from traditional topics by suggesting that women have a responsibility to be
good citizens who have an impact on society. This new thinking inspired women to explore new
roles and engage in work outside the home.

By 1906, clubs began to address issues that were more political in nature. One of the
most important matters discussed at the annual meeting of the Atlanta Women’s Club was how
to “convince legislators of the need of passing a child labor bill intended to abolish this evil of
working children” (“All the Women’s,” 18 Mar 1906, C3). The upper-class club women also
made it a priority to interact with working-class women. Several women gave testimonials on
their work in factories during the annual meeting to inspire greater involvement in this effort.
Participants at the meeting also discussed methods to get women seats on school boards, raise more funds for scholarships, encourage compulsory education for children, increase taxes to build and support schools, and restrict the number of work hours to eight per day and 48 per week (C3). During the meeting, women listened to lectures on social issues including degeneracy and class equality, and male sociologists encouraged them to get involved (C3). Clearly, the aim of women’s clubs was changing. As these organizations expanded, women with more progressive views began to promote female suffrage, formal education, and involvement in politics for women in the South.

To prepare for the new challenges they would face, many women’s organizations began to train their cohorts to coordinate and execute effective advocacy projects. A March 1906 "Atlanta Constitution" article suggests that the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) provided leadership in training women to fight for reform and suffrage:

The WCTU in its more than thirty years of life has been a training school for any and every woman. . . . In that school she has become accustomed to the sound of her own voice in parliamentary verbiage and method, in impassioned appeal, in logical argument, in patient reiteration of the facts of the reform. In that school she has mastered the mysteries of “the press.” Witness the fact that in 1878, her press committee reported 3000 papers as willing to publish temperance news: in 1905, the press superintendents of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union have the eyes of 22,000 papers; 2816 women in all the states are supplying copy for 1000 columns of news each week. In that school they studied law. . . . In that school women studied the suffrage question. . . . Witness today the onward march of the suffrage movement.” (“All the Women’s,” 11 Mar. 1906, E2).
In addition to advocating for suffrage, women learned to raise and manage the significant sums of money necessary to promote reform. Attendees of the 38th annual Women’s National Suffrage Association meeting held in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1906, learned that the Club had raised almost $30,000 toward suffrage efforts during the year, and because of their successful fundraising and outreach, membership which was greatest in Western and Northeastern states, was growing significantly in the Southern United States (“Women Tell,” 9 Feb. 1906, 5). Through membership in clubs of this type, white women were gaining power and influence as they raised funds and awareness about issues that were important to them. As the report on the WCTU suggests, white women were finding their voice and promoting the new ideals of feminism. The increasing volume of positive news stories on the successes of club women in local Atlanta papers of the era suggests that feminist views were being given greater consideration in Southern society. The development of agency was important for women who responded to the Atlanta riot. The skills they gained and the new perspectives they developed through clubs and the women's movement encouraged a more confident response to the riot.

African American women were also organizing themselves and gaining power through clubs. In 1898, many state clubs and organizations combined efforts to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) which allied itself with the WCTU and other white women’s organizations. The NACW held its fifth convention and celebrated its tenth anniversary in July 1906. During the conference, hundreds of African-American women filled the venues in Detroit, Michigan, to learn about the community work of the club women and hear addresses on “the Afro-American Woman and the Church,” “the Afro-American Woman and the Professions,” and “the Afro-American Woman in Journalism” (“National Association” 197). Among club leadership were many influential women including Mrs. Booker T. Washington.
The NACW supported improvements in domestic concerns, temperance, community, education for youth, and suffrage. Like white women, African-American women used newspapers and magazines to spread their messages and report on club successes. Unlike their white peers, women of color gave attention to the poor living conditions and racial injustices experienced by women, men, and children of their race. In an article on the progress of the NACW published in the *Colored American Magazine*, Mrs. Cornelia Bowen, an educator and officer in the Club, described the work of an Alabama club which typified the work of many state clubs:

The colored women of the state of Alabama are pushing forward a movement to operate a reformatory for our colored youth. It is everywhere conceded that children arrested for small offenses and thrown among hardened criminals are not helped, but are made worse by such unwholesome contact. These earnest women have purchased the land and will soon erect the first building. Our women in other states are working along lines that tend to make better the conditions of our people. (223)

Although this statement seems merely to describe the work being done through the Alabama Club, it also functions to highlight class differences within the black race. While club women displayed the important social work they were doing to eliminate potential criminal threats to society, they also distanced themselves and other productive black citizens from the criminality of their working-class peers. However, if the Atlanta riot was truly incited by black autonomy as Mixon and other historians suggest, this article, intended for racial uplift, would have served to increase the threat of violence against blacks.

While some social work provided assistance to the lower class and emphasized class differences, other work, including lynching prevention, was intended to provide relief to the
entire race. Lynching remained prevalent during the era, particularly in the South, and any person of color could be a victim. In 1906, there were seventy-two lynchings, nine of which occurred in Georgia ("Lynchings" 225). Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell, like many officers of the NACW, were anti-lynching advocates who gave speeches and wrote editorials for newspapers to increase moral pressure to abolish lynching. In addition, Wells used financial pressure to increase the strength of her anti-lynching argument, for “through her efforts, several labor organizations of Bradford and Leeds adopted resolutions warning British emigrants away from the southern states until negro lynching in those states had ceased” (“Ida B. Wells” 8). Several governors of Southern states were angered by Wells’ advocacy efforts which cost their states needed revenue.

The efforts of women of all races in clubs and other feminist groups during the early twentieth century clearly lifted them out of the domestic realm. Through these organizations, women learned to develop agendas for community work and political power, to increase news coverage of their issues, and to raise money to facilitate projects they wanted completed. Female advocates were challenging the traditional discourse on womanhood which insisted that they remain silent while policies were being made on issues relevant to them. These changes in the roles of women allowed women to respond to the Atlanta riot in a coherent manner.

Industrialization in the South also impacted the discourse on Southern womanhood prevalent during the early twentieth century. With the increase in the number of factories and other employment opportunities, the number of working women increased. Changes in employment rates of women were defined in a 1907 article in the Atlanta Constitution. In the forty year period between 1860 and 1900, the number of working women in the United States increased from 300,000 to 5.5 Million ("Serious Matter,” 28 Jul. 1907, D3). In Georgia, there
were 182,000 working women, and the state reported a higher percentage of working married women than other states in the nation: “twenty-seven percent of Georgia’s women are employed for wages. . . . While only one married woman out of twenty works in the United States as a whole, one married woman out of every seven is at work in Georgia” (D3). The article indicates that low family income was the reason many white women were accepting work outside the home.

White women could find many types of employment at the turn of the century. Educated women worked as nurses and physicians, teachers, stenographers/typists, store clerks as well as found employment in many other disciplines. Uneducated women could find opportunities as factory workers, domestic staff at hotels, and in restaurants. However, as the number of women employed outside the home increased so did the concerns about working conditions including pay, working environment, and treatment at work.

Women formed unions to protect themselves and gain negotiating power with employers. A 1904 article on female labor union leaders and the labor movement explained the experience of women with labor unions:

Few people realize how rapidly the organized woman worker is invading our industrial life. She controls 26 different trades in Chicago, and in that city alone numbers 35,000 members. She is to be found in all our factory centers and she will soon be as many as are the Russian soldiers in Manchuria. There are now trade unions in nearly every branch of woman’s work and many of the men’s unions are admitting women members. . . . It is by this means [labor unions] that we can raise wages and secure fixed employment. . . . Through our union we have reduced our hours of labor from fourteen and sixteen hours per day to ten hours, and in some places eight and nine. We have
secured fixed legal holidays. . . . We have cared for our sick and buried our dead” (Carpenter, 15 May 1904, 2).

Women were becoming an important part of working society. They were taking jobs and joining unions in large numbers. Through these unions, women were gaining support in their efforts to ensure a fair work experience and demand better pay.

Unions used negotiation as their primary means to achieve equity for their members; however, when settlement could not be reached, many unions encouraged strikes and boycotts. Anna Bowen, the head of the women cigar strippers union of Boston, suggested that strikes should be used only when necessary:

I think women stand by their demands in strikes as steadfastly as the men. . . . I do not believe in strikes except when they are absolutely necessary, and think every possible means toward an amicable settlement should be made. I do believe in the boycott in all cases where an employer threatens to lower the standard of labor in a given industry and think it the duty of the whole people to boycott such employers. (2)

Although unions viewed striking as a last resort, they engaged in it frequently. Countless articles including “Striking Girls at Memphis: Telephone Workers Persuade Strike Breakers to Return Home,” “Striking Women Parade Streets Thousands Sing ‘The Marseillaise,’ ” and “500 Striking Women Make Attack on Police,” detail female resistance when their working conditions were unsuitable, wages unfair, or opportunities unacceptable at the turn of the century. Most newspaper articles on women’s strikes during the era include a description of the support striking women received from upper-class women and women’s organizations. A report on the strike and arrest of female New York shirtwaist workers described the support of an upper-class woman who mortgaged her home for bail for the workers:
Mrs. Belmont here stepped into the gap and offered bail for the girls, tendering her home on Madison Avenue as security. . . . “It [her home] is valued at $400,000 but I think there may be a mortgage upon it for $100,000 which I raised to help the shirtwaist workers and the woman suffragette movement.” (“Mrs. Belmont,” 20 Dec. 1909, 5)

This report and that of a strike of Chicago garment workers in which club women donned the garb of working women and participated in the strike are just two examples of the multitude of reports that suggest white working women received widespread support from their upper-class peers (“On Girl,” 02 Nov. 1910, 1). Upper-class women championing working-class causes brought greater attention and aid for workers. The money and legal support working-class women received allowed them to strike and take other risks, knowing they would have some of their basic needs met. The support of the upper class gave working women greater confidence and allowed them to achieve better results with their union efforts.

Women’s clubs and organizations also endeavored to enact legislation to protect female workers. In early efforts, women’s organizations supported separate restroom facilities for women, sanitary working conditions, and serviceable fire escapes in factories, public buildings, and other work facilities (Dooley, 26 Jul. 1908, A5). In later efforts, women’s organizations supported legislation to decrease the number of hours women could work, ensure fair wages, and improve the working conditions in which women were required to earn a living.

Trends emerging in the population centers of the upper Midwest and Northeast were welcomed by many women in the South. In Atlanta, The Atlanta Women’s Club and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) worked together to develop housing and assistance with employment for low-income working women. Because Atlanta developed rapidly, the city experienced an influx of female workers who needed to find suitable and affordable
accommodations. These women typically found boarding houses or other places to live, which club women deemed inappropriate. As one newspaper article pointed out:

There is no place where the young women can find help or protection. Earning small wages, many of them are forced to go to the cheapest boarding houses, where the associations are not improving, if not positively harmful and the food furnished is poorly prepared, and they have no proper nourishment for soul nor body. (“Atlanta Women,” 24 Jan 1899, 9)

This report served to inform the public of the poor living conditions of working women and to call attention to the inadequate wages women were receiving for their labor. By placing the discussion of wages in the context of concern for the health and welfare of women, club women were able to use pathos to make a controversial statement on wages. The mention of “associations that were not improving” may have been a reference to prostitutes who were known to reside in low-cost housing. Gregory Mixon asserts that “many white men in the city [Atlanta] were particularly disturbed by. . . “fallen women” [who] lived in bordellos and cheap houses of assignation” (23). Through this allusion, the report emphasizes the declining male authority in Atlanta. News reports of this type may have been a contributing factor in triggering the Atlanta riot, because white males felt threatened by their loss of control over female autonomy.

Women’s clubs were not just bringing to the forefront local challenges to male dominance, they were also putting pressure on the federal government to assist with issues of importance to women. Because of the influence of women’s clubs, the government made efforts to investigate the conditions of female workers. Congress paid for special (industrial) commissions to research the type of work, environment, and necessary work-related procedures
that would be acceptable for female workers. While these commissions were not able to institute new laws, their recommendations to states were important. For example, a recommendation published in 1900 suggested that the length of the work day be fixed:

A simple statute should be enacted by all the states regulating the length of the working day for all persons between the age of fourteen and twenty-one years who work in factories. . . . The length of the working day should be fixed at eight hours. . . . Employment in mines. . . of all women and girls should be forbidden. (“Eight Hours,” 26 May 1900, 2).

Federal commissions provided the government with research data that could be used to encourage states to make new laws about working conditions and many other issues of importance to women. Because research decisions were made on the federal level, women’s clubs and organizations were able to address a centralized source with their efforts and gain results that potentially impacted the entire country.

Despite advances in the workplace, public opinion about female workers was slow to change. Employment outside the home was becoming more prevalent for women, but many women were maligned in newspapers for working because their choices deviated from the traditional roles women were expected to play. This was particularly true in the Southern United States. In a study of cotton mills of the South that ran in *The Century Magazine* in 1890, Southern women were described in less than favorable words: “female operatives in Georgia cotton mills are wasteful and improvident, wear rags because too lazy to sew new clothes, and often expending their hard earnings on satin shoes and nameless gewgaws” (“Mrs. Felton’s Trenchant,” 24 May 1891, 4). In an effort to dispel the negative depictions of Southern women, Rebecca Felton, a women’s advocate and club woman, conducted a study of female workers in
the South. She visited numerous cotton mill factories that employed women throughout the state of Georgia. In every location, Felton inquired about the work habits of the women and their virtue, even though their virtue was not at issue. Too many readers — male and female— tacitly assumed that the proper place for decent women was in the home:

Is this labor efficient, Mr. Fisher? Very good madam,” was the reply. Are they, as a rule, virtuous? Yes ma’am, I believe them to be virtuous. I hear no complaint. . . . It doesn’t take long for a lewd character to disclose herself, no matter what she is engaged in. (4)

After studying the situation and deciding that the Northern press was simply maligning Southern women to improve the position of Northern cotton mills, Felton dismissed the pervasive prejudice: “I know they were heroines, brave and true, and their heroism puts to shame the extreme littleness of those who would malign them” (4). Felton, sympathetic to the plight of working women, used the news media to change the national perception about women in the workplace. However, despite her progressive stance in support of working women, she relied on the reactionary ideology of the cult of true womanhood to define female virtue. Her statement highlights the conflict between the burgeoning feminist and the outdated ideals of true womanhood.

With greater industrialization came many new opportunities for white women to work outside the home and surmount bygone ideals that had hamstrung women for millennia, and thus change the oppressive patriarchal attitude towards the woman’s place in society. However, industrialization also promoted new struggles for women to gain equity in the workplace. Women learned that obtaining fair treatment frequently required advocacy and activities previously considered unacceptable for women including striking and picketing. To achieve
success in labor-related battles, women seemed to employ the lessons of the feminist movement, including abandoning class divisions and banning together for greater impact and financial support and using the news media to highlight important concerns. Club women were integral to success in labor struggles, just as they were in the feminist movement, because their involvement brought attention and needed funds to many causes. Most labor issues women addressed removed them from the domestic realm and encouraged them to abandon traditional codes of conduct, and white women were quickly learning to expand their boundaries and create new codes for acceptable behavior.

For African-American women, however, industrialization did not achieve the same result, for the opportunities offered to white females were withheld from their black peers. Instead of migrating to cities like Atlanta, they became sharecroppers, farming the same plantation land their families had worked as slaves. Ida B. Wells in a speech presented in 1895 on the condition of African-Americans of the era described why more African-Americans did not leave the South: “They are not able to emigrate because they are always in debt to their landlords, being paid in checks for provisions, only good at plantation stores” (“Susan Anthony,” 10 Apr. 1895, 9). The same sentiment was expressed by W. E. B. DuBois in an essay in his collection *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903:

> On the whole the merchant of the Black Belt is the most prosperous man in the section. So skillfully and so closely has he drawn the bonds of the law about the tenant [African American sharecropper], that the black man has often simply to choose between pauperism and crime. . . . When the crop is growing the merchant watches it like a hawk; as soon as it is ready for market he takes possession of it, sells it, pays the land-owner his rent, subtracts his bill for supplies, and if, as sometimes happens, there is anything left, he
hands it over to the black serf for his Christmas celebration. The direct result of this system is an all-cotton scheme of agriculture and the continued bankruptcy of the tenant.

(96)

Typically, landowners and merchants conspired to ensure sharecroppers would not earn the funds necessary to pay debts or leave the land. Many female sharecroppers worked the same land on which their families had served as slaves because of debt. Sharecropping was particularly difficult for women because domestic concerns kept them from working the long hours necessary for significant crop yield. While most sharecroppers lived their entire lives without leaving the farm, others stole away despite their debts or left during a period of relative prosperity.

Even though some were able to escape from farm life, there were few opportunities for work, even in cities like Atlanta. An article that ran in the Colored American Magazine on employment opportunities for educated women, detailed the number of black women in some business professions: “there are now four colored women who are notaries public. . . . We have one journalist of note. . . . Among our well-known stenographers is Miss. Carrie Dent, who holds an important position with the Organizer of the National Negro Business League” (“Opportunity” 303). The article continues to describe the positions of other stenographers and the efforts of some women to obtain employment with the federal government. Although this article may not include all professional African-American women of the era, it adequately indicates that their numbers were very small. In addition to employment in business, educated African-American women could find work as teachers, nurses, and domestic workers. However, even in Atlanta where there was a concentration of colleges and universities for African Americans, the number of female teachers and nurses was insignificant.
Most African-American women were employed as domestic workers. Despite the number of women entering the field, newspaper articles of the era frequently detailed complaints about the quality and quantity of domestic workers. While schools like Tuskegee Institute had programs to train women for domestic work, many white housewives felt educated women were unwilling to do necessary domestic tasks and lacked commitment to the discipline. Employers also complained that uneducated domestic workers lacked the proper training to be of use in their households. An August 1902 article printed in the *Atlanta Constitution* attempted to provide solutions for the dearth of well-trained servants:

> Quit trying to teach negroes the higher branches of education in the country schools of the south. Take the money that is now wasted on Latin and algebra and use it in teaching them to cook, wash, sew, and do general housework. Every town in every county of Georgia ought to have a school for the domestic training of servants, and it ought to be managed by the best white women in the community. (“Trained Servants,” 24 Aug. 1902, D2)

While this article suggested that domestic positions left African-American women very few opportunities to display agency, this claim is not totally correct. Domestic workers found many ways to exercise autonomy. One way these women displayed agency when working conditions were not acceptable was by changing jobs without notice. Because servants leaving without notice was a common concern, examples were frequently featured in newspaper articles. A 1905 news report, “Society: Again the Servant Question,” described the plight of a white housewife whose domestic servant left the home because she was not allowed liberties she had been afforded on her previous job. The article sought to provide a solution for managing African-
American domestic servants who chose to leave their place of employment without giving notice:

The young matron gently remonstrated with her as to the great liberties she had taken, and requested that she desist from such pastimes during her leisure hours. “Why, the lady I formerly worked for didn’t object to my using her piano,” was the excuse given. “That makes no difference,” she was told. “You cannot use mine.” It is needless to add, the young matron, failing to have satisfactory clothes and a well tuned piano and not making due apologies for the same, found herself without a cook the next morning. . . . Until there is some cooperative spirit among housekeepers along this line [sharing information on the good and bad qualities of perviously employed servants], the housekeepers will continue dependent upon untrained servants, instead of the latter being kept in their places, and generally disciplined. (“Society: Again,” 25 Mar, 1905, 8)

A 1906 edition of the Atlanta Georgian featured a similar article, “The Servant Problem: A Possible Solution,” which encouraged white housewives to organize and share information to blacklist domestic workers who left without notice. These types of articles appeared frequently in newspapers, indicating battles with domestic workers were a widespread concern. While white women had won labor and civil liberties struggles through organizing and sharing information and support, that approach was not used to successfully manage domestic workers. The prevalence of workers leaving without notice suggests that domestics knew that demand for their services was high and that they did not have to endure unfavorable working conditions.

Another method to decrease the number of domestic servants who left the employ of white housekeepers without notice was threatening all domestic workers. An article printed in a
September 1890 edition of the *Atlanta Constitution* proposed that domestic workers should be made aware that they could be easily replaced with white domestic workers from Europe:

A large portion of the colored population derive their support from this service [domestic service]. One great trouble is the failure to keep contracts and the sudden leave-taking without notice to employers. . . . There are millions of white people in the crowded regions of Europe who would be glad to get what negro servants treat as something hardly worth their while to bother with. The southern people have always preferred the negro when he would do his best, but this preference ceases when he becomes indifferent and inefficient. A word to the wise is sufficient. ("Trouble," 24 Sept. 1890, 4)

Threats to employ European immigrants as domestic workers were intended to force African-American workers into compliance. However, such threats did not achieve their desired results. Instead of submitting to demands, domestic workers shared information with each other on which families were good to work for and which to avoid. In fact, many articles complained that domestic workers were sharing information and effectively *blacklisting* Southern employers. In an October 1892 article in the *Atlanta Constitution*, a contributor described the problem as follows: “When a cook gets mad and quits, she runs around and warns the naborhood [sic] and she raises a row if another cook takes her place” (Arp, 30 Oct. 1892 10). Likewise, another article printed in the February 1909 edition of the *Atlanta Constitution* described the information sharing and boycotting of domestic workers in this manner:

The sessions of the secret societies are executive ones. The doors are closed. The members never talk about what transpires behind them, and practically every negro is a member of one or more. What high jinks they cut up, we don’t know. We do know that it is at such meetings that, for reasons sufficient to themselves, negro women boycott
their white employers, and the word being passed around, our wives have to do their own cooking.” (Dibble, 7 Feb. 1909, 5)

Through sharing information, blacklisting, and boycotting, domestic workers were able to gain agency. Although their efforts did not appear to be organized, they were efficient enough to make white housekeepers suspicious that they had unions or other structured networks. White housekeepers discussed many methods to curtail the retaliatory practices of domestic workers; however, none of the methods were effectively implemented.

While the practices of leaving work without notice and boycotting employers were a means for Southern African-American female workers to execute agency, similar collective action could be found north of the Mason-Dixon line. In Newark, New Jersey, washerwomen went on strike to argue for a wage increase: “The colored washerwomen of this place won out on a strike for higher wages. They were getting $1.25 for an ordinary wash and struck for $1.50 which they are now getting” (“Washerwomen Strike,” 13 Oct. 1906, 5). While neither the washerwomen or other African-American domestic workers were unionized, they exhibited two of the methods frequently used by unions, striking and boycotting, to gain acceptable employment conditions.

Traditional unions did not accept African-American laborers as members at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a November 3, 1906, article in an African-American newspaper, The Atlanta Independent, the first opportunity for African-American workers to join a union was described:

A great labor union is using its strength and influence to secure higher wages for the negro laboring men and women. This is the first labor organization in this country to take up the battle in behalf of our race. This union proposes to see that the colored
people are given their proper place in the work of this country. ("Higher Wages," 3 Nov. 1906, 3)

Membership in the union promised to provide for African-American workers many of the benefits their white counterparts were already enjoying. Although progress for African-American female workers was slower than that of their white peers, these women were experiencing agency and finding ways to control the conditions under which they worked. While domestic workers banded together to promote better employment outcomes, they—unlike their white counterparts—lacked the widespread support of upper-class women of their race. Upper-class black women were actively engaged in efforts to distance themselves from the working class. They seemed to fear their support might blur class differences and encourage their poor treatment by whites.

Despite their lack of resources, unions, and broad media access, African-American female workers, through efforts in their neighborhoods and church groups, shared information and took advantage of labor shortages. African-American women, just like their white peers, were becoming engaged in activities to improve their employment circumstances and at the same time alter the discourse on womanhood.

While the rhetoric of lynching advocates worked to change the discourse on womanhood by elevating the position of Southern women and decreasing class differences, it did not have the liberating effect of the feminist movement and industrialization in the Southern United States. These movements expanded the acceptable roles for women in society and empowered black and white women to advocate for greater opportunities. Newspaper coverage of the movements detail how women became accustomed to speaking on topics that had not previously been within their domain of thought or discussion. This growing autonomy of women and that of blacks
disturbed white male authority in Atlanta. In retaliation, lynching advocates increased the volume of rhetoric that highlighted black savagery and female dependence in newspapers, inciting white hatred. The violence of the riot and the Jim Crow laws that were instituted in its wake seemed to subdue blacks. However, the riot did not silence women. Empowered women of both races wrote essays, letters, and poems to defend or reprimand male rioters, extend sympathy to African-American victims, or to admonish African-American retaliation. In the final section of my thesis, I will present the responses of women to the Atlanta riot.

4 SECTION 3

In Atlanta in 1906, many women, including those who supported families through their employment or participated in clubs or the feminist movement, were self-sufficient and actively involved in society. Their autonomy, along with the agency many African Americans were beginning to display, challenged Southern white male paternalism. In response, Atlanta lynching advocates initiated a campaign of reactionary rhetoric which depicted white women as helpless victims of African-American male aggression. The campaign eventually led to the violent riot of 1906. While the riot crushed African-American efforts at autonomy, it did not quiet Southern women. These women, who had become accustomed to rendering opinions on important issues in newspapers, lectures, and other forums, were poised to respond to the violence of the riot. Gregory Mixon, Rebecca Burns, Mark Bauerlein, and other historians who have published essays on the riot have largely ignored women’s responses to the riot and instead focused on issues of racial violence and social reform, freedom of the press, or the response of male historical figures to the riot. However, women made many important social statements about the riot. In this section of my thesis, I will discuss the personal letters, poems, essays, and speeches published in local and national newspapers to understand the impact of the Atlanta riot on the discourse on Southern womanhood.
All local Atlanta newspapers covered the riot, as did many papers in other large cities. A survey of several Atlanta newspapers, including *The Atlanta Georgian*, *The Atlanta Constitution* and *The Atlanta Journal* from September 22 through October 31, 1906, indicates that while riot coverage included multiple reports in each of the papers early in the course of the event, it declined significantly by the end of October. Regional newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Herald*, typically had limited coverage of the riot. A review of several regional papers from September 22 through October 9, 1906, reveals that coverage ended by the end of September. In local and regional newspapers, coverage of the riot ended as reports of new current events became more important. In Atlanta, coverage of a large and destructive storm charging through the South filled the headlines when news reports of the riot ceased.

Unlike local and regional newspapers, African-American papers contained extensive, continued coverage of the riot. A study of black newspapers and magazines, including the *Colored American Magazine* and *The Voice of the Negro*, from September 22 through December 31, 1906, demonstrates that these publications continued their coverage through the end of the year. The extended coverage suggests that issues related to the riot were of great importance to readers. Because many of these publications were printed only weekly or monthly, their coverage needed to run for a longer period to address all the concerns.\(^3\) A categorical listing of the newspapers and magazines reviewed for this study is found in Appendix I.

Many women also wrote personal letters about the riot.\(^4\)\(^5\)

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\(^3\)Newspaper coverage of the riot presented two types of responses: reported behaviors which describe the actions women took in response to the riot and written responses which include women’s statements captured in letters, essays, and poems. For written responses, female contributors were identified by the name printed on the signatory line and references to gender in the body of the letter or essay.

\(^4\)Letters signed only with initials and those that did not allow for the positive identification of the contributor’s gender were not included in this study. Only published letters written between September 22, 1906, and September 22, 1907, were included in this study.
The behavioral responses of women to the riot differed by race. White women’s responses were omitted from local Atlanta newspapers, but they were found in regional and African-American newspapers. The report of Mrs. Carol Thompson, a neighbor of the Atlanta Park Commissioner, Robert H. Manley, appeared in the *New York Times*. After witnessing the shooting of two African-American males on Mr. Manley’s porch, Mrs. Thompson died instantly. The *New York Times* described it in this way: “as the shots died away she fell into her husband’s arms dead, killed by the shock” (“Whites,” 25 Sept. 1096, 1). The report of Mrs. F. S. Cox appeared in the *New York Times* and *The New York Age*, an African-American newspaper. Mrs. Cox reportedly confronted the mob and saved the life of a black male, Walter Hicus. Cox locked Hicus in her home and stood on her porch to confront the mob of more than 100 men and said: “This man has worked for me a number of years. He may be guilty, but he ought to have a chance for his life, and not be put to death on suspicion. You can’t have him, but if you will telephone for officers, they can take him to jail” (1). Reportedly, the mob, struck by Mrs. Cox’s courage, did not attack, and Hicus was placed in jail.

Newspapers were sparse on reporting of the heroic or courageous actions of women. However, it is important to note that in the reports white women were respectfully identified by name and described in a positive manner. The lack of coverage of local Atlanta newspapers may suggest that Atlantans were unwilling to accept that a woman could successfully confront a mob of white men, particularly when the city’s mayor had been unsuccessful at controlling the mob. Southerners may have also disdained the idea that the behavior of a mob of white men could

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5Eighteen written responses and five reported behaviors of women during the riot were identified. All responses of women to the riot can be found in their entirety in Appendix II. Behavioral responses are presented first and are followed by written responses.
result in the death of a white woman, particularly since Southern men were believed to be well-behaved gentlemen.

African-American women were depicted in riot news reports as violent and aggressive individuals who encouraged others to fight. The Pittsburgh Gazette Times dated September 24, 1906, described African-American women in this manner: “In the fighting last night, Negro women were the most warlike, urging resistance to the mob and themselves fighting like Amazons” (“Reign,” 24 Sept. 1906, 2). Likewise, the Atlanta Constitution reported that “one negro woman fought like a savage wildcat with an umbrella. Another tried to use a hat pin. They were fighting for their lives, and they knew it” (“Attack,” 23 Sept. 1906, B4). Another Atlanta Constitution report stated, “The negroes, incited by a negro woman who smiled while the fight was in progress, fought until overpowered and dragged off. . . . The negro women were almost disrobed. The women were given a few cuffs on the head and allowed to escape” (“Fierce Fight,” 23 Sept. 1906, B4). Newspaper coverage of the militia raid of Brownsville, a black upper-class Atlanta neighborhood, reported that “many of the negro women . . . screamed, beat their breasts, and called on the Lord to ‘save His people’ while the raid was in progress” (“3000,” 26 Sept. 1906, 5).

Newspaper coverage was universally negative in tone, describing African-American women as savage and violent individuals who encouraged retaliation or hopeless characters who could do nothing but cry to God. Media depictions seem to reflect racial beliefs during the era; blacks were considered either as savages or harmless “old-time” figures, akin to slaves. Only in one Atlanta Georgian report was a woman of color identified by name. In that report, she was being fined for making inflammatory remarks, within days of the violence. While it can be argued that it would have been difficult to identify women on downtown streets, certainly
African-American women could have been respectfully identified by name in news reports of the raid of Brownsville, when militia invaded the homes of upper-class African Americans. The lack of identification suggests that white citizens viewed all African-American women, despite class, in the manner depicted in news reports. Although the lack of naming was likely intended to indicate the insignificance of blacks, it may have served to prevent retribution from whites.

The written responses of women to the riot presented a more diverse picture of their opinions about violence. Most of the written responses were found in the Atlanta Georgian, likely because the editor of the newspaper, John Temple Graves, invited commentary on the riot. White women seemed more likely than African-American women to provide written responses. However, differences in response rate may be attributable to racial differences in access to publication rather than actual differences in the rate of response. Another reason may be fear of repercussions or blacklisting.

Responses of white women varied. Some condemned the mob spirit outright, while others encouraged women to carry pistols filled with acid to use against their male attackers. Yet others recommended that women organize themselves to achieve acceptable social outcomes. This suggestion highlights the fact that women had been successfully organizing to address issues related to feminism and employment and were comfortable initiating legislative change through their organizations. The diversity of responses indicates that many white women examined the social circumstances that led to the riot and offered solutions to remedy the conditions. More than anything, these public responses suggest that women no longer sat on the sidelines but were ready to identify and implement the solutions necessary to rectify racial tension in the city.
By comparison, relatively few African-American women went public with their concerns, but all espoused a concern for safety. However, their solutions on how to manage racial concerns and ensure safety differed in several respects. Adrienne Herndon, a wealthy African-American woman, seemed to sink into despair, desiring to escape to a place of safety but fearing there was no such place in the United States. Alternatively, Carrie Clifford, another upper-class black woman, suggested that whites treat African Americans as they want to be treated to solve racial concerns. Other women expressed anger and suggested violence as the solution. The number of responses is insufficient to draw conclusions on whether the opinions expressed were representative of those of African-American females by class or other distinctions. However, the fact that even affluent African Americans, like Carrie Clifford and Adrienne Herndon, felt a lack of safety suggests that such concerns were widespread and likely more intense among working-class blacks.

Although the riot seemed to incite a universal concern for safety, it did little to change the discourse on African-American womanhood. After the riot, the concerns of these women were ignored in mainstream media, just as they were before the riot. Most black newspapers continued to stress class differences between upper- and working-class African-American women, as they insisted lower-class women were the cause of crime and other societal concerns in the city. A few newspapers, however, asserted that working-class blacks protected upper-class neighborhoods during the riot and had thus earned the loyalty and respect of their upper-class peers, but that message was eclipsed by negative depictions.

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While the riot had little impact on the discourse on black womanhood, it worked to solidify the changing discourse on Southern white womanhood. As women employed the skills they learned in feminist and employment struggles to respond to the riot, they took another step toward changing the effective discourse on womanhood. The bold actions of women like Mrs. Cox who successfully confronted and stopped a mob of over one hundred angry men suggest white women did not need protection. With women writing essays and letters to identify potential solutions to the racial concerns in the city, it could no longer be argued that women needed men to find solutions to societal problems. In fact, the responses suggest that women were eager to become involved in shaping the social conditions of their city, and the riot presented an opportunity for them to come forward.

After the riot, Atlanta evening newspapers were chastised by a Fulton County grand jury for their inflammatory and bigoted reporting of the riot. Unlike the Atlanta Evening News which was named in the jury report, the Atlanta Georgian was only referred to as an afternoon newspaper. Thus, despite the printed evidence, the Georgian initiated a print campaign to deny ever having engaged in incendiary reporting and to pledge to suppress such reporting in the future. Articles calling for lynch mobs to protect the sanctity of white womanhood no longer appeared in the newspaper, and reports that highlighted the fear of defenseless white women before the riot were replaced with those of women who were more self-sufficient and independent. Reports titled “Women Unionist Hold Meeting to Discuss Trouble” and “Brightest

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7 Reports of Fulton County Grand Jury findings were printed in several local papers. In the Atlanta Constitution, the findings were reported in: “Evening Papers are Condemned: Grand Jury Deplores Sensational Journalism.” Atlanta Constitution 28 Sept. 1906: 7.

“We, the members of the grand jury of Fulton county, Georgia, believing that the sensational manner in which the afternoon newspapers of Atlanta have presented to the people the news of the various criminal acts recently committed in this county, has largely influenced the creation of the spirit animating the mob of last Saturday night.”
Mind of Georgia Women Meet in Americus” were typical of the coverage. Depictions of white women successfully warding off attacks by men like “Woman Held to Door and Kept Burglar Out,” were also more common. This report detailed how Mrs. G. E. W. Robertson held off a burglar keeping herself and her daughter safe from harm:

The man entered the front door and endeavored to enter the room in which Mrs. Robertson and her daughter were sitting. The woman held to the door knob, however, and while the daughter screamed for help the man endeavored to wrench it from her grasp. (2)

It is not possible to be certain that the shift in reporting reflected a change in perceptions on Southern womanhood. Perhaps inflammatory rhetoric involving Southern womanhood had run its course in the city because African-American Atlantans were deemed sufficiently subdued. Although the depictions of women as helpless creatures necessitating male protection were eliminated from the *Georgian* immediately after the riot, they gradually disappeared from other newspapers as well, as a much more stratified representation of Southern women began to appear in the media. These changes indicate that Atlantans were being presented new images of Southern womanhood, and the riot may have been a contributing factor for the change.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The efforts of women and blacks to gain autonomy and be heard on social issues proved to be a threat to white male dominance in the early twentieth century, and lynching advocacy is just one example of how white men engaged rhetoric to maintain paternalism in the South. Through depictions of African-American male aggression and white female dependence, white males instituted violence and changed perceptions on race and gender. While many Southern women accepted male authority and welcomed male protection, others rebuffed male dominance. Those women joined the women’s movement, took jobs and became active in labor disputes, and
engaged with local politics. Through media campaigns, protests, and legal battles, women began to have a voice in society. To stem female agency and African-American progress, an increased volume of incendiary racist rhetoric was printed in newspapers to incite violence. In Atlanta, the yellow reporting resulted in the riot of 1906. Although many women were frightened, others who had become accustomed to voicing their opinions used the riot as an opportunity to engage in the development of new social mores in the city. Women’s statements on the riot were diverse, and many of them detailed logical approaches to manage race issues. However, their commentary was insufficient to change the discourse on Southern womanhood. Changes in the discourse seemed to occur only after the riot when newspapers were reprimanded for incendiary and irresponsible reporting. In an effort to distance themselves from such reporting, newspapers stopped promoting the racist images and instead presented women with greater autonomy. This shift in reporting to a stratified representation of Southern white womanhood suggests that the riot may have had a subtle impact on the discourse on Southern womanhood presented in the city.

After the Atlanta riot, significant race riots took place in many other cities, including Springfield and Chicago, Illinois. A few of the riots were instigated by the same racist rhetoric used in the Atlanta riot, but more of these riots were associated with labor disputes, fear of growing black populations, and anger over black autonomy. This change in the instigating factors of the later riots suggests that using the dependent female trope to start violence may have been losing favor or becoming less effective and the discourse on womanhood was truly changing.
REFERENCES
Section 1 Works Cited


Address.


“To Young Women: Dr. Spalding Delivers a Sermon to Young Lady Students.” *Atlanta Constitution* 20 May 1895: 2. Web. 30 Jun. 2014.


**Section 1 Works Consulted**


Section 2 Works Cited


“Susan Anthony’s Statement: Colored People No Better Treated North Than in the South.”


Section 2 Works Consulted


“Striking Girls at Memphis: Telephone Workers Persuade Strike Breakers to Return Home”


Section 3 Works Cited


“Reign of Terror in Atlanta in which Negroes are Slain Causes Military Occupation.”


Section 3 Works Consulted


Web 20 Aug. 2014.

APPENDICES

Appendix A-Works Consulted for Responses of Women

Local Atlanta Newspapers:

Atlanta Newspapers:

• Atlanta Constitution
• Atlanta Georgian
• Atlanta Journal

Regional Newspapers:

• New York Times
• Boston Evening Transcript
• Pittsburgh Gazette Times
• Urbana Daily Courier
• Cleveland Leader
• Los Angeles Herald
• San Francisco Call
• Richmond Times Dispatch
• Memphis Commercial Appeal

African-American Newspapers and News Magazines:

• (New York) Colored American Magazine
• (Boston) Alexander’s Magazine
• (Atlanta) Voice of the Negro
  • Atlanta Independent
• New York Age

• (Chicago) Broad Ax

• St. Paul Appeal

• (Baltimore) Afro-American Ledger

• (Indianapolis) Freeman

Note: These works were reviewed for coverage of the race riot; however, many lacked responses to the riot written by women.
Appendix B-Responses of Women to the Atlanta Riot

Responses are listed in the order they appear.

Reported Behaviors:


Written Responses of African-American Women:


Written Responses of White Women:


WHITE WOMAN SAVED HIM FROM MOB OF LYNCHERS

Her Door to Fleeing Wretch and Fired for Him.

ATLANTA, September 24.—The bravery of Mrs. S. P. Cox of West End saved Walter Hicus, an Afro-American, from being lynched this morning. Hicus was being chased by a mob on suspicion of being implicated in the assault upon Mrs. Arnold, for which one innocent Afro-American has already been killed. There were a hundred whites in the party and Hicus was hard pressed when Mrs. Cox called to him to come into her home.

The man rushed into the proffered refuge and Mrs. Cox shut the door on him and faced the mob. She told the men that they could not have Hicus without breaking into her house.

“This Negro has worked for me a number of years,” said Mrs. Cox. “He may be guilty but he ought to have a chance for his life and not be put to death on suspicion. You can’t have him, but if you will telephone for officers they can take him to jail.”

The mob was struck by Mrs. Cox’s courage and officers were summoned, who took the Afro-American to jail.