Chapter Two:
The Forgotten Atlanta Compromise

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On an autumn day in Atlanta in 1895, Georgia Swift King ascended a stage at the Cotton States and International Exhibition and stood before some of the most prominent African American religious leaders of her day. Perhaps the 37-year old mother of two felt a flutter of nerves as she asked the audience of influential men to buy into her vision of racial uplift, but the power of her words and the authority of her role as one of only two African American National Organizers for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union carried the crowd. Over two days of speaking engagements, King convinced both the Georgia Congregational Association and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Congress to unanimously endorse one of her many projects in her lifelong anti-liquor crusade. The issue on the table was "the enactment of a law securing scientific temperance instruction in all grades of the public schools," a policy that would legally require the implementation of an empirically based anti-liquor curriculum in the classroom.[1] Buoyed by the strong show of support from religious leaders for such a proposal, King reported back to the nearly all-white national WCTU convention later that month that the "many assurances of aid and cooperation" led her to believe that her "prospects seemed bright for a fruitful year."[2] In her role as State President of Georgia's 'No. 2 Unions' – the WCTU's euphemistic label for their African American branches – King had by 1895 led the organization in the enactment of a broad program of reform that reflected not only the anti-saloon platform of a typical temperance drive but also a general reconceptualization of what it meant to be both black and female in a world that seemed to challenge her very identity at every step.

King's scientific temperance platform ultimately belonged to a larger tradition of social reform that would be more clearly articulated during the closing days of the Exhibition with the

[1] "Since Our Last Issue," *Union Signal* no. 47 (Chicago, Illinois), December 5, 1895.
[2] Georgia Swift King, "Reflections," in *Report of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Baltimore, 1895* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publishing Association, 1895), 417.

assembly of the first National Colored Woman's Congress. Although the 150 black women gathered at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church for the Congress on December 27 and 28 were quick to endorse King's work with the WCTU, the rest of their platform seemed at first like a jumble of unrelated projects. In addition to the promotion of scientific temperance instruction, the reformers identified the need to build more asylums for orphans, condemned obscene literature, and denounced the serving of alcohol on the Exhibition grounds.[3] King's push for temperance textbooks in schools and the Congress's conglomerate of causes can be neatly summed up in a speech by prominent educator Margaret Murray Washington. Although her lecture on the "Education of Negro Girls" has been lost, the *Atlanta Constitution* captured the spirit of Washington's words and the platform of her peers: racial uplift would be achieved only if the "heart be trained with that of the head."[4] Restated by Washington herself in 1898: "To be a stronger race physically we have got to be a more moral one."[5] Convinced that a bid for moral equality would provide the basis for total racial equality in all spheres of life, women like King and Washington offered a tactical way forward from the painful realities of the Jim Crow South.

Yet it is not Margaret Murray Washington's speech that looms large in historical descriptions of the 1895 Cotton Exhibition but rather the opening address of her husband. Booker T. Washington's opening address on September 18 outlined a very different conception of racial uplift, an "Atlanta Compromise" that sacrificed political agitation for a peaceful economic relationship with Southern whites. With the kind of industrial education that African

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[3] "Colored Women Discuss the Affairs of the Day: Interesting Talks Made," *Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), December 28, 1895.
[4] "For Their Race: Negro Women Point Out What Their People Should Do," *Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), December 29, 1895.
[5] Margaret Murray Washington, "We Must Have a Cleaner 'Social Morality,'" in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 864-865.

American men and women might receive at his own Tuskegee Institute, the race could make itself "essential to mutual progress" in commerce and thus achieve eventual equality in all spheres.[6] The drama of Washington's declaration has long monopolized history textbooks, overshadowing the perspective of his wife and her fellow female reformers. Georgia Swift King's name has also been lost in this broader narrative of racial uplift. Though her later work at Atlanta University has earned scattered references, she was largely ignored for her unique ideology of reform.[7] Despite the exclusion from historical retellings, Mrs. Washington and King's prescriptions for moral amelioration represent a "forgotten Atlanta compromise" that was the culmination of years of hard work, lessons learned and values forged amongst black female reformers. Yet while the Washingtons returned to Tuskegee after the exhibition buildings in Piedmont Park were shuttered, King and the African American chapters of the WCTU remained as a constant testament to the power of this strategy of uplift by moral improvement.

As the Cotton Exhibition opened, King could have boasted dozens of No. 2 chapters and hundreds of African American members; however, the Georgia WCTU had only formalized black involvement in the state in the late 1880s. Although temperance was a prominent issue in Atlanta throughout the previous decade thanks to two major prohibition referendums, the largest women's organization in the country had primarily remained the domain of white advocates.

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[6] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1907), 113.

[7] For references to King in secondary literature, see: Clarence Albert Bacote, *The Story of Atlanta University: A century of service, 1865-1895* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1969), 209; Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 97; Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 202; Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 92; Francine Rusan Wilson, *Segregated Scholars and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 97, 101-106.

However, widespread interest in the founding of the West Atlanta No. 2 chapter in 1887 signaled that there had long existed a rich network of local black reformers ripe for such participation. The 1880s and 1890s had seen the rise of Atlanta's black professional class, who sought to augment their high social status through prominent displays of middle class values. Atlantans with an eye on their societal clout might increase their status by joining fraternal societies, attending certain churches, achieving educational landmarks, or espousing particular political platforms. The relative fluidity of this stratification responded to the rise of educational, religious and social institutions in a way that was particularly local.

The overlapping nature of these organizations deeply informed the mission of the WCTU chapters of Atlanta. When King joined the Union in its early years, she would have encountered an institution visibly influenced by the values of the local African American elite. In particular, the overlapping membership with local universities created a far-reaching code of principles shaped by the deep pockets of northern missionary groups. For women, these obligations required a high standard of moral character. For example, Atlanta University required all students to pledge total abstinence from alcohol and tobacco.[8] Those who could not maintain these values of polite society were rendered socially invisible. For example, young Ann Brown found herself excommunicated from the Congregational Church, expelled from Atlanta University and banished from the elite community of the city after it was discovered that she "associated herself with persons of bad reputation [and] had often attended public dancing

[8] Jennifer Lund Smith, "The Ties That Bind: Educated African-American Women in Post-Emancipation Atlanta," in *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in the Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950,* ed. John C. Inscoe (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 94-95.

parties and other places of bad repute" without any declaration of remorse.[9] "As a woman who did not subscribe to the values of the rising black elite, Brown would have been an obstacle to their foremost goal: proving they were the intellectual and moral equals of their white counterparts," explains Jennifer Lund Smith.[10] This emphasis on upright social behavior in the universities made the faith-based temperance platform of the WCTU a natural fit for the elite of Black Atlanta.

The severity and uniformity of Brown's harsh punishment reflected the cohesive nature of this goal. The African American middle class was fighting a battle much larger than just a single reform cause or the policies of a lone university. While the moral authority of white women had long been assumed and accepted as a justification for social reform activity throughout the nineteenth century, women like King recognized that she and her fellow black reformers would constantly need to prove their virtue. One unnamed white woman summed up the norms that the No. 2 Unions found themselves up against: "Negro women evidence more nearly the popular idea of total depravity than men do… When a man's mother, wife and daughters are all immoral women, there is no room in his fallen nature for the aspiration of honor and virtue… I cannot imagine such a creation as a virtuous black woman," she declared, excluding her black peers from the same standards of womanhood that had allowed white women to extend their reach beyond the confines of the home into social policy.[11] While their white peers could point to their femininity as the base justification for their work, King could not assume such a right as given. In her discussion of black female reformers in 1894, Olive Ruth

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[9] Minutes of the First Congregational Church, Atlanta, 1869-1871, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, as quoted in Smith, "The Ties That Bind," 195.
[10] Smith, "The Ties That Bind," 195.
[11] "Experiences of the Race Problem by a Southern White Woman," *Independent* 56 (March 17, 1904), as quoted in Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent,* 190.

Jefferson of the mostly white Chautauqua Club highlighted what was at stake from the external perspective of a white audience:

> "The soul of civilization is incarnate in womankind and the type finally assumed by any race of people or national order of society can be best prophesied by a careful study of its superior womanhood. If on expert observation it is found that certain staying qualities of the highest order are uniformly found in the best women developed under the broadest Christian training, there will be little risk in prophesying good things for that people."[12]

The strict moral codes of Atlanta University therefore represented an attempt to meet such standards, a project that would involve not only institutions of higher learning but also reform organizations like the WCTU. By asserting that black women also had the conventional feminine power of social uplift, reformers were not only reclaiming their own public dignity but that of the race as a whole. Those most visible necessarily carried the bulk of this heavy burden.

The authority of the WCTU depended to no small extent on the reputation of its participants, as they had to argue not only against the harmful properties of liquor but also against cruel racist and sexist stereotypes. By proving their own moral decency, they too could wield the power of true womanhood in their own communities. Evelyn Higginbotham's model of the 'politics of respectability' is particularly useful for understanding the advantages and drawbacks of this mindset. Surveying black female leadership in the Baptist Church at the turn of the century, Higginbotham concludes that these campaigners "emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations."[13] This approach equalized black and white womanhood and created a "common ground on which to live as Americans with Americans of other racial and

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[12] Olive Ruth Jefferson, "The Southern Negro Woman," *The Chatauquan* (Meadville: T.L. Flood Publishing, 1894), 91-92.
[13] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

ethnic backgrounds."[14] This was no vanity project. From the start of the WCTU, King recognized that the prominent performance of gendered norms would be key to the organization's ability to enact effective reform. As members of a scrutinized elite, these women inherited a project with both interior and exterior aspects. Concerned with the actual wellbeing of their race and motivated often by a deeply spiritual drive towards salvation, reformers also had to be constantly cognizant of the way that their actions reflected on the broader concept of black womanhood for a white audience. Their programming was therefore both for the uplift of the intemperate classes and also the rehabilitation of the reputation of middle class black womanhood. African American WCTU reformers recognized that external respect was an existential necessity: without making the conscious choice to further entrench these conservative gendered values, the No. 2 Unions were painfully conscious that their organization would simply cease to function.

Thus from their founding, the identity of Christian womanhood was central to the power of the No. 2 branches. The West Atlanta chapter's first president Obdelia Cecile Brown Carter epitomized this relationship. Despite her high profile role as the wife of Rev. E.R. Carter, the temperance devotee had not always expressed such an interest in religion. In fact, Carter confessed herself that she did not believe in the dogma of the Church when she first arrived in Atlanta. "At the time of her marriage, she knew not Christ as her Redeemer," Mrs. M.A. McCurdy revealed in a short biography of her friend.[15] What prompted her conversion? Ultimately it was not her husband's pleading or her own personal revelation that led Carter to declare her faith, but rather her interest in the WCTU movement: "After being elected President

[14] Ibid., 188.
[15]McCurdy, M.A. "Mrs. Obedelia Cecile Brown Carter," in *The Black Side*, ed. E.R. Carter (Atlanta, 1894), 237.

of the West Atlanta Christian Temperance Union in 1888, she sought earnestly to know the Lord as her Redeemer, and was converted several days previous to the time she was to preside over that Christian body of women," wrote McCurdy.[16] This sequence of events – her institutional obligations and subsequent conversion – reflects Carter's sensitivity to the need to portray a specific image of black womanhood in order to be an effective advocate of reform. As the first recording secretary for the chapter in 1887, King would have had these same values on her mind as she ascended the organizational hierarchy.

King herself had epitomized virtuous black womanhood. An 1896 article in the *Union Signal* reflected on the national organizer's influential upbringing: "Born of a mother who is a total abstainer, educated at Atlanta University during Crusade days, the fiber of temperance naturally entered largely in her make-up."[17] Upon her graduation from the prestigious normal school, young Swift entered the intellectual elite – but began her career with seven years in the public school classrooms of Augusta and then Atlanta, as such women were expected to do.[18] Although her daughter would graduate from the college preparatory program of Atlanta University with honors and return as a faculty member to her alma mater, Swift visited the school to lecture mainly on matters of temperance and purity.[19] King recalled utilizing the classroom as a site of moral transformation even before she joined the No.2 Unions: "The Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and Reasons for Total Abstinence, formed the three strokes of the letter A in my school work," she remembered fondly of her days of teaching.[20]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] "Mrs. Georgia Swift King*," Union Signal,* (Chicago, Illinois), April 9 1896.
[18] "Mrs. Georgia Swift King, 89, Oldest A.U. Grad, Passes," *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), May 18, 1944.
[19] *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University, 1904-1905* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1905), 22.
[20] "Mrs. Georgia Swift King," *Union Signal* (Chicago, Illinois), April 9 1896.

Upon her arrival in Atlanta, Swift claimed membership at First Congregational Church – the spiritual home of Atlanta's elite – and augmented her status on the arm of Washington King, a well-known bridge contractor who would become one of the city's most successful engineers.[21] It was from this place of relative privilege that Georgia Swift King entered the powerful networks of the black elite and thus the leading ranks of the temperance cause. In Black Atlanta, King's educational attainment and her background as a schoolteacher would have already lent her social credence. Her solidly middle-class status enabled her to spend her time cultivating a powerful and very visible reputation around the city. By 1894, the first female graduate of Atlanta University's college preparatory program would cite King in an essay on the "Progress of Colored Women Since 1863." Young Mattie Child's description of King as a "wide-awake, energetic, Christian woman" speaks to the kind of reputation King would have refined in her early years – a social standing that would lead to significant opportunities.[22] King's careful navigation of traditional gendered expectations enabled her to claim the moral authority of womanhood and thus the mantle of leadership.

This attention to the performance of black womanhood led the African American WCTU chapters of Atlanta to lend special attention to issues of social purity. Moving even beyond the traditional limits of an anti-liquor crusade, the No. 2 WCTUs adopted a more comprehensive understanding of temperate values. For example, 1890 and 1891 saw West Atlanta Chapter President Mattie Upshaw Ford give 23 lectures on "Engagements, What they are; Engagements, What they should be; Care of Body, Baths, etc.; Mother's Influence; Marriage; Motherhood;

[21] "Mrs. Georgia Swift King, 89, Oldest A.U. Grad, Passes," *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), May 18, 1944.
[22] Mattie Childs, "The Progress of the Colored Woman Since 1863," *The Bulletin of the Atlanta University* no. 52 (January 1804): 5-6.

Unfermented Wine; Character Building."[23] Although only marginally related to the anti-liquor crusade, this emphasis reveals that Ford cared about the broader moral repercussions for her community. Such topics seemed to be an obvious extension of their feminine mandate, even beyond the propensity to drink. Such efforts were quantifiably rising, boasted Ford in her chapter report: 23 women took the "White cross pledge" in 1890 and 127 accepted a "pledge taken for social purity" in 1891.[24] One sample purity pledge distributed at Spelman provides a useful example for the values at stake: signees promised "to uphold the law of purity as equally binding upon men and women, "to be modest in language, behavior and dress," "to avoid conversation, art and arguments which may put impure thoughts into the mind," "to guard the purity of others, especially of my companions and friends," and "to strive after the special blessing promised to the pure in heart."[25] By the time King looked back at her state presidency at the national convention of the WCTU in 1895, she could declare to the audience of white reformers that her No. 2 Union "counts among its victories many souls won to Christ, and many fallen girls redeemed."[26] The reliance on conservative gender norms required the WCTU to police the virtue of black women; social purity was therefore a pre-requisite for any other reform effort because it granted these leaders moral supremacy.

But while a reliance on these conventional norms of womanhood allowed King and her fellow Union members to enter these public spaces with renewed power, they were not without their downsides. As white women had discovered themselves, an essentialist understanding of womanhood provided authority only so long as they stayed within certain constraints. The

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[23] E.R. Carter, *The Black Side* (Atlanta, 1894), 43.
[24] Ibid., 44.
[25] "White Shield Pledge," Spelman College Archives, reprinted in Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together,* 106.
[26] King, *Report of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention,* 94.

commitment of both black and white temperance reformers to these conventional gender norms first came under scrutiny as their white counterparts in Georgia stepped beyond the boundaries of traditional womanhood – and faced the consequences. While WCTU National President Frances Willard had endorsed women's suffrage as early as 1876, Southern chapters had largely avoided such a liberal stance out of fear of alienating their male church connections. But as Atlanta hosted the national WCTU conference in 1890, former Superintendent of the Franchise Department Zerelda Wallace of Indiana raised local eyebrows as she called for the right to vote on their very doorstep.[27] Certainly, many of the leaders of the white southern temperance movement were prominent supporters of the franchise for women. When Mary Latimer McLendon was not working for the WCTU, for instance, she was leading the Georgia Woman Suffrage Association. McLendon would later argue at the Cotton Exhibition in 1895 that (white) women's votes could be crucial to the temperance cause: "Some of us are sure that we could wage our war against King Alcohol to much better advantage if we had the ballot and could assist materially, as well as spiritually, in bringing Christ's kingdom of peace and love on this sin-cursed earth, if we could vote."[28] Relating the prohibition movement to the suffragist cause was a tactic that could link new liberal freedoms with conservative values.

But despite McLendon's early enthusiasm, discussions of the vote in their own city soon destabilized the alliances between the white WCTU and the Methodist Church. Such tensions reached a breaking point in 1892 as Warren A. Candler, the powerful President of Emory College, declared that he would "not cooperate with the WCTU until the suffrage business is stopped." Although his wife had been a prominent member of the Oxford WCTU chapter,

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[27] Nancy A. Hardesty, "The Best Temperance Organization in the Land:" Southern Methodists and the WCTU in Georgia," *Methodist* History 28, no. 3 (1990): 189-190.
[28] "WCTU Congress in the Woman's Building," *Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), November 3, 1895.

Candler was adamant that the influences of the national organization had "ruined the temperance cause [in the] North and they are beginning to injure it in the South."[29] Worried primarily about the potential for schisms in the Southern Methodist Church, Candler noted that Willard had already caused controversy by advocating for female ministers. Declaring that he was "unwilling to imperil the harmony of our church… by following the leadership of revolutionary woman suffragists and 'reformers,'" Candler insisted that Methodist churches around Georgia cut their ties with the Union.[30] Although Willard might have mocked Candler's Southern conservativism from her perch in the North, Candler's criticism had a major impact on the Georgian WCTU: so many women dropped their membership that the WCTU could not even hold a state convention by 1899.

It is difficult to parse what the No. 2 Unions of Georgia might have thought about these events or how their membership rates could have been similarly impacted. Candler made it clear that the only thing worse than white women voting would be the enfranchisement of their black peers: "We have suffered enough from negro suffrage already without bring in the negro women," he declared in 1893.[31] Therefore, any outspoken support for their white contemporaries would have likely harmed more than it could have helped. Georgia Swift King conspicuously skirted the issue in her speech at the national convention in 1895. Instead of advocating for her own vote, she argued for the successful outcome of black male suffrage. King noted that black men with high levels of education voted overwhelmingly for the prohibition cause: "The educated negro ballot in Georgia is, as a rule, for Prohibition and good government," she

[29] Hardesty, "The Best Temperance Organization," 192.
[30] Ibid., 193.
[31] Ibid.

declared.[32] King's calculated distance from the suffrage debacle suggests that she recognized the tenuous position of the WCTU, both black and white. Perhaps she was also considering the strength of patriarchal oppression from within Black Atlanta. Religious leaders were often uncomfortable with the growing power of their female counterparts. *The Woman's Era*, a publication for African American clubwomen during the 1890s, recounted this backlash: several black churches had asserted that "the only place for woman in the church is that of a singer and prayer, and that in teaching and preaching she (woman) is acting contrary to divine authority."[33] Surveying the chaos within the white WCTU, it is not surprising that King did not want to sacrifice her own movement for the suffrage cause. Even though they were only involved on the margins, the No. 2 Unions would have learned an important lesson about the limits of any attempts at gender equity.

Instead of trying to subvert these gendered norms, black women tried to work creatively within their limits. Female reformers answered such arguments from the male establishment by cloaking their politics in a reconceptualized motherhood. Claiming a right to enter the public sphere to protect their children, their neighborhoods and their communities as a whole, black women gradually claimed new authority even beyond traditionally female spaces. Prominent African American Georgia educator Lucy Laney argued that this was a natural manifestation of the maternal instinct: "She should be interested in the welfare of her own and her neighbors' children. To woman has been committed the responsibility of making the laws of society, making environments for children," Laney reasoned.[34] Therefore, by clinging to conservative

[32] King, *Report of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention,* 417.
[33] "Woman's Place," *The Woman's Era* 1 no. 6, edited by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Florida R. Ridley (Chicago, Illinois), September 1894.
[34] Laney, "Address Before the Woman's Meeting," 56.

notions of femininity, black women could negotiate the patriarchal systems at the core of Black Atlanta.

To uplift her world whilst swallowing the bitter pill of conventional gender norms; such was the careful compromise evident in the life, mission and strategy of King herself. Long used to walking this tightrope of black female leadership, her reign as state president and national organizer reflected a healthy respect for these gendered norms even beyond moments of crisis. Much like Laney, King relied heavily on the tropes of motherhood to justify her presence in the public sphere: "If it is true, that of the three main factors in the make-up of the individual, -- the home, the school and the church, -- the greatest is the home, and since it is true that the home is what the parents make it, the mother by nature having the larger share in the making, then it follows that that destiny of the Negro race is largely in the hands of its mothers," King announced as one of the few female speakers at the Atlanta Conference of Negro Problems in 1896.[35] King's promotion of mother's meetings as a solution to both the liquor problem and more general public health issues reflected this central identity. Marketed as a means of reducing infant mortality and defective moral educations, mother's meetings throughout the early 1890s served as a place "where all questions of human interest are pertinent and may be freely discussed; where all classes of women may become better informed."[36] King argued that even illiterate women could learn about infant care, healthful cooking, and the physical and moral needs of children through childhood and adolescence through a conversational approach. Such gatherings advanced the temperance cause because they could teach mothers "to fortify young

[35] Georgia Swift King, "Mothers' Meetings," in *The American Negro: His History and Literature* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 61.
[36] King, "Mothers' Meetings," 62.

men against the follies of immorality and young women against the dangers of imprudence."[37] Assuming that it was only a lack of knowledge that permitted working class black mothers to skip such crucial lessons, King's meetings used the logic of motherhood on a community-wide scale to spread a message of moral uplift. As both the practice and reputation of black womanhood within the lower socioeconomic strata were rehabilitated, she claimed "not only the mothers but the whole people may receive real benefit."[38] For King, racial power was rooted in a prominent maternalism.

Yet just as the Atlantan leaders of the WCTU had successfully negotiated the patriarchal limitations of their power in 1892, the No. 2 unions soon faced renewed prejudice along racial lines as well. Confronted with the limits of their interracial assimilation, the Georgia No. 2 chapters would be forced to reconsider the power of their conservative strategies. Such debates were triggered by anti-lynching activist Ida B. Well's 1894 trip to Britain. Although she hoped to push back against the general complicit attitude of white progressives towards lynching in the South, her initial target had not been the WCTU. Pure chance dictated that Frances Willard would be on vacation in England as the guest of Lady Somerset, a prominent British temperance leader, at exactly the right moment.[39] An 1890 interview with Willard in the *New York Voice* became the center of a heated debate as Wells took the opportunity to accuse the WCTU president of condoning lynching. Willard's previous discussion of "the race problem" had argued that "better whiskey and more of it is the rallying cry of great, dark-faced mobs… the grogshop is the center of power" and concluded that African Americans "should go where [their] color was

[37] King, "Mother's Meetings," 62.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Pinar, William F. "White Women and the Campaign against Lynching: Frances Willard, Jane Addams Jesse Daniel Ames," *Counterpoints* 163 (2001): 517.

the correct thing, and leave those pale faces to work out their own destiny."[40] Although Wells admitted that Willard's views were conventional wisdom amongst Northern liberals, the African American activist still insisted on holding the leader of the WCTU accountable for her problematic position.

This debate would have been a familiar refrain for the black women of Georgia. King would have repeatedly encountered the racially charged arguments of her white contemporaries. Willard was not alone in implying that alcohol was a key ingredient in black crime. More specifically, white women worried about liquor's effect on black-on-white rape. Such accusations fed into the broader rise of mob violence across the South and in Georgia in particular: Between 1882 and 1903, Georgia witnessed 269 lynchings. 88% of these victims were black, and a significant number resulted from accusations of sexual assault.[41] Arguing that true (white) womanhood required the protection of feminine virtue, the Southern culture of honor combined temperance rhetoric with an instinct for racially motivated vigilante violence. For white prohibitionists, the "smoking gun" was the obscene labels printed on low-grade alcohol marketed at African American men. Featuring nude white women, the labels were passed around white temperance rallies to incite fear and anger.[42] "Liquor, lust and lynching all ran together," explains James Marone – removing alcohol from supposedly dangerous African American hands therefore became justification for prohibiting it for everyone.[43] In 1897, prominent WCTU leader Rebecca Latimer Felton voiced her long held position on the matter to the Georgia Agricultural

[40] Quoted in Pinar, "White Women," 519.
[41] Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 254-258.
[42] Horace DuBose, "The Model Saloon License League," *Nashville Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), Jun. 14, 1908.
[43] James Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 295.

Society: "If it needs lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from the ravenous human beasts, then I say lynch a thousand times a week if necessary."[44] While King framed temperance as a racial uplift, Felton wielded it as a weapon of white supremacy. It is likely that the two would have attended conventions together as representatives of Georgia. Imagine how Georgia Swift King must have felt at these all-white events, standing in front of an audience steeped in such venomously racist literature!

Linking this local argument with the very real threat of racialized violence throughout the nation, Wells remained in England and reprinted the *Voice* interview in the British magazine *Fraternity* in 1894, leading to immediate backlash from Willard and her host, Lady Somerset. As the two attempted to prevent Wells' future speeches in the country, the young activist noted the power imbalance in this overseas rivalry: "Here were two prominent white women, each in her own country at the head of a great national organization, with undisputed power and influence in every section of their respective countries, seeming to have joined hands in the effort to crush an insignificant colored woman who had neither money nor influence nor following - nothing but the power of truth to fight her battles."[45] In response to the backlash, Willard agreed to be interviewed by the *Westminister Gazette* two weeks later to clarify her position. Still insisting that she had told by Southern advocates that "the safety of women, of children, is menaced in a thousand localities so that the women dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof trees," Willard acknowledged that there was "no crime however heinous [that] can by any possibility excuse the commission of any act of cruelty or the taking of any human life without due course

[44] Anthony W. Neal, *Unburdened by Conscious: A Black People's Collective Account of America's Antebellum South and the Aftermath* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010): 131.
[45] Ida B. Wells, *The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells,* ed. Alfreda Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 210.

of law."[46] A scornful Wells' retort to Willard's defense was published in the *Gazette* the following day: "The interview published in your columns yesterday hardly merits a reply, because of the indifference to suffering manifested."[47] Overall, anti-lynching advocates largely considered Wells' trip to Britain a resounding success. Wells was invited to two meals at the House of Commons and organized an anti-lynching committee, which included several prominent members of parliament, high profile journalists, and well-known clergy. Notably, Willard and Somerset were also incorporated into the policy task force.[48] Wells' strategy represented a far cry from the individualized moral uplift and collective rehabilitation long advocated by African Americans in the WCTU. With little concern for her 'womanly' characteristics, the highly visible presence of Wells forced women such as King to face the racial tension within their alliance with the WCTU.

Although such debates were occurring on an international stage, there is no doubt that African American reformers in Georgia followed these events very closely. Although perhaps tempted by the militancy of Wells, King made no public comment on the events (or at least none that has survived). In place of such harmful racialized accusations, the No. 2 Unions tried to change the narrative entirely. Focusing instead on the mechanisms of the state, temperance leaders in Atlanta argued that the relationship between alcohol and crime could be blamed on the cruelties of the chain gang: "How long shall our poor and untaught children, tempted on every corner by the cigarette seller, the beer shop and the brothel, be arrested and placed in chain gangs with hardened criminals, to be steeped in iniquity and schooled in crime, and hastened to death

[46] Quoted in Pinar, "White Women," 522.
[47] Ibid., 523.
[48] Pinar, "White Women," 523.

of body and soul?" King argued.[49] The state president focused on these systemic injustices, claiming that political corrections could prevent social ills. King even took the lead on a co-ed committee of scholars and community leaders to evaluate Georgia's judicial system from "the top instead of at the bottom" and evaluate the extent to which "the state is the guilty party."[50] King recalled in 1896 that the WCTU's work with prisons throughout her administration was a point of particular pride, highlighting an "efficient service in rescuing children from the contaminating influences of jail life, consigned thereto for offenses common to untaught children wandering day and night on the streets." However, others turned back to the power of the home and embraced a more traditional interpretation of respectability politics in their anti-crime strategic platforms. Fellow reformer Minnie Wright-Price offered proper parenting as the prime solution: "As we inspire others to make home pure, comfortable and happy, we are making men and women of the future who will lead honest, industrious Christian lives. Thus we will rid the country of its chain gangs and prison houses, and build up a civilization such as the world has never yet seen," she declared.[51] Needless to say, such issues were not the concern of many white WCTU chapters, whose members largely preferred their sensationalized narrative of black rape.

The limits of her racial and gendered identity would have been foremost in King's mind as she entered a particularly hectic era in her presidency. With the suffrage incident and lynching narrative in her recent memory, King began 1895 with a pragmatic approach to racial uplift. The events of the Atlanta Cotton Exhibition would ultimately prove the culmination of these hard learned lessons. It is difficult to tell how significant the Exhibition would have seemed to King

[49] Georgia Swift King, "Intemperance as a Cause of Mortality," 28.
[50] "What the Negro is Doing: Matters of Interest Among the Colored People," *Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), June 28, 1896.
[51] Minnie Wright Price, "Friendly Visiting," *The American Negro: His History and Literature* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 60.

personally; quite possibly, it was just another speaking engagement. But for the elite leadership of Black Atlanta as a whole, the 100-day event represented a once-in-a-lifetime chance to prove the strength and power of their world. "We want to show the people of this country that the colored people of the south are more progressive and more prosperous than the people of their race in any other section of the country," explained Rev. Carter during the year of planning for the Negro building, a 25 thousand square foot testament to racial progress.[52] At a moment where it seemed as if they were losing the fight for equality, the Exhibition was a chance to correct the decline. The decade previous had seen the formal recognition of segregation in law, skyrocketing rates of lynching, and the complete silencing of black political voices through poll taxes and all0white primaries.[53] The visions of racial uplift that would be forcefully articulated in the waning months of 1895 hoped to offer another path forward.

Booker T. Washington sought to do exactly that as he stood in front of a mostly white crowd on Opening Day, reaching out his palm and extending each digit: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress," he declared to enthusiastic applause.[54] Much like the women of the No. 2 Unions, Washington was calling for an arrangement with both benefits and concessions. In exchange for economic security, African Americans would accept their historical exclusion from political and social integration. As King planned how she might articulate her own vision of gendered black conservatism, Washington's pragmatism would have been ringing in her ears. Her choice to lend her national platform to the specific cause of scientific temperance therefore reflected her own compromise: In a neat parallel to Washington's focus on industrial education,

[52] Theda Purdue, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 15.
[53] Ibid., 12.
[54] Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography,* 113.

King's plans for a temperance curriculum advanced the strategy of moral equality that she believed would be key to eventual racial equality in all domains.

Yet just as Washington acknowledged that his call to economic advantage required sacrificing other principles, King's advocacy for scientific temperance instruction reflected the tacit acceptance of the privileges and limitations of conservative gender norms. The endorsement of scientific temperance was not an uncontroversial decision, even amongst the anti-liquor establishment. Framed as a means of inculcating the young in respectable values before they faced the choice to drink, the textbooks were often accused of being sensational and irrational. The presidents of Columbia, Cornell, Yale, Stanford and Vassar had all spoken out against the "weak sentimentality" of scientific temperance textbooks.[55] In 1893, the Physiological Sub-Committee of the Committee of Fifty became the voice of this criticism, arguing that the WCTU's publications were "neither scientific, nor temperate, nor instructive."[56] For the women of the WCTU, this opposition represented an existential threat to the authority of womanhood. Temperance was the domain of the mother, they argued; if they allowed the Committee of Fifty to challenge their hold on the anti-liquor cause, they risked undermining their entire project. Superintendent of Scientific Temperance Mary Hunt worked tirelessly against such public criticism, accusing her detractors of being swayed by their ties to liquor interests: "That there are women who make the platform a means to gratify selfish ambition, no one denies, just as here are such men, but as everyone acknowledges woman's moral nature to be purer than man's, than by just so much, do we claim there are fewer such women than men," she declared, positioning

[55] Norton Mezvinsky, "Scientific Temperance Instruction in the Schools," *History of Education Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1961): 52.
[56] Ibid.

women as the moral authorities on the subject.[57] For King, such justification would have certainly rang true. Given the particular vulnerability of black temperance reformers, the No. 2 Unions would have clung even tighter to their self-proclaimed power. King's embrace of scientific temperance instruction can therefore be read as a commitment to conservative maternalism.

Beyond Hunt's world, King also expanded the national WCTU's discussion of the results of liquor on the body to make arguments about racial wellness. Playing into the power of motherhood, King was concerned about the effects of alcohol on the children of intemperate parents: "Alcohol, as a remote cause of death, is none the less effective in cases in which the victim is not himself addicted to the use of strong drink, but inherits from drinking parents a weak constitution, which renders him easy prey, an inviting field for disease," King warned, going so far as to blame racial deterioration over generations on the whiskey habit.[58] A moral crisis becomes a public health crisis, she reasoned, and a public health crisis was a eugenic crisis for the race as a whole. Placing temperance as the key to racial health, King thus positioned women as agents of medical salvation. In addition, King's focus on scientific temperance allowed her to avoid some of the more racially charged rape narratives of her white peers – by focusing on the effects had on all human bodies, regardless of skin color, she was able to create a common moral ground.

King's success in promoting this scientific temperance agenda early on in the Exhibition would have bolstered the spirits of the women gathered for the Colored Woman's Congress just a few months later. Led by Lucy Thurman, the Superintendent of Colored Work for the WCTU,

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[57] Jonathan Zimmerman, "The Queen of the Lobby: Mary Hunt, Scientific Temperance and the Dilemma of Democratic Education in America, 1879-1906," *History of Education Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1992): 6-7.
[58] King, "Intemperance as a Cause of Mortality," 26.

the 150 reformers developed a vision of racial betterment deeply rooted in the gendered politics of respectability that had characterized the No. 2 Unions of the state under King's leadership. The discussion reflected the logic of conventional womanhood from a distinctly racial perspective. Their motherhood mandate empowered these women to ask for funding for new social welfare institutions and to condemn the exploitation of families by landlords in dirty one-room cabins. [59] The women sought to defend their respectability by insisting that journalists referred to them as "Mrs." or "Miss" in the press (a request openly ignored by the *Atlanta Constitution* even as they reported on the meeting's objectives).[60] But their reach extended even beyond the blurry lines of the home as they called for the end of racial segregation on railcars and even broached the issue of lynching and sexual assault. Condemning both lynching and "the crime which provokes it," the women joined a larger chorus whose first priority was ending the widespread violence. At the same time, the women refocused political attention on the much more common crime of white-on-black rape. To that end, they passed a resolution asking for segregation by gender on railway cars, a confined space that made women of all races particularly susceptible to attack.[61] Their concern for the virtue of all women surely masked at least some bitterness, as they had been excluded from the palatial Woman's Building, the most visited site of the Exhibition. Regardless of the snub, the Congress seemed to offer a strong sense of self-assured identity. United in the unique needs of their race and gender and cognizant of the limitations of each, the women of the Colored Woman's Congress saw their work as the culmination of half a decade of tough lessons. Rooted in conservativism but promising

[59] Purdue, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exhibition of 1895,* 47-8.
[60] "Colored Women Discuss the Affairs of the Day: Interesting Talks Made," *Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), December 28, 1895.
[61] Purdue, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exhibition,* 51.

sometimes radical results, this forgotten Atlanta Compromise represented a moral strategy all its own and ultimately a viable alternative to the economic model of Washington.

As the Colored Woman's Congress described their own vision of racial uplift through moral reform, they could point to their local hosts as an example of such an approach's relative success. From their programmatic focus on social purity and scientific temperance to their rhetorical reliance on motherhood and faith, the operations of the WCTU in Atlanta revealed the power and pitfalls of their moral strategy. Fears of black stereotypes and the scrutiny of their white peers lurked just beneath their guarded words and strategic performances of virtue. Even as they used their motherhood mandate to engage in the public sphere as never before, black temperance reformers were ever conscious of their precarious status on the margins of mainstream movements. King's commitment to the cause despite such obstacles speaks to her tacit conclusion that such work – as perilous as it might be – was preferable to remaining silent.

The pioneering reformers gathered for the Exhibition boarded segregated trains to return home to their respective organizations across the nation, bearing the example of Atlanta's No. 2 Unions as a model of uplift. Yet just as these new standards of conservative strategy seemed poised to claim a national significance, they were soon met with radical challenges from within the black elite. Although W.E.B. DuBois had first declared Washington's speech "a word fitly spoken," the Professor of Sociology at Atlanta University later worried in 1903 that the Compromise would "shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders."[62] [63] Socially and professionally linked to both the Washingtons and DuBois, King's path to racial uplift could hardly remain unaltered by this ideological split. The WCTU's vision of racial uplift

[62] Gates, *Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies,* 209.
[63] W.E.B Du Bois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Jennifer Burton, ed., *Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 217.

would be further undermined as increasingly blatant white supremacy emerged both within their own national organization and the Georgian political scene. With the Race Riot of 1906 looming ahead, the respectability politics that remained key to this forgotten Atlanta compromise would necessarily evolve with these crises: How would this gendered strategy of moral uplift meet the challenges of the late 1890s? And what would the changing landscape of racial conservativism mean for King and the temperance cause?

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