Women in South Carolina Politics

Lynne E. Ford
Women entering public life and politics in the South have had multiple hurdles to overcome. At first, the obstacles were both cultural and legal; women were quite simply legislated out of public life and reassured that it was for their own protection. Over time, however, as the legal impediments to women’s participation in politics have fallen, persistent social attitudes relegating women to the private sphere and marginalizing their public role have proven perhaps more impenetrable than any law. In the history of the South Carolina state legislature, for example, a total of 55 women have been elected; 23 of these women were serving in 1996. Prior to 1970, only nine women had ever served in the state legislature. Two women have been elected to statewide office. The first, Nancy Stevenson, was elected Lieutenant Governor in 1978; and the second, Barbara S. Nielsen, State Superintendent of Education, is currently serving. Within the judiciary, Jean Toal serves on the state Supreme Court; and while two women currently preside on the Court of Appeals, there are no women serving on the Circuit Courts.1 Elizabeth G. Van Exem (1938-1939)2 and Elizabeth J. Patterson (1986-1993) are the only two women in the history of the state to have served in the U.S. Congress. South Carolina has yet to send a woman to the U.S. Senate.

It seems paradoxical that so few women hold political office when females registered to vote throughout the state outnumbered men by almost 80,000 in the 1994 elections and current state registrations for the 1996 elections show the gap has almost doubled.3 Will this growing reservoir of potential political advantage translate into greater representation for women in state politics? It seems unlikely. The persistent lag in southern women’s representation behind non-southern states is a reflection of the political culture and a place for women
historically defined within the private sphere. Women in South Carolina are caught in the double bind of socialized cultural roles that proscribe their public participation and a tenacious traditionalistic political culture that supports and defends the status quo through the maintenance of elite white male rule.

South Carolina: Traditionalistic Political Culture

Women in the South have been historically slow to enter public life and politics and are vastly underrepresented in governing bodies and visible leadership positions within the southern states. Scholars are undecided as to precisely why this is so. Daniel Elazar’s analysis of American politics through the use of political culture proves a useful starting point in explaining why women are largely invisible in South Carolina politics.

Political culture has been described as "the historical source of such differences in habits, concerns and attitudes that exist to influence the political life of the various states." As such, political culture defines the role for the individual within politics and public life and has been widely used to explain differences in political behavior across states and regions. Historically, the dominant national culture in America has proscribed women’s active participation in politics, defining the competitive electoral arena as most appropriate for men. Yet the considerable variation in the proportions of female representation across the states suggests that some state environments may foster women’s participation at both the mass and elite levels, while others do not. Diamond finds that moralistic and traditionalistic subcultures are most directly related to women’s representation in state legislatures. In moralistic states, there is a general commitment to utilizing communal...power to intervene in the sphere of private activities when necessary for the public good or the well-being of the community. Accordingly, issues have an important place in the moralistic style of politics, functioning to set the tone for political
concern... Politics is a matter of concern for every citizen.\textsuperscript{8}

Therefore, a moralistic culture encourages a political environment "potentially receptive to the values and style that have traditionally been associated with women—concern with public welfare rather than personal enrichment and so forth."\textsuperscript{9} Further, given the focus on issues, women within moralistic subcultures are able to promote gender issues like women's health and reproductive policy, as well as broader social concerns like crime, education and nutrition.

The traditionalistic subculture, on the other hand, dominant in the Southern states, "accepts government as an actor with a positive role in the community, but tries to limit that role to securing the continued maintenance of the existing social order."\textsuperscript{10} Therefore, political power is confined to a relatively small group of elites "who often inherit their right to govern through family ties or social position."\textsuperscript{11} Those without defined roles to play in politics are not expected, nor encouraged, to be even minimally active as citizens and certainly not as legislators. This includes women and other minority populations as well as low income, poorly educated citizens. Further, mechanisms of participation, like political parties, that might allow such groups entrance to elective office are not important in traditionalistic political cultures since they "encourage a degree of openness that goes against the grain of an elitist political order."\textsuperscript{12}

A variety of measures have been developed to empirically test the relationship between Elazar's typology of subcultures and the variation in women's representation across states. The results have been somewhat mixed.\textsuperscript{13} Hill and Nechemias\textsuperscript{14} both find at least minimal evidence that moralistic and traditionalist subcultures exert some influence on the proportions of women in legislative assemblies, while Jones and Nelson\textsuperscript{15} find political culture less important than other factors. Darcy, Welch and Clark's review of such studies suggests that the problem may lie with the measure of political culture:

The traditionalistic political culture, then, may be just another way of saying southern regionalism. Southern states \textit{are} lagging behind the rest of the nation in...
female legislative representation, but we learn little about why by saying this is caused by 'southernism' or by the traditionalistic political culture, which in this context is the same thing.\textsuperscript{16}

Wilma Rule linked historical egalitarian tradition with women's representation in state legislatures. She found that the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment before it became a part of the U.S. Constitution was unrelated to the current levels of female representation.\textsuperscript{17} Likewise, David Hill tried to link a state's "climate of advancement" measured by male and female professional incomes with the number of women in elective office and found no statistically significant relationships when other factors were held constant.\textsuperscript{18}

In looking at the role of the political party, Emmy Werner, in some of the earliest research on women in state legislatures, found that women tended to be elected in Republican states rather than in states dominated by the Democratic party.\textsuperscript{19} If heavily Democratic southern states are removed as confounding forces, the relationship remains although weakened. Scholars suspect that the Democratic party's ethnic coalitional nature, combined with the Republican party's association with Prohibition and suffrage account for these differences through the 1970s. The relationship between party dominance and the proportion of women in state legislatures disappears for all but states in the deep South in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{20} Robert Darcy, Susan Welch and Janet Clark conclude it is not one factor but the web of interrelated forces that conspire to limit women's participation in state electoral politics in the South:

The absence of party competition, the politics of race, a traditionalistic political culture, and rural domination of legislatures through legislative malapportionment are all possible explanations for the low representation of women in the southern state legislatures.\textsuperscript{21}

Elazar identifies South Carolina as perhaps the most traditionalistic state in the Union. From the "earliest years of its
settlement it was built around the maintenance of traditional patterns of rule and institutions to support them.\textsuperscript{22} Voting, in particular, was limited to the few through intimidation and explicit franchise restrictions debated and affirmed in the 1895 Constitution. For women, the traditionalistic political culture fuses plantation sex role expectations and religion with their role in maintaining the patriarchal white social hierarchy, rendering women culture-bound and isolated from the forces of social change that benefited women in non-southern states.

The Perils of the Pedestal: Social and Cultural Limitations on Women's Public Role

Since political subcultures are derived in part from the "cumulative historical experiences of particular groups of people,"\textsuperscript{23} traditional gender role expectations regarding women in the South borne out of the plantation experience prove doubly powerful in explaining women's absence from political life. Southern states were particularly slow in admitting women into public life\textsuperscript{24} and, as one scholar observed, "the myth of the southern lady has served as a golden cord binding women to traditional roles."\textsuperscript{25}

Slavery held Southern women back...because control of slaves dictated control also of white women. Slaveholding dulled men's sensitivity to individual freedom and created the hypocritical 'chivalric ideal' that chained women to a pedestal.\textsuperscript{26}

Southern women have, by tradition, not only been relegated to the home, family and private sphere, but defined by the totality of expectations within these institutions. As Shirley Abbott wryly warned, "To grow up female in the South is to inherit a set of directives that warp one for life, if they do not actually produce psychosis."\textsuperscript{27}

The identity of the South and the southern woman is wrapped tightly within church and family.\textsuperscript{28} Regional traditions, a deep "regard for kinship networks and genealogical connections, and open
conservatism on issues of social change create a formidable impediment blocking southerners from entering the mainstream. The ideological rhetoric of the plantation culture placed white women on a pedestal, isolating them from normal economic and social intercourse to a greater extent than women in other areas of the country. Inherent in these traditional southern values is a strong individual and collective commitment to maintain differences in sex-role behavior and attitudes toward men and women. The combination of "southerness," religion and patriarchy remains a powerful force in the socialization of southern women:

Religious women were persuaded that the very qualities which made any human being a rich, interesting, assertive personality—a roving mind, spirit, ambition—were propensities to be curbed. No matter what secret thoughts a woman might have about her own abilities, religion confirmed what society told her—namely, that she was inferior to men.

For southern women, the "family" often included the entire plantation household—slaves, women, and children—all of whom were subject to the master's supreme will. "Patriarchy guarantees the place of the husband as supreme head of the household while providing a special protectiveness for, and adoration of, women." Women, after all, were instrumental in maintaining the white male lineage. "In a biracial slave society where 'racial purity' was a defining characteristic of the master class, total control of the reproductive females was of paramount concern for elite males." The social rhetoric of the time, in fact, celebrates the importance of republican motherhood: the virtue and vitality of patriotic women who bore future statesmen. Southern women's role was thus inextricably tied to her "biological destiny": her primary duty to her husband to produce heirs and duty to her country to produce citizens. Both of these "duties" tied women to the household and "chaperonage" further limited their ability to bridge the gap between the private and public spheres. Southern women could be "protected" within the confines of their sex
role and the boundaries of the plantation; outside these walls, danger and chaos prevailed.  

While southern women had power and ruled the domestic sphere, the public world of economic gain, political influence, and self-determination was off limits. Southern women, therefore, had to pursue more subtle means to emancipation than their sisters elsewhere. Women gradually expanded their participation in church societies and the Women's Christian Temperance Union to include women's clubs and suffrage organizations. In the process, female leaders emerged carefully constructing their public persona to fit within the confines of the image of the Southern Lady. This image in the late 1800s included both external qualities, such as beauty, gentleness, and winning ways, as well as components related to appropriate behavior: modesty, domesticity, chastity, and submission to male opinions. As long as the image could be at least outwardly maintained, southern women expanded their participation in the suffrage and equal rights movements. As a Virginia woman remarked in 1918, "the wise suffrage leaders here have realized...that success depends upon showing their cause to be compatible with the essentials of the Virginia tradition of womanliness, and both instinct and judgement have prevented the adoption here of the more aggressive forms of campaigning."  

Thus, it has historically been a cautious, rather passive entrance into politics for southern women. They have been burdened by a culture that charges them with maintaining the values and southern "way of life" when threatened by social change—even when the nature of social change would directly benefit women themselves.

Voting Rights for Women in South Carolina:  The Intersection of Race and Gender

The fight for suffrage rights among South Carolina's women began in 1869 when Charlotte Rollin, an African American woman, first spoke on the floor of the South Carolina House of Representatives asking for women's suffrage. Having met with little success, Charlotte and her sister Frances Rollin convened a Women's Rights Convention in Columbia, December 20, 1870. By 1871, the sisters had
chartered a South Carolina branch of the American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA), nationally organized by Lucy Stone. Working with other progressive women, the Rollin sisters believed that their best hope for suffrage within the state rested with the South Carolina legislature. In 1892, Senator R. R. Hemphill acted on their behalf by introducing a joint resolution in the Senate to allow women to vote. Advocating women's suffrage, he argued that it was "founded in justice and demanded by the dictates of an enlightened public sentiment." Not many of his colleagues shared such sentiments, however, and the bill was defeated that same year. It was not until the Constitutional Convention of 1895 that women's suffrage was again taken up, but this time the motivations had little to do with justice and enlightenment.

Some of the earliest recorded debates in South Carolina over women's public role involved voting rights. Most clearly, the 1895 Constitutional Convention debates highlight the intersection between race and gender in South Carolina culture and politics. "Disenfranchisement of blacks was the central focus of the convention" and what might have been a progressive step for women in 1895 with the extension of voting rights for property-holding women, proved nothing more than a thinly disguised attempt to dilute the influence of the black male vote and prevent suffrage for black women.

Delegates to the convention considered several provisions that would have extended the vote to women, provided they held property, paid taxes and met literacy requirements. The primary purpose of these provisions advocated by male delegates, however, was not to enfranchise women, but rather to "cripple the black vote without doing so in an explicitly discriminatory fashion that might attract the wrath of the Federal authorities." Had this not been the case, it is doubtful that women's suffrage would have received much attention at the Convention. Males opposed to voting rights for women argued that women, particularly delicate southern women, should not be exposed to the corruption of politics in public polling places where they might encounter crude language and oafish behavior. Moreover, women could only be expected to vote as their husbands instructed them, thus unduly inflating the political opinions of some portion of the electorate over others.
Women in South Carolina pressed for suffrage for other reasons. The national women's suffrage campaign was well underway by 1895 and was therefore a nascent presence at the South Carolina Constitutional Convention even in the absence of any female delegates. Susan B. Anthony, national leader of the women's suffrage movement, spoke at the Columbia Opera House in 1895. Women argued that their presence in politics was badly needed and that if "women were given the ballot, they would come in with mops, brooms and clean water and purge the state of the corruption that men seemed unable to root out." An editorial in *The State* on October 29, 1895, made a similar argument:

We believe and maintain that to extend the suffrage to taxpaying women is not only just in itself, and an honest safeguard against any possible "Negro domination," but that it will promote the good order and the purity of elections. Rowdyism at the polls will not be tolerated when the wives and sisters of the men are to visit them; those who think nothing of cheating men out of their votes will hesitate to cheat women.

Similarly, Cora S. Lott made the following argument situated squarely within the role for southern women as moral guardians of society, rather than property-holders within the male domain:

The great importance of making no mistake in the pending change in the Constitution is felt by every thinking woman in the State far more keenly than by the men. Are not our sons and daughters vitally concerned, and who will assert that a child is dearer to a father than to a mother? We are intended for helpmates in the broadest sense. Can we be that when no voice is given us in framing the laws by which we are governed? ... That indomitable courage is in the mothers of this dear Southland, and I have no fear that they will be found wanting when the privilege is
accorded them for a voice in the government of those dearer than life... Let our men give us franchise, and the moral influence exerted by woman will be the needful leaven which will permeate and make palatable what we now find a heavy loaf.46

Arguments that women should be enfranchised because the nature of democracy declares the vote a fundamental right upon which all others depend went unanswered. When a group of women from Marion, South Carolina submitted a petition suggesting that

...since true democracy maintains that every individual is born with an equal right to the protection and consideration of the law and affirms that every one must have a vote in order to secure this fundamental right; that whereas the spirit of our form of government is such as requires that no man's property shall be taken for the purpose of government without his consent, and since, therefore, the law allows women to hold and manage property, it seems anomalous and inconsistent that it should refuse them a vote to protect their property from inordinate taxation and the consequences generally of weak or vicious government, and class them along with the minor, the idiot, the lunatic and the criminal; that whereas to exclusion from the suffrage founded on color has long since perished, it is a matter of deep humiliation to your petitioners that the only other exception should be founded on sex alone; and whereas that from these and other incontestible grounds your petitioners are firmly persuaded that the disenfranchisement of women is an utter anomaly in the constitution of a free people that boasts of "equal laws and equal rights," and a most unjust discrimination against equally free-born, moral, intelligent and property-holding individuals;...
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The Convention did not even bother to refer it to a committee for serious consideration. The majority of suffrage proponents were reassured by arguments that rendered the vote compatible with women's moral role within the private sphere. The most persuasive opponents used similar moral claims regarding a woman's place in society. In denying women the vote, John T. Sloan, argued that it "...is not a prejudice, but is a religion that we have been taught to place women in South Carolina upon a grander and a greater plane... God has settled the question for us...after he had created Adam and put him in the garden of paradise as a ruler over all things, then he gave a grand finishing touch and made woman. He never intended her to be put on an equality with man in any respect."  

When a vote was finally taken on the amendment to grant voting rights to property-holding women, it was voted down 121 to 26. The intersection of race and gender traditions proved powerful in the defeat of women's suffrage in South Carolina. Underwood, in reflecting on the 1895 debates, surmises that the tradition of the "pedestal-dwelling women would be sacrificed only if it were essential to maintain the even more dominating tradition of white supremacy."  

Disappointed, but undaunted, suffragettes continued to publicly press for women's rights. As the national campaign adopted more unconventional forms of political pressure, South Carolina women followed albeit more peacefully. The first suffrage parade in the state was held in 1910 through the streets of Greenville, but was followed seven years later by a much larger, more dramatic display in Aiken County. The Aiken County women adorned themselves in yellow, the color of suffrage, and marched through the streets led by Eulalie Salley. Salley was later elected president of the South Carolina Equal Suffrage League in 1919, just before Congress passed the nineteenth Amendment and sent it to the states. South Carolina did eventually ratify the Anthony Amendment, but long after women in the state had voted for the first time in 1920. The South Carolina state legislature ratified the Nineteenth Amendment in 1969.
Women began entering the southern state legislatures shortly after the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment. Few women served for any significant length of time, most serving for two terms or less. The early women to serve in southern legislatures fit the "Southern Lady" model: they arrived at public awareness and public participation through their involvement in church or club work. Once suffrage was accomplished, many women saw political office as a reasonable way to exert more direct influence over social and education policies. Generally, their legislative interests centered around the needs of women and children, the poor, and improving the quality of life in their communities and the state.

Like their predecessors during the suffrage debates, southern women legislators, throughout the decades to follow, shied away from outwardly exhibiting feminist sentiments. Two issues proved the exception in the 1960s-1970s: women serving on juries and women advocating the Equal Rights Amendment. While women state legislators in Mississippi were much more vocal within the context of the legislature in gaining women seats on juries, South Carolina eventually amended the constitution in 1967 to allow women to serve on juries in state courts. The Equal Rights Amendment enjoyed considerable support among women throughout the state. This was one of the few times that women within the state legislature organized and campaigned on behalf of a "women's issue" despite strong opposition from many of their male colleagues. The amendment passed the House of Representatives in 1972 but died in the Senate that same year. The ratification bill was again introduced in 1973 and 1975, but was tabled on both occasions. The South Carolina branch of the America Association of University Women (AAUW) took an active part in promoting the ratification of the ERA and subsequently a more active role in supporting women for elective office within the state.
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Women in the State Legislature

From the start, South Carolina lagged behind even the other southern states in first electing a woman to either chamber of the legislature. In 1928, Mary G. Ellis was elected to the South Carolina state Senate, but it wasn’t until 1946 that Harriet F. Johnson was elected to serve in the state House of Representatives. Fifty years later, South Carolina ranks 43rd in the United States in representation of women in the state legislature. Of the 170 state legislators currently serving, only 23 are women; three serve in the Senate and 19 in the House. Women, therefore, constitute 13 percent of the South Carolina legislature compared to 20.7 percent nationwide. Of the seven states with fewer women, four are states of the former Confederacy and two, Kentucky and Oklahoma, are widely regarded as southern in character. For the South as a region overall, women constitute only 13.7 percent of the whole (see Table 1). While this is certainly a significant increase over the 2.5 percent of the legislative seats held by women in the South in 1971, the rate of increase for women’s legislative representation in the South has been dramatically slower than for women in other parts of the country.

African American women entered southern legislatures even more slowly and incrementally than white women. Prior to the 1960s, the only period of widespread participation by blacks in politics was the period of Reconstruction in the South when women were still denied the vote. Once suffrage was granted in 1920, racial barriers erected in southern states prevented African American women from voting once again. Not until after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and its enforcement did black women enter politics either as voters or candidates. By 1973 the states of the Old Confederacy accounted for one-third of all black women in elective office, "a figure which has declined as the number of black women office holders elsewhere has risen." Most African American women in elected office in the South are concentrated in offices related to education, a reflection of the high proportion of educated black women who are teachers and "a persuasive case for professional preparation for all women."
Table 1

Women in the Southern State Legislatures: 1993 and 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1993 (N) %</th>
<th>1995 (N) %</th>
<th>Rank in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>43\textsuperscript{63}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average for Region: 13.0% | 13.7%
Average for Nation: 20.4% | 20.7%

In 1972, there were seven black women in southern legislatures and eleven by 1974.\textsuperscript{64} In 1995, of the 1,535 women serving in state legislatures nationwide, 167 (10.8 percent) are African American. There were 40 senators and 127 representatives, all but three were Democrats.\textsuperscript{65} In 1994, a Republican African American woman was elected for the first time as the Secretary of State in Colorado.\textsuperscript{66} In the South Carolina state legislature, African American women constitute 31.5 percent of the women in the House of Representatives and one of three women in the Senate.\textsuperscript{67} All of the African American women serving in 1996 are Democrats. There has
not been much research on the efficacy of women of color working in largely white legislative institutions. However, throughout the nation, moderate to large-size cities in the South serve as the region of origin for most of the African American women serving in politics suggesting that additional research about the intersection of regionalism, race and gender would be fruitful.

Women's underrepresentation in South Carolina at the state legislative level is significant for a number of reasons. First, evidence shows that service in the state legislature functions as a key entry point to higher office; the rate of gains for women at the state level has a direct impact on the number of women serving in the national legislature and executive positions nationwide. Of the 47 women who hold seats in the 104th U.S. Congress, 20 served in their state legislatures prior to being elected to the national legislature. Liz Patterson serves as South Carolina's only example, having served in the South Carolina Senate from 1979-1986 just prior to winning the fourth congressional district seat in 1986.

Additionally, state legislatures hold particular importance for women from a policy perspective; many of the issues of direct concern to women are decided at the state level. The Equal Rights Amendment, issues of pay equity, spousal retirement benefits, teen pregnancy, women's health concerns, maternity and family leave issues, and workplace climate have all received direct attention at the state level. Research shows that a higher percentage of women than men spend time promoting passage of "women's rights" bills and that women are more likely to list "women's distinctive concerns" when asked to name their top legislative priority. To many interested in the promotion of women's rights, this suggests that as the number of women serving at all levels increases, the attention devoted to policy of direct concern to women will also increase.

The few women serving in South Carolina's state legislature over time may be one of many forces responsible for the state's relatively poor record on women's rights and legal status. In December, 1986, the National Organization of Women (NOW) released a study entitled, *The State-by-State Guide to Women's Legal Rights.* The study ranked all 50 states and the District of Columbia according to a point system based on women's legal rights in four areas:
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employment, home and family, education and community. In each of the substantive policy areas, a state could receive from +4 to -2 points depending on the degree of protection provided by state statute in each of the four areas. The points were totaled to determine each state's overall ranking. Washington ranked highest at 36 total points and South Carolina tied Alabama for 51st with 6 total points. The governor's subsequent response revolved around "furthering the interests and image of South Carolina" and countering the national perception that "South Carolina laws are deficient in recognizing and respecting the legal rights of South Carolina women. This perception can only hinder South Carolina's ability to attract quality people and businesses to the state."  

The mere fact that there are so few women serving in the South Carolina state legislature itself may prove to be a deterrent to creating the kind of environment that allows women to "stand for" women on issues related to women, children, and families. Following Rosabeth Kanter, Sue Thomas suggests that when women's numerical presence falls below the token level of 15 percent, they, like other minorities, are constrained in their legislative goals and behaviors and are therefore less likely to introduce and pursue legislation regarding the interests of women, children, and the family. Of the 13 states where women's representation fell below the 15 percent token level during the 1995 session, seven of those were in the South. Further, in states with more than 20 percent women, women legislators gave priority to bills dealing with issues of women, children, and the family. In these states, women are more successful in introducing, monitoring, and passing distinctive legislation than were their male colleagues. Not one of the southern states surpasses the 20 percent threshold in 1996, making it unlikely that the women serving in these bodies developed or pursued a distinctly female legislative agenda or identity. Since women's representation in the South Carolina legislature falls well below even the 15 percent token level, it is perhaps not surprising that they have not crafted a collective, gendered presence within the institution.

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The South Carolina Commission on Women: Comprehensive Advocacy for Women

The South Carolina Commission on the Status of Women was created in 1970 through statute. In 1978, the legislation was amended to change the name of the Commission to the South Carolina Commission on Women and expand its functions.\(^79\) When first created in 1970, the commission found itself hostage to a small budget, no staff, and organized opposition within and outside of the legislature. A lawsuit was filed in 1973, lay dormant for several years, and was restored to the docket in 1975-76. The lawsuit, *Theresa Hichs, et.al., v. Commission on the Status of Women and Honorable Grady L. Patterson, as Treasurer of the State of South Carolina, et. al.*, focused on three areas: the SCCW's stand on the ERA, the SCCW's *Legal Guide for South Carolina Women*, and Commission members' travel outside the state. As a result of the lawsuit, SCCW members agreed not to speak on behalf of the SCCW regarding the Equal Right's Amendment and the judge ruled that the SCCW had exceeded its statutory authority in disseminating the *Legal Guide*. Subsequently, the original statute was amended in 1978 changing the mandate and expanding the Commission's responsibilities.

In 1990, SCCW published a report to Governor Carroll Campbell responding to the NOW study by comparing South Carolina laws in the four areas identified by NOW to those of other southern states (primarily Georgia and North Carolina) and making recommendations for amendments to improve the legal status of women within the state. As a result, in 1991, a women's agenda was developed by the SCCW and the agency adopted a new direction that included "advocating for public policy that addresses women's needs, preparing and distributing educational information on women's rights and encouraging women to become involved in the public policy process."\(^80\) For the first time, the SCCW actively met with legislators to discuss women's concerns.

While the SCCW functions today as an advocacy organization for women throughout the state, its relationship with women legislators is less clear. Although a Women's Issues Caucus was formed in 1992, it remains largely invisible as a vehicle for political leverage. Part of
women legislators' reticence may well be an effort to avoid public ridicule by male legislators. In 1989, state Senator Ryan Shealy worked on legislation that would create a state commission on men. The stunt garnered the publicity he sought, was able to make light of the SCCW's work, but he never introduced the bill.81 Several years later, in 1993, state Represenative Roger Young, "drew chuckles from fellow lawmakers when he called for the creation of a 'Legislative Men's Caucus'."82 In a memo distributed throughout the House, Young "lamented that the women's movement has led to a decrease in the dominance of the male of the species (and) as we enter the nineties, we...need to bind together to preserve male qualities which have served this country so well throughout the years."83 The memo further went on to suggest that the Men's Caucus should meet soon to "discuss items of common interest to men in society and the Legislature...namely the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue." Asked for reaction, Rep. Candy Waites, said, "My first reaction to the memo was that these are sensitive guys who are really going to talk about the portrayal of women in society. Then I realized it was a joke and it made me a little angry... But it's not worth making a big deal out of it... Boys will be boys."84 The climate for women's ability to organize effectively within the legislature is chilly at best, and traditional sex-role attitudes pervade the climate for women throughout the state as a whole.

South Carolina Women on Boards and Commissions

In 1989, along with the American Association of University Women (AAUW), SCCW co-sponsored the "South Carolina Women on Boards and Commissions Project" finding at the time that the 36 significant policy making bodies had one or no women members.85 A subsequent 1991 review found that out of 313 positions on 36 boards, women held 20 of the seats (6 percent).86 The goal of "SC Women on Boards and Commissions" is to increase the number of women serving on the more than 200 state boards and commissions described in the S.C. Legislative Manual. The Project has developed an application form, disseminates a brochure on the application process, and together with local AAUW chapters, identifies women who might
wish to serve. No count has been made since 1991, but Barbara Moxon, chair of the South Carolina Advocates for Women on Boards and Commissions, said women are making headway, "I know there’s been improvement. The state Board of Education had one woman; now there are four. DHEC had none; now there’s one. ETV had one; now there are three women." No studies have been done on the impact of women serving in this capacity. Since the research on women in state legislatures suggests that a critical mass is necessary before women can exert a particularized gender impact, one would suspect the same is true for governing boards and commissions. For now, symbolic representation appears to be the overriding goal of the project.

Conclusion

What are the prospects for women in South Carolina politics over the next decade? The totality of the historical and contemporary scholarship presented here suggests that southern women will continue to be underrepresented in the public sphere and politics, captives of sex segregated public role expectations that limit opportunities for women even when legal and structural barriers have fallen. For young women in the state, the stakes are highest. Employment statistics suggest that from 1989 through the year 2000, two of every three new entrants to the labor force will be women. If policies guaranteeing educational equity, employment and training opportunities, and supportive child and family policies are not in place, women stand to lose the most. While women are not the only legislators who can enact such legislation, research confirms that female legislators are more sensitive to issues of gender equality and legal rights for women and more likely to take legislative action in these issue areas. Within the South Carolina electorate, women continue to hold a sizable advantage in both registration and voter turnout. However, overcoming socialized sex role attitudes that accept women’s place defined within the private sphere and marginalize their public contributions will not be easy. Centuries of enculturated tradition pose a greater obstacle to the advancement of women over time in South Carolina than single party dominance or legal barriers.
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Endnotes


2. Van Exem was elected in 1938 to fill her late husband's unexpired term.


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12. ibid., p. xxx.


32. Dillman, "Southern Women: In Continuity or Change?" p. 10.


34. ibid., "Women in the Land of Cotton," p. 112.

35. ibid.
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52. Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*.


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61. ibid.


63. One additional woman was elected in a 1995 special election.

64. Prestage, "Black Women State Legislators"


66. ibid.

67. 1996 South Carolina Legislative Manual


69. See for example: Kirkpatrick, Political Woman; Diamond, Sex Roles in the State House; Susan J.Carroll, Women as Candidates in American Politics (Bloomington,IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); and Sue Thomas, How Women Legislate (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

70. Darcy, Welch and Clark, Women Elections and Representation.

71. CAWP Fact Sheet, 1993.

72. Darcy, Welch and Clark, Women, Elections and Representation.


79. As amended, The SCCW is composed of 7 members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate from "among persons with a competence in the area of public affairs and women's activities." The members are appointed for four year terms, serve without salary, and may only serve two terms. The duties of the Commission defined in the amended statute are as follows:

To study the status of women and report to the Governor with recommendations concerning the following areas:

a. Educational needs and educational opportunities pertaining to women.

b. Social insurance and tax laws as they affect the net earning and other income of women.

c. Federal and state labor laws dealing with such matters as hours,
night work and wages to determine whether they are accomplishing the purpose for which they were established and whether they should be adapted to changing technological, economic and social conditions.

d. Differences in legal treatment of men and women in regard to political and civil rights, property rights and family relations.

e. New and expanded services that may be required for women as wives, mothers and workers, including education, counseling, training, home services and arrangements for care of children during the working day.

f. The employment policies and practices of the State of South Carolina with reference to additional affirmative action to assure non-discrimination on the basis of sex and to enhance constructive employment opportunities for women.

The Commission is also empowered to:

a. Revive and disburse state and federal grants for furtherance of the Commission's objectives.

b. Disseminate pertinent material relating to the rights, responsibilities and status of women.


83. ibid.

84. ibid.


88. SCCW, The Legal Status of Women, p. 4.

89. Thomas, How Women Legislative.